

Peaceful Strategy to Black National Question in Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the theme of Black national liberation as it appears in Ralph Ellison's novel Juneteenth. The study has relevance to probe into the remedies of Black liberation movement in America. The article addresses on the research problems concerning to the black protagonist's inability to identify and deal with an appropriate path that leads the freedom of blacks in American society. The study analyzes the issues through the research approach (methodology) of the Marxist concept of dialectics. According to this theory, the conflict between society's opposing forces is permanent, while any resolution to it is conditional and only temporary. This idea maintains that the key to the liberation of the oppressed nationality and class is the battle against the oppressor nationality and class. One of the novel's two main protagonists, Reverend Hickman, belongs to the oppressed black nationality and class. Hickman seeks to free the downtrodden Blacks from its constraints, but he chooses the incorrect road by making peace with the country's ruling white class. Hickman believes that the battles of Afro-Americans alone cannot end black national oppression; instead, he looks to some heavenly figure from the white race, such as Abraham Lincoln, to grant Afro-Americans their independence, justice, and equality. Bliss was nurtured by Hickman in the hopes that he would become the American equivalent of Abraham Lincoln, but Bliss betrayed Hickman by becoming into the racial baiting white senator Adam Sunraider. Despite Bliss's betrayal, Hickman continues to have faith in Sunraider. The study reveals that this Hickman's message of peaceful approach while dealing with ruling whites keeps the Afro-Americans weak, far from liberating the oppressed black nationality.

Keywords: Compromise theory, Black nationality, Emancipation, Hero-worship, National oppression, Struggle

1. Introduction

The article deals with the Afro-American question portrayed in Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth*. Ralph Ellison is a well-known Afro-American novelists and essayist. His first novel, *Invisible Man* (1952), earned the National Book Award and was almost immediately regarded as a masterpiece in American society. The most ambitious work he ever wrote

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was his second novel, *Juneteenth*, but it was not released until after Ellison passed away in 1999. *Juneteenth* is about Afro-Americans, as the title suggests. It is about their sorrow and anguish, their difficulties and tribulations, and their aspiration for freedom from all forms of oppression in their own country, America. The novel primarily tells the story of the two main characters in the book, Reverend Alonzo Hickman and Bliss/Senator Adam Sunraider, who symbolize the opposing ethnicities and social classes—the lower class black and the higher class white, respectively. Hickman has nurtured Bliss as his foster child in the hopes that one day Bliss will break down the barriers separating blacks and whites. It is incorrect to believe that Hickman will erase racial lines by raising a white child and placing all of his hopes in that child, as if the child will play a trick on him and his entire suppressed Afro-American nationality. Hickman places all of his faith in the might of his adversary, the governing whites, and does not believe in himself or the strength of his black nationality. Hickman does not believe in the laborious fights of Afro-Americans against their oppressor adversary, the ruling whites; rather, he believes that via conciliation with the governing whites, he and his oppressed black nationality will be able to achieve freedom, justice, and equality. This study examines the anguish and suffering experienced by Afro-Americans as depicted in the book, examines the route taken by the black protagonist Hickman to free Afro-Americans, and assesses the reasons why Hickman's ambitious plan to free himself and his entire Afro-American nationality in America failed.

2. Methodology

The article adopts the qualitative approach with exploratory and analytical methods. This is accomplished by analyzing and interpreting Ellison's novel *Juneteenth* as the primary text and some secondary literature that are based on the novel. The researcher employs the Marxist concept of dialectics as theoretical tools. This theory was first put forth by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and it was further taken to new heights by V.I. Lenin and Mao Tsetung. The theory believes that there are contradictions in everything. This theory holds that the fight between opposites that are mutually incompatible is absolute and that the unity of a thing's contradictory aspects is fleeting and relative.

