

## The Struggle of Afro American Women as Revealed in Walker's *The Color Purple*

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**Abstract.** *This research intends to find out the struggle of Afro-American women against discrimination in Alice Walker's The Color Purple. This research is qualitative, which means that the data are in the form of words; thus, the data came from the novel and other books that are relevant to this research. A mimetic approach is used in data analysis to unearth the literary work as an imitation or reflection of aspects of human life, such as sociological, historical, or psychological background that is related to the topic. The result shows that the Afro-American women that are pictured in Celie's life should struggle against both white and black discrimination. The whites did not accept the existence of the blacks and treated them cruelly through violence, rape, and murder. On the other side, the black man oppressed the Afro-American woman through sex abuse, physical abuse, and economic depression. The black women were living under the protection of men. However, their protection is no better than dominance and subservience. Even though Celie was treated abruptly and disrespectfully by her father and her husband, she could face it bravely, increasing her knowledge and insights, achieving financial success, and being happy in her life. Therefore, she achieves self-esteem, self-acceptance, economic independence, and, above all, freedom for the whole of her life. This is the realization of African American women's desire to gain recognition as individuals who deserve fair and equal treatment.*

**Keywords:** *Love, hatred, tragedy*

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui perjuangan perempuan Afro-Amerika melawan diskriminasi dalam *The Color Purple* karya Alice Walker. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif, artinya datanya berupa kata-kata; dengan demikian, data berasal dari novel dan buku-buku lain yang relevan dengan penelitian ini. Pendekatan mimetik digunakan dalam analisis data untuk menggali karya sastra sebagai peniruan atau pencerminan aspek-aspek kehidupan manusia, seperti latar belakang sosiologis, historis, atau psikologis yang terkait dengan topik. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa wanita Afro-Amerika yang digambarkan dalam kehidupan Celie harus berjuang melawan diskriminasi kulit putih dan hitam. Orang kulit putih tidak menerima keberadaan orang kulit hitam dan memperlakukan mereka dengan kejam melalui kekerasan, pemerkosaan, dan pembunuhan. Di sisi lain, pria kulit hitam menindas wanita Afro-Amerika melalui pelecehan seksual, kekerasan fisik, dan depresi ekonomi. Wanita kulit hitam hidup di bawah perlindungan pria. Namun, perlindungan mereka tidak lebih baik dari dominasi dan kepatuhan. Meskipun Celie diperlakukan secara tiba-tiba dan tidak hormat oleh ayah dan suaminya, namun ia dapat menghadapinya dengan berani, menambah pengetahuan dan wawasannya, mencapai kesuksesan finansial, dan bahagia dalam hidupnya. Oleh karena itu, dia mencapai harga diri, penerimaan diri, kemandirian ekonomi, dan, di atas

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segalanya, kebebasan seumur hidupnya. Inilah realisasi keinginan perempuan Afrika-Amerika untuk mendapatkan pengakuan sebagai individu yang berhak mendapatkan perlakuan yang adil dan setara.

**Kata kunci:** Perjuangan, Kekerasan, Diskriminasi

## **INTRODUCTION**

Alice Walker is an Afro-American and the child of a sharecropper family in rural Georgia. She graduated from Sarah Lawrance College, where one of her teachers was the politically committed female poet Muriel Rukeyser. Other influences on her work have been Flannert O'Connor and Zora Neale Hurston. As a womanist writer, as Walker calls herself, she has long been associated with feminism, presenting black existence from a female perspective (VanSpanckeren, 108).

In 1983, her novel *The Color Purple* won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize and was shortly thereafter made into a feature film by Steven Spielberg. Walker's most recent book is *The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficulty* (1994), composed of essays and articles about the film *The Color Purple* and the original screenplay for the film (Kallet and Clark 6).

*The Color Purple* (1982) is a fabulous work because it is informative, encouraging, and inspiring not only to women but to anyone who has gone through a great deal of suffering or who has ever felt oppression. The story shows Afro-American women are exploited by the men in their families and, furthermore, their husbands. The white men in society oppress African Americans in turn. Instead of coming home and rejoicing in the wonders of family life, the black men depicted came home and abused their women. This is the vicious cycle that goes on throughout most of the story.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **The Elements of the Novel**

#### **Plot**

According to Griffith, a "plot" is a pattern of carefully selected, causally related events that contains conflict. One event may cause another event. Whatever the causal relationship among events, each event intensifies the conflict so that the plot "rises" toward a climax. The climax is the most intense event in the narrative. The rest of the

story, the falling action, is usually brief. It contains events that are much less intense than the climax and that lead toward the resolution of the conflict and toward a stable situation at the end.

### **Character**

Griffith states that characters are the people in narrative, and characterization is the author's presentation and development of characters. Character is divided into two kinds: flat and round. Flat characters have only one or two personality traits and are easily recognizable as stereotypes, while round characters have multiple personality traits and therefore resemble real people (Griffith, 47).

