



## “THE PORTRAYAL OF THE BLACKS’ CULTURE AND LITERACY IN ALFRED WILLIAMS’S CAPTAIN BLACKMAN”

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### **Abstract**

*The tradition that John Alfred Williams develops in Captain Blackman provides insight into two important aspects of black participation in Vietnam War. Williams describes the social and psychological factors that are necessary to understand why black soldiers join the military in the first place and he presents the relationship between historical understating and the characters’ perception of their involvement in Vietnam. The first insight highlights the contradictory nature of black involvement in all the American War. The exploration of contradictory nature gives us some understanding as to why African Americans were initially thrilled at the opportunity to prove themselves in Vietnam. Their titillation can be understood as a form of double-consciousness, that sense of simultaneously belonging and not belonging to American society. The black soldiers felt their service in the military act as a bridge to connect ‘the American and African halves of them.*

There is a long tradition of optimism of this black nature, usually labelled ‘accommodation’ and it was functioned clearly by them in the Vietnam War era. In a 1967 article, Morris Jonowitz, a sociologist from the university of Chicago, ‘asserts in an interview that ‘the experience of the Military will integrate them into the larger society. They will be more likely to enter the mainstream the political American life’. During the early phases of the war, many blacks were eagerly participated in the war to treat them equal. These soldiers’ feeling imply that the Militancy is a model from which the overall society might learn. Jack Foner notes that ‘during the mid 1960s most black military personnel and civilians had a decidedly favourable opinion of the armed forces. They considered the Military establishment the most completely integrated segment of American

society and the one that provided the best career opportunity for black men’(Foner,2014). These black people ultimately believe that military established is not democratic, although Captain Blackman admits that many blacks perceived it as a democratic institution. Certainly young black man didn’t feel racism in the military a thought, for him an Army seemed an excellent opportunity.

The characterization of the military as a democratic institution is derived from the American half of Double-consciousness. Here, many blacks were in the military to learn, however the double –consciousness made them to think contradictory to accumulate white America’s acceptance. Specifically, knowledge of the racial memory and its individualized application is at the centre of successfully dealing with the contradiction of Double –consciousness. Those characters who do not realize this fail to advance the quest for freedom and literacy and therefore live bitter and confused lives.

The second insights is the relationship between historical understanding and the way characters perceived their involvement in Vietnam war. Norman Harries notes that ‘Captain Blackman is an allegory, Blackman’s understanding leads to an ultimate solutions that is intended to end the contradictory nature of black military involvement in American wars and in effect destroy the basis for this specific manifestation of Double—consciousness. If there is no ‘white militancy’, black will not need or want to prove themselves within that structure. Hence service in the military is common to both black and white. This novel Captain Blackman demonstrates the consequences of historical understanding to the way Afro-Americans perceived their Vietnam involvement. In this sense, the novel provides an enlightening the various cultural demands that black soldiers made during the Vietnam war, for these demands were attempts on the part of the soldiers to discover themselves in the content of African American history.

As the novel progresses, America’s racism and imperialism harden to exclude an accurate perception of Afro-American capabilities. In this novel Captain Blackman trains the Blacks soldiers in sub Saharan Africa to destroy America’s defence systems. The novel ends with that goal accomplished and general Ishmael Whitman, the principal white protagonist, remarking senselessly that the ‘niggers have finally won’. The method of obtaining retribution is equal to the historical exclusion of black military achievement from the public record. Here the absence to be balanced by black soldier to get the final solution. The novel requires that freedom and literacy be expressed in a concrete form that will end the contradiction of double-consciousness.

Given the American military tradition, which is characterized by outright exploitation on the part of white commanders and white peers, why did black soldiers join in the military to fight in Vietnam? In Blackman’s case and surely John Alfred



Williams intends us to understand this character as every Blackman –there are two interrelated reasons : an absence of life choices usually resulting from economical constraints, and an overall socialization process that suggests to young Blackman to join the military is a democratic institution in which advancement results from merit and not from race.

Blackman's parents are not wealthy and they are divorced. After his schooling the young Blackman works at various jobs, thinks of going to college eventually: and fights frequently battles with restlessness and a “distressing ennui”. Thus at 18, without parents guidance or an ability to pull any useful precedent from Afro-American history. Blackman makes a convenient decision, he joins the army. Williams notes the similar points on Captain Blackman “three squares, a professional and travel and rapid promotion. He left Newyork without looking back.”(Williams ,297).

Although Black man decisions to join military illustrates an essentially negative aspects of what it means to be a black man during time of war, the way he ultimately uses his war experience provides insight into the way the way could advance the quest of freedom and literacy. Blackman development is an example of what happens to a soldier when he is able to generalize his experience through historical and cultural study.

Blackman 's process of development in the military has three stages. First he is thrilled at the prospect of being in the military, he is then disillusioned as a result of a racist treatment he received day by day , and finally he commences a cultural search in an effort to locate himself in Afro-American history and thereby make some sense of his war experience. Blackman's search of freedom and literacy is two fold: first he needs racial fraternization to create a sense of well-being and self-worth: and second . He begins to study , primarily by holding conversation with old black veterans . These two activities light the way to understanding the cultural demands of black who fought in Vietnam and thereby illustrate a relationship between historical understanding and the way individuals thought about their own Vietnam experience. Blackman's experience of black fraternization or racial fraternization did not always

Lead to politicization , but it was certainly a prerequisite for it and created a basis for freedom and literacy . Besides the second fold of William's search , beginning to study and holding conversation with other senior blacks made Blackman's conscious anew and the cycle of black exploitation be ended by a definite act, the destructive America. It is significant that fraternization with other blacks soldiers stimulated the formation of Blackman's consciousness. it was evoked Blackman to resist the inequality that led them one among the others . For Blackman , the tradition of his culture emerges as he studies black military history . Once Blackman studies and understand the cycle of betrayal that black soldiers have undergone, he is compelled to break the cycle. It is doubtful that black soldiers in Vietnam considered any retribution as absolute as that theorised by the fictional Blackman , but an abundance of evidence indicates a relationship between cultural historical understanding and military. Norman Harries notes that “ those Afro-American soldiers who were most conscious of their cultural and history were less likely to accept the discriminatory practices of white peers and commanders than were those who on an unarticulated level saw themselves only as Americans. Through the novel , Captain Blackman , Blackman moves from being a confused adolescent who entered into Newyork city as a soldier who came back as a self-assured revolutionary who brings American to his knee. The change occurs because external events force. The cultural –historical dimension of Blackman's movement makes us to understand why so many chose to join in the military and how did they resist the discrimination. Their cultural –historical demands are but less dramatic instances of what Blackman does through historical study and travel. In both instances , historical understanding is the key to advancing the quest for freedom and literacy.

## References

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