3. Results and discussion

Reverend Hickman and the parishioners attempt to see the racist senator Adam Sunraider in the novel's opening scene. Hickman maintains hope for Bliss despite the fact that he flees and changes into the hateful senator Adam Sunraider. Hickman confidently approaches the senator's secretary while waiting outside the senator's private office with his men and asks: “. . . you just tell the Senator that Hickman has arrived. When he hears who's out here he'll know that it's important and want to see us” (3). This demonstrates Hickman's devotion to his beloved Bliss. Hickman's loyalty to Bliss motivates him to follow the boy's career, especially once he becomes into a politician. When he discovers that Bliss is in danger, this loyalty leads Hickman to Washington. He wants to speak with

Bliss/Adam Sunraider to find out what happened that caused Bliss to shatter and behave badly toward Black people after gaining power. He is curious as to whether it is perversity or the structure of power that requires everyone playing the role to act in essentially the same way. But for the helpless black religious people, meeting with such a strong racist senator as Adam Sunraider is not simple. They are not allowed into the senator's office, and eventually Sunraider's security forces them out of the lobby. "This time, however, he was not to reach the secretary. One of the guards, the same who had picked up the fifty-dollar bill, recognized him and pushed him bodily from the building" (*Juneteenth* 7). Sunraider's security officers abuse Hickman and the parishioners, forcing them to leave the senator's office without allowing them to see their cherished kid Bliss.

The congregation then travels to the Visitors' Gallery of the Senate to view Sunraider in action. The senator Sunraider looks at another circular object that reminds him of the nation's history and mission, "the Great Seal," which has the "national coat of arms", while he speaks in front of audiences sat behind "circular, history-stained desks," (*Juneteenth* 9). He is making a fiery speech about Americans of African descent. It is a racist monologue that even uses the derogatory term "Coon Cage Eight" for black people. Senator Sunraider says the following in his speech: "We have reached a sad state of affairs, gentleman, wherein this fine product of American skill and initiative has become so common in Harlem that much of its initial value has been sorely compromised. Indeed, I am led to suggest, and quite seriously, that legislation be drawn up to rename it the 'coon cage eight'." He elaborates on this racial epithet by saying the following: ". . . it has now become such a common sight to see eight or more of our darker brethren crowded together enjoying its power, its beauty, its neo-pagan comfort, while weaving recklessly through the streets of our great cities and along our superhighways" (*Juneteenth* 20). In his remarks, Senator Sunraider minimizes black Americans as much as he can.

The eagle on the flag of the country appears to be glaring threateningly and hungrily at Senator Sunraider as he addresses the congress. Sunraider is characterized as struggling to focus on his mission while "two sphinx like eyes bore in upon the senator with piercing frontal gaze" and "held him savagely in mute interrogation" (*Juneteenth* 10). This picture is effective on several levels. On the surface, we can read this as an internal indication of the senator's guilt. In the novel's context, this also foreshadows the severe consequences the senator will soon suffer for his action against those people he had previously considered his kin. Finally, he is made to pay for his actions. A young black assassin suddenly shoots the senator dead as he continues to deliver increasingly fatal blows to black Americans throughout his speech. Sunraider wails as soon as he is shot: "Lord, LAWD . . . WHY HAST THOU" in "the hysterical timbre of a Negro preacher" and feels "a profound sense of self-betrayal, as though he had stripped himself naked in the senate" (*Juneteenth* 23). Senator Adam Sunraider's murder is related to post-World War II American cultural conflicts, according to Robert J. Butler. He claims: ". . . the assassination of senator Adam Sunraider

on the floor of the United States senate in the mid-1950s, dramatizes the disastrous cultural conflicts and contradictions of post-World War II American culture" (17). The incident exhibits the tension between the two racial groups – the whites and the blacks.

The Reverend Hickman screams at his beloved son after senator Adam Sunraider is shot: "Bliss! You were our last hope, Bliss; now Lord have mercy on this dying land!" (*Juneteenth* 33). Hickman views Bliss as his final hope for himself, for his race, and for his country since he has staked a lot of things on Bliss, including his cherished family, his ideal self, and his priceless youth. Unidentified white woman who claims to be Bliss' mother accuses Robert, Hickman's brother, of rape. Despite being innocent, Robert victimized through the cruel American institution of lynching as a result of Bliss' mother. In America, segregation against black people took many different forms, including denial of civil rights, the right to vote, the right to hold public office, the right to serve on juries, etc. (Haywood 1). The dominant whites rely on all arbitrary forms of violence, including the most heinous one, lynching, to maintain these repressive structures. In light of this, Harry Haywood claims: "This vicious system is supported by all forms of arbitrary violence, the most vicious being the peculiar American institution of lynching. All of this finds its theoretical justification in the imperialist ruling class theory of the 'natural' inferiority of the Negro people" (1). The governing white class in America holds the view that black Americans cannot be treated equally with white Americans because they are innately less superior to white Americans.