*Celie* is the protagonist and narrator of "*The Color Purple*." She is an older woman. She has two children. *Olivia and Adam* were the result of her stepfather, also known as *Alphonso*, raping her. They are adopted by Samuel and Corrine, the missionaries who take *Nettie*, *Celie's* sister, with the family to Africa. *Nettie* writes letters to *Celie* detailing her life in an African village. *Nettie* eventually adopts *Celie's* two children and marries Samuel after *Corinne's* death. Later, *Adam* marries *Tashi*, one of the young girls in the Olinka tribe, who becomes *Olivia's* best friend there. They finally return home at the end of the novel.

*Miss Beasley* is the local schoolteacher who encourages *Celie* to stay in school. However, *Pa* prepares for her marriage rather than studying. After *Alphonso* dies, *Daisy* calls *Celie* to tell her that the house belongs to her and *Nettie*. *Daisy* is a young girl of fifteen who marries *Pa* because she is the family's employer.

*Celie* is married to *Albert*, whom she only called Mr. at first. He treats her very poorly by beating her and making her work like a slave. He is in love with *Shug Avery*, and he brings her to his house when she gets ill.

*Shug Avery* is a singer who makes a great deal of money from her performances. She has a big role in helping *Celie* in her crucial situation and also motivates and supports *Celie* as she sets up her pant business. *Shug's* real name is *Lillie Avery*. *Shug's* husband is *Grady*, who eventually runs off with *Mary Agns* and sets up a reefer plantation in Panama. Her last lover is *Germanie*, a blues flute player who is nineteen when he joins *Shug's* band.

## **Theme**

Griffith helps us understand the various meanings of a work's subject and theme.

The theme is the central idea of the work, whether it is fiction, poetry, or drama. The subject is what the work is about. You can express the subject in a single word or phrase. The theme, on the other hand, is what the work says about the subject. The statement of a work's theme requires a complete sentence, and sometimes several sentences (49).

## **Setting**

### **Setting is defined by Griffith as follows:**

Setting includes several closely related aspects of a work of fiction. First, the setting is the physical, sensuous world of the work. Second, setting is the time at which the actions of the work take place. Third, setting is the social environment of the characters: the manners, customs, and values that govern their society (52).

Celie's story reflects the migration of South-North-South in *The Color Purple*. At first, Celie's life is a series of sacrifices—to Pa's desires, to Nettie's safety, to Mr.'s brutality. She has been torn to pieces—torn from her childhood by Pa's rapes, torn from her children, torn from Nettie. She can identify nothing of her own self, and she does not feel she belongs in this world. Later, she decides to leave Mr. to live with Shug in Memphis. Getting out of the rural South and moving to Memphis opens up a totally new world for Celie. It emphasizes the economic liberation of the North, which provides Celie's folkpants business, as well as attempts to gain self-identity by improving her dialect to be more refined, which means she becomes a different person. Finally, Celie returns to the South as a result of her successful business and incredible personal transformation, which must have taken a long time and a lot of effort.

The story of *The Color Purple* is a historical novel that never refers to any factual events. There are no dates, little sense of the passage of time, and very few mentions of characters' ages.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a good example of colored women's plight. Three obstacles black women must overcome to be able to express themselves are racism, the idea that women are inferior because of a lack of education that keeps them in the lower class, and men's violence toward women.

Celie is the daughter of a successful Negro store owner who was lynched by white men for no other reason than his financial success. The story also stated that Celie was not allowed to go to school and only received an education by learning what her little sister was teaching her. It is believed that Afro-American women are inferior if they are kept uneducated. By that means, they would not know any better and would not fight for freedom. The Color Purple also pictures colored women getting violent treatment. Celie would get up to cook and clean, then go out and work in fields all day, then come back and cook and clean some more. Sophia would work in the fields, repair the roof, and take care of children. The men, Mr. and Harpo, would sit and not do much. If the woman ever said anything, they would beat her. However, it no longer happened until Shug Avery taught Celie that a person has to stand up if they want to be respected and work hard to get what is deserved.

### **Afro-American Women in the Early Twentieth Century**

Afro-Americans have overcome numerous challenges to achieve their current position. They have experienced racism throughout their habitation in America and have been treated like animals. For Howard, slavery was "inherently a system of brutality and coercion in which beatings, the breakup of families, and the sale of individuals were commonplace" (152);

Women of color had it even worse. They were also accused of slavery. But they were women too. In much of the world as well as in the United States, women were seen as inferior to men. She did not have many of the rights we now take for granted, as Howard stated:

Since colonial times, unmarried women have enjoyed many of the same legal rights as men, although custom requires that they marry early. With matrimony, women virtually lost their separate identities in the eyes of the law. Women were not permitted to vote, and their education in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was limited primarily to reading, writing, music, dancing, and needlework (138).

As recently as the nineteenth century, many American women could not be legal agents and thus could not own property or negotiate contracts except through their fathers, husbands, or brothers. They could not act as political agents, vote, or be elected to political office. They were not expected to speak in public, and they were not regarded as

economically independent. Therefore, women's goals in life were supposed to be marriage and motherhood.

In effect, women, the weaker sex, were under the control or protection of their male relatives and, in many ways, were conceived as properties. Husbands and fathers could not be prosecuted for physical or sexual abuse. Unfortunately, Afro-American women are subjected to similar treatment and must be prepared to be assaulted by white men.