Robert is innocent, Bliss's mother acknowledges beside Hickman. Bliss has a different father who is strange. Mom of Bliss claims: "I do, only his father doesn't know about him; he's far away..." Though Bliss's mother may have been aware of the repercussions of accusing Robert of rape, she simply tells Hickman that she has no special intention to harm Robert: "I never knew your brother and I meant him no special harm." But the white mob has already brutally lynched Robert, and the trauma of his death has already killed Hickman's mother. This is the grim reality for black Americans in the USA. Hickman must battle the assassin who killed his brother and mother but more significantly, he must battle the cruel lynching system. In contrast, Hickman accepts the role of Bliss' foster father after learning that his mother has accused Hickman's brother, Robert of rape. Hickman acknowledges his own guilt: "Ha! Hickman, you had wanted a life for a life and the relief of drowning your humiliation and grief in blood, and now this flawed-hearted woman was offering you two lives – your own, and his young life to train. . . . So not only had the woman placed a child on my hands, she made me a bachelor" (*Juneteenth* 264, 263, 265-66). Hickman initially felt a desire for vengeance against his brother's killers, but he sacrifices this emotion for Bliss. Hickman could get married to a girl and have kids of his own, but he will not for Bliss. Hickman could assist her in giving birth to her child when she begs for assistance and submits in front of him, but he should not make such great sacrifices for Bliss and should not place such high hopes in Bliss, who would eventually free his entire suppressed black nationality.

Hickman has chosen the route of compromise to his adversary white nationality in order to obtain justice for himself and for his black nationality. Bliss, a white child, will be raised and educated by Hickman so that he might become the black nation's future emancipator. Ellison quotes: "Bliss symbolizes for Hickman an American solution as well as a religious possibility" (*Juneteenth* 303). Hickman portrays himself as "a heroic person who will sacrifice the self in order to assume two important social roles—first, a father who names and raises Bliss and, later, a Christian minister dedicated to the 'Christ-like' ideal of being a self for others" in order to support his path of peaceful coexistence with whites (Butler 22). Butler further explains: "His story, therefore, dramatizes in a powerful way the Christian concepts of good coming out of evil, growth emerging from suffering, and life growing out of death. In an altogether mysterious way, the terrible violence inflicted upon his brother and the death of his mother has resulted not only in Bliss's birth but also Hickman's rebirth" (22). Hickman makes changes to his own lifestyle as he decides to raise and educate Bliss in order to make him the black people's emancipator. He starts a new life by shifting his enthusiasm for jazz music, alcohol, and ladies to preaching and religion. J.T. Cobb claims: "The Reverend Alonzo Hickman is a former Jazz musician and gambler who turned to the ministry both for reasons of personal morality and necessity; he had a new son to care for, after all" (33). Hickman's decision to raise Bliss for the freedom of Blacks brings changes to his own life style.

Bliss is brought up by Hickman to make him a child preacher and is included in his revival performance. Bliss is meant to be portrayed by Hickman as a sort of messiah person who can mend America's racial divide. Hickman asserts: "Bliss, a preacher is a guy who carries God's load. And that's the whole earth, Bliss boy. The whole earth and all the people" (36). In the revival meeting, Bliss assumes the identity of Bliss Hickman, a white preacher who was reared by a congregation of benevolent, devout Black Americans. Bliss has a wonderful gift for preaching as a young child. His talent occasionally caused others to envy him. Hickman has optimism for Bliss and says: "I tell you, Bliss, you're going to make a fine preacher and you're starting at just the right age. You're just a little over six and Jesus Christ himself didn't start until he was twelve" (41). Bliss learns all the customs and beliefs of Afro-American culture and religion at a young age, in addition to being a skilled preacher. With the exception of his white complexion, Bliss resembles all other Afro-Americans. Hickman becomes ecstatic as he starts to see in Bliss the traits of the future emancipator: "Yes! And it is said that the child is the man's father. Why then should the vessel's size, shape, or color be a surprise? Why not take in the life-giving water of his word and pay attention to his beautiful, little voice...?" (*Juneteenth* 50). Bliss makes Hickman happy at his early days and Hickman becomes more hopeful in his ambitious project of making Bliss the emancipator of black nationality.

The novel's revival episodes are both humorous and satirical. They offer an insightful look at how an American evangelical heritage is perceived by the African-

American community. Hickman instructs Bliss to use proper English while warning against speaking in a rambling manner: "Yessuh". He is saying that Bliss should not speak in the Afro-American dialect of the South. Hickman favors one kind of speaking above another. Hickman prioritizes the "white" language of discourse. Furthermore, by informing Bliss that "words are everything" (*Juneteenth* 38), Hickman makes the point that language is powerful and that "White" language is the key to dominance. Hickman suggests Bliss reading the white canonical literature in addition to the "white English." Bliss is urged by Hickman to take Shakespeare and Emerson as his models: "That's right, Bliss; in Good Book English. I guess it's 'bout time I started reading you some Shakespeare and Emerson....Who's Emerson? He was a preacher too, Bliss. Just like you. He wrote a heap of stuff and he was what is called a *philosopher*" (*Juneteenth* 39). Bliss is supposed to be the future emancipator of black Americans, but Hickman takes him to the world of white people instead of the world of black Americans. Hickman did not advise Bliss to read Afro-American literature so that he might learn about the plight of black Americans and discover some solutions to help them escape their misery and suffering. In contrast, Hickman is not training Bliss to free black people; rather, he is training Bliss to become a powerful person like Senator Adam Sunraider, a man in power who is there just to further himself. According to Angela F. Ridinger: "Taken together with Hickman's directives to Bliss to speak using 'good' English, his planning to read Shakespeare to Bliss hints at the belief that mastering the 'traditional white canon' will empower Bliss to move beyond his station in life" (40). This exhibits that though Hickman has a good intention, he unknowingly leads Bliss to the wrong path.

Bliss already has a profound understanding of black religion and culture, but Hickman is guiding him toward the dominant whites' society, piquing his interest in white language and literature. This might be the primary cause of Bliss's alienation from the Afro-American community, which gave him a lot of support and nurturing when he was a child. However, his departure from the African-American community really starts when Miss Lorelli, a crazy white woman, interrupts the resurrection play and sermon he and Hickman were doing. Bliss is placed in a coffin in the resurrection play, and at a specific point in the sermon, Hickman cries out, "Suffer the little kids to come onto me," at which point Bliss would rise from the coffin and utter, "Lord why hast thou deserted me?" However, Bliss experiences a tragic situation within the coffin, and out of fear of suffocation, he begs in his head: "Please let me to stand up. Let me to ascend and exit into the fresh air" (*Juneteenth* 125, 127, 123) before emerging from the coffin to preach beside Hickman.

Miss Lorelli names Bliss as Cudworth while still in the middle of the resurrection act and claims herself to be his mother. Bliss responds after hearing this: "She's talking about me, he concluded as a strange and unpleasant sensation began to arise within of him. He then lost his ability to breathe" (*Juneteenth* 133). Bliss now begins the transformation into Sunraider, which is symbolized by the small Bible he was holding as it began to slip

from his hands. Bliss' life took a turn when he emerged from a coffin, received a new name, and let go of his Bible. Writes Cobb: "His time in the coffin for the miracle play is not only a childhood trauma, but is symbolic of the point at which Bliss dies and the man who would become Sunraider is born" (22). This event becomes the turning point in Bliss's life. Bliss begins his journey of becoming Sunraider from this particular day.

Miss Lorelli, who identifies as Bliss's mother, is not just a white person but also a member of an upper-class family. About Miss Lorelli, Hickman informs Bliss as follows: "But because she's from a rich family she can go around acting out any notion that comes into her mind." Miss Lorelli's encounter with the black parish represents not only the encounter between blacks and whites but also the encounter between the rich and the poor because Miss Lorelli comes from a wealthy family while everyone in the black parish comes from a poor background. Hickman acknowledges that Miss Lorelli poses a threat to them not only because she is white but also because she is wealthy. The wealthy family member is free to do anything they want to the underprivileged. One of the black parishioners exposes the rich people's reality: ". . . they can't be happy unless they know we're having a hard time." She makes it clear that the suffering of the impoverished Black people is what makes the rich White people happy. She is aware that the rich white world and the poor black world are vastly different from one another. She continues: "You are aware that these well-off people always dress differently. They have cocktail dresses for drinking gin and whiskey, tea gowns for drinking tea, and ball gowns for what they call dancing" (*Juneteenth* 173, 182, 184-85). She is aware that impoverished black people must work extremely hard to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and clothing, while wealthy white people enjoy tea, gin, whiskey, and dancing while donning various outfits for various occasions.

Bliss, a child of a white person, lives among the underprivileged black people. Bliss has the rare opportunity to be familiar with the world of the wealthy white people because he lives with the impoverished Black people in their society. Bliss has the opportunity to learn more about the wealthy white woman who also claims to be his mother for the first time, as well as about their way of life. Although Miss Lorelli is repelled by the parish, this experience starts Bliss' obsession with the world of the wealthy white people and ultimately drives him away from his African-American community. "Rich and white though she be, the po' thing's nuts. . . . *No, no, no, she's my mother*, my mind said and I lay rigid, listening" (*Juneteenth* 183). Bliss finds it fascinating to hear about Miss Lorelli, his potential mother, who is wealthy and white. Bliss almost becomes convinced on the white woman, Miss Lorelli's claims, transfers his questions about his unknown mother and his emerging sexuality to the white woman, starts to undervalue the African-American women who are there for him and take care of him, and starts to consider the prospect of becoming whites.

Bliss, after meeting Miss Lorelli, becomes attracted by the world of wealthy whites, and he starts to stray from the road of virtue that had been previously laid out

for him as a great force for good. When Miss Lorelli disturbs the congregation on that particular day, Sister Georgia, in Hickman's absence, takes Bliss back to her home for the night. They converse while sharing a melon. Bliss should revere his sister Georgia because she generously provides him with food and shelter at her house, but he is attracted to her physically instead. Georgia lets Bliss sleep in her bed after having a nightmare, and he gets a peek underneath her nightgown. Georgia severely reprimands him for his transgression: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, peeping at my nakedness and me asleep. Sneaking up on me like a thief in the night, trying to steal me in my sleep! You, the young preacher who is meant to be Revern Bliss!" When Bliss sees her as a woman, he is ashamed of his unethical behavior. Georgia, to whom he confesses his transgression, disowns him and kicks him out of her bed. Similar to that, Bliss adores flirting with Laly, an Afro-American girl. The two enjoy their food-filled picnic. The two are in love and eventually have intercourse beneath the tree. "And we came through the parklike space, into shade and out again, her cool skin touching mine. Touching and leaving, coming again unself-consciously, skin-teasing and skin in gentle friction" (*Juneteenth* 167, 59). Bliss, the revered pastor of the Afro-American church, starts to lose his morale by being involved in such immoral actions.

Young Bliss becomes obsessed with his mother as a result of the painful meeting he had with Miss Lorelli, his potential mother. To keep Bliss entertained, Hickman takes him to the theater and the circus. Bliss, however, is afraid because he thinks Miss Lorelli, his mother, is the woman in the picture. When Hickman reminds him that all they are viewing is a moving image, Bliss even starts to doubt his father Hickman. Bliss believes: "...it's her. He doesn't want me to know, but just the same, it's her... And I tried to understand the play of light upon the dark whiteness, the rectangle of cloth that would round out the mystery of my mother's going and her coming." Bliss resolves to rebel against Daddy Hickman and the entire Afro-American community as a result of his mother-related trauma and curiosity with the world of wealthy white people. Bliss has found movies as a most effective form of rebellion against them since Daddy Hickman, told him that "if they look at those movies too often they'll lose their way. I mean, they won't know who they are" (*Juneteenth* 209, 190). Hickman warns Bliss not to watch movies as they lead him to the wrong path.

Instead of taking Hickman's advice, Bliss chooses to explore the world of cinema. In the end, Bliss departs from the parish, the word, and his culture in order to traverse the Midwest and make vain attempts at making movies. According to Charles Pete Banner Haley: ". . . in *Juneteenth*, we see Bliss leave the Black world for the world of movies in which he becomes (and I am inferring here from Ellison's notes and Callahan's introduction) white. The movies then lead him to the world of politics and his subsequent transformation and career as a racist race-baiting US senator" (374). Bliss is drawn to the world of cinema by the allure of the wealthy white community, where he meets and mingles with them. He then has the opportunity to get involved in politics and possibly through foul means, he manages to amass millions of dollars, which finally aids in his election as the senator for

New England State. After that, Bliss, who is a significant member of the Afro-American community, is no longer Bliss. Bliss has fully transformed into the racist white senator Adam Sunraider.

Conciliationist Hickman remains optimistic about Adam Sunraider despite this. Hickman is attempting to re-educate his lost kid Bliss about the history of black Americans while he is resting next to senator Sunraider in the hospital bed. Hickman describes how his ancestors were transported from Africa to America as slaves. They were taken hostage, transported in shackles, and housed on slave ships. Hickman claims "Mother and babies, men and women, the living and the dead and the dying all chained together." According to Hickman, the importation of slaves into America was a cruel operation. These slaves from Africa were actually treated like animals with no names or identities. Hickman claims: "They left us without names. Without choice. Without the right to do or not to do, to be or not to be. . . ." When the first wave of forced African slaves brought in the southern farms, they were left behind "eyeless, earless, noseless, throatless, toothless, tongueless, handless, feetless, armless, wrongless, rightless, harmless, drumless, danceless, songless. . . motherless, fatherless, sisterless, brotherless, plowless, muleless, foodless. . ." (*Juneteenth* 104, 105, 107). They are without any shape, personality, authority, or possessions. They lost their independence and cultural diversity, were torn away from their families and homelands, and they belong to the men from nowhere. However, as time went on, they progressively shifted from being Africans to becoming Africans in America or Afro-Americans, and they started to develop their own distinct national identity. Paul Robeson and Amilcar Cabral write:

Separated from their families and homeland, robbed of their freedom and cultures, their control of their labor power denied them, the African people began the transition from Africans to Africans in America or Afro-Americans. From the moment the Africans were captured and placed in slave ships, but specially when they arrived on plantations, the unplanned but objective process of national formation began. (16)

Black slaves might claim ownership of America since they irrigated the soil with their blood and sweat for years. Hickman correctly notes: "And as we moldered underground we were mixed with this land. We liked it. It fitted us fine. It was in us and we were in it." The Afro-Americans have merged with American soil while keeping their distinct identity after receiving "new teeth, new tongue, new speech, new music, a new name and new blood." Hickman asserts: "This land is ours because we come out of it, we bled in it, our tears watered it, we fertilized it with our dead. . . . We know where we are by the way we walk. We know where we are by the way we talk. We know where we are by the way we sing. We know where we are by the way we dance" (*Juneteenth* 108, 110, 112). Hickman makes a compelling case that despite their cultural differences from white Americans, the land of America is now an integral part of their way of life. Hickman is aware that white Americans

do not view black Americans as true citizens of the United States. Hickman advises black Americans to have confidence in themselves despite the fact that white Americans do not accept them.

Hickman then draws a link between Juneteenth holiday and the history of African Americans. Because Juneteenth is historically associated with the emancipation of Afro-American slaves in the USA, the title Juneteenth itself is derived from the Afro-American Juneteenth festival. The emancipation of slaves in Texas and, more broadly, all enslaved Afro-Americans throughout the former Confederacy of the southern United States was announced on June 19, 1865, two and a half years after the emancipation proclamation. This event is commemorated by the Juneteenth celebration. The Juneteenth holiday was first observed in Texas and eventually spread to other southern and southwestern states in the early 20th century. It has recently had a resurgence. Hickman views the Juneteenth anniversary as a special occasion for Afro-Americans because he understands that on that day, black slaves in the South might experience freedom from the bonds of slavery for the first time. Even though they are unhappy the entire year due to poverty and many forms of social injustice and discrimination, black Americans from around the nation appear to be in a good mood on the day of the Juneteenth holiday. Hickman claims: "And it was a great occasion. There had been a good cotton crop and a little money was circulating among us. Folks from all over were in the mood for prayer and celebration" (*Juneteenth* 113). This reveals that Juneteenth holiday is the great festival for the entire black nationality in USA.

Hickman is well aware of black national oppression in America, but he has the erroneous idea regarding the issue of black national liberation. Hickman talks more about Juneteenth and links it to African-American liberation, but he is unaware that hundreds of black slaves gave their lives in the Civil War to bring about the celebration. According to Robeson and Cabral, "Approximately 186,000 African Americans fought in the forces of the North. They originated from working class and petty bourgeois circles in the North, and from free and fugitive slave elements in the South. As the Union army approached, some turned to violence against their masters and the confederate forces" (17). The Southern Afro-American slaves achieved freedom not as a result of favoritism on the part of the Union troops, but rather as a result of their own participation in the Union army and combat against the slave owners and Confederate forces. Thus, in order to alter their lives and obtain freedom, justice, and equality in the USA, repressed black Americans must engage in struggle. Hickman, however, opposes struggle and violence and favors gradual change: "They make life a business of struggle and fret, fret and struggle.... But you just keep on inching along like an old inchworm. If you put one and one and one together soon they'll make a million too. There's been a heap of Juneteenths before this one and I tell you there'll be a heap more before we're truly free!" (*Juneteenth* 113). Hickman talks about peace, but he ignores the fact that many unarmed black Americans—including his brother Robert—"are often and arbitrarily detained, assaulted, and killed by US officials at various levels

and members of the Ku Klux Klan, and other racists" (Tsetung 1). If there is no daily racial violence against innocent black Americans in the USA, Hickman's notion of progressive transition will succeed.

Hickman thinks that history can be changed via hero worship and acts of bravery. Hickman views Juneteenth as a "God-given day" in the sense that the Afro-American slaves in the USA were emancipated not through their own efforts but rather through the intervention of a higher power or God. In "Father Abraham," Hickman witnessed the human incarnation of God. Abraham Lincoln is viewed by Hickman as possessing divine attributes. Lincoln is lauded by Hickman: "That kind of man loves the truth even more than he loves his life, or his wife, or his children, because he's been designated and set aside to do the hard tasks that have to be done. That kind of man will do what he sees as justice even if the earth yawns and swallows him down, and even then his deeds will survive and persist in the land forever" (*Juneteenth* 101, 239, 241). But on January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, "...not because of Lincoln's, the Union leadership's, or industrial capitalists' subjective desires, but because the objective course of history necessitated it" (Cabral 17). Abraham Lincoln had to enlist the black slaves into the Union Army in order to defeat the confederate armies during the American Civil War. For this reason alone, Abraham Lincoln made the choice to free the black slaves not across the nation but just in the southern states that were in uprising. Document that Lincoln signed "yet, left slavery in place in the loyal border states. Additionally, it excluded the regions of the Confederacy that were now under federal administration" (Glass1). Lincoln's guiding principle was to protect the Union, and whether or not slavery persisted was irrelevant to him. According to Andrew Glass, "In an August 1862 letter to Horace Greely, editor of the New York Tribune, Lincoln stated that 'my principal purpose in this war is to defend the Union, and it is not either to save or to destroy slavery'" (1). This clarifies that the black slaves got emancipation not because of the subjective intention of Lincoln but because the objective condition of that time demanded it.

Hickman, accordance with his notion of gradual change and hero-worship, has placed a great deal of trust in Bliss who "would do something to transcend the viciousness of racial difference." Hickman sought to transform Bliss into an American Abraham Lincoln. Hickman expresses a sacred hope that "...raising the child in love and dedication in the hope that properly raised and trained the child's color and features, his inner substance and his appearance would make it possible for him to enter into the greater affairs of the nation and work toward the betterment of his people and the moral health of the nation" (*Juneteenth* 300, 302-03). Hickman has not kept hope onto the struggles of African Americans or the Bliss-like child born from the womb of an African American,

but rather kept hope onto the child born from the white lady who falsely accused his brother Robert of rape and allowed a white lynch mob to kill him. Hickman does not believe in the ability of Afro-Americans to obtain their freedom, justice, equality, and progress. On the other hand, he only believes in the strength of those who belong to his enemy nationality.

4. Conclusion

Hickman's peaceful strategy for the emancipation of Afro-Americans fails at last when Bliss betrays Hickman, changing himself into the race baiting white senator Adam Sunraider. But Hickman's theory of compromise forbids him from stopping there. It even prompts Hickman to maintain faith in changed Bliss—the racist white senator Adam Sunraider. The novel's conclusion reveals that Hickman has forgiven Senator Adam Sunraider for his betrayal of the Afro-American community rather than sending a message to his black people to rise up against their adversaries like Sunraider. The novel concludes with the clause "he appeared to hear the sound of Hickman's consoling voice, calling from somewhere above" (*Juneteenth* 298). This suggests that the senator Adam Sunraider may have felt pardoned by Hickman at the time of his death for his betrayal of the entire Afro-American community. Hickman's peaceful strategy with the ruling whites does not lead the struggles of Afro-Americans to victory that enables them to gain their freedom, justice, and equality in the USA. In contrast, Hickman's theory of compromise aids the ruling class of white Americans in bolstering their political influence over the oppressed groups, particularly Afro-Americans.

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