### **The Author's Biography**

Alice Walker is a novelist, teacher, editor, poet, storyteller, and biographer. She is the winner of both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for *The Color Purple* and has dedicated her life to establishing a literary canon of African American writers and to encouraging the "survival whole" of all women. She was born on February 9, 1944, into a family of sharecroppers near Eatonton, Georgia. Her father, Willie Lee Walker, was the grandson of slaves. Walker's enslaved paternal great-grandmother, Mrs. Mary Poole, walked from Virginia to Georgia carrying two of her children on her hips. Walker's relationship with her father became strained as she grew into adolescence and showed a proclivity for intellectual pursuits. Although her father was an intelligent man, his educational opportunities had been limited, and he feared that education would place barriers between him and his children. When Walker left her home for Spelman College in Atlanta, her relationship with her father effectively ended, but over time she has re-evaluated the relationship and has resolved many of her conflicted emotions toward this parent. Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker's mother, a farmhand and domestic worker, realized how important education was for her daughter. She enrolled Walker in the first grade at the age of four and excused her from household chores so that she might have time for her reading and schoolwork. Minnie Walker saved the money she earned as a domestic in the town of Eatonton and bought several gifts that had a great impact on her daughter's life, including a sewing machine that enabled Walker to make her own clothes, a suitcase that gave her the promise of and permission to travel, and a typewriter, of which she later made good use. When Walker was eight years old, a shot from her brother's BB gun permanently blinded her right eye. Convinced that the resulting scar tissue in her eye was disfiguring and ugly, she retreated into solitude and spent the next seven to eight

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years reading voraciously and writing poems. Walker was the valedictorian of her high school class, and when she graduated in 1961, she was offered a scholarship to Spelman College in Atlanta and attended there. After traveling to Africa in 1964, Walker returned to the United States and entered Sarah Lawrence College. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College in 1965. Alice Walker has had a tremendous impact on the African American literary canon. In addition to being a major author of notable literature, Walker has enlarged the canon by bringing the works of Zora Neale Hurston before the public, and she has both written within and revised the tradition of African American women writers. Her literary contribution includes major novels, collections of short stories and essays, and volumes of poetry. Walker writes to and for women of all colors and cultures, urging them to know their true selves and to bind up wounds resulting from centuries of silence and abuse. Walker believes in change, for the individual and for society, and for the survival of the African American woman. Although Walker has been labeled a feminist writer, she prefers the term "womanist" rather than "feminist," for she believes the term "womanist" captures the spirit of the African American woman. As she exposes the twin afflictions of racism and sexism, the soul and spirit of the African American woman remain Walker's first commitment (<http://www.litencyc.com>).

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY****Research Design**

This research is classified as qualitative research since the data are collected in the form of words. Bogdan and Biklen state that "qualitative research is descriptive." The data collected is in the form of words and pictures rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation (30).

**Source Selection**

The sources were divided into two categories by the author: primary sources and secondary sources. The data were collected from a primary source: the novel itself. Secondary sources are relevant books used to support the analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

The data is analyzed using a mimetic approach. "The mimetic orientation, according to Abrams, is the explanation of art as essentially an imitation of aspects of the universe... and one issue, that is, the perfecting of the social state and the state of man," (8-1). It is clearly seen that the mimetic approach views the literary work as an imitation or reflection of the universe or aspects of human life. Thus, this approach is used to study the sociological, historical, or psychological background that is related to the topic.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **The Life of Afro-American Women**

Afro-American women had to fight every effort to realize their American dreams as citizens of the United States. They have the rights which were put forth in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Moss, 382). However, it was difficult for blacks to celebrate their American identity in a country dominated by racist whites who oppressed African Americans. No wonders: *The Color Purple* illustrates the life of African Americans through violence, rape, and murder as their existence was not accepted by the whites. Despite racial discrimination by white Americans, Afro-American women suffered from black discrimination. By that means, black men oppressed their female relatives sexually, physically, and economically.

### **Afro-American Women Struggle against White Discrimination**

*The Color Purple* is a powerful novel that explores the complicated and difficult aspects of African American life. The novel describes the way blacks were treated through Celie's experience. Celie's whole story is derived from the lynching of her father. This ultimate act of racism defines most of Celie's future: her being raped by Pa, her pregnancy and the loss of her children, her marriage to Mr., her separation from her lovely sister, and her unknowing dispossession of her home and inheritance. Nettie's letter informs Celie about this fact:



Once upon a time, there was a well-to-do farmer who owned his own property near the town. Our town, Celi And as he did so well farming and everything he turned his hand to prospered, he decided to open a store and try his luck selling dry goods as well. Well, his store did so well that he talked two of his brothers into helping him run it, and, as the months went by, they were doing better and better. Then the white merchants began to get together and complain that this store was taking all the black business away from them and that the man's blacksmith shop that he set up behind the store was taking some of the white. This would not do. And so, one night, the man's store was burned down, his smithy was destroyed, and the man and his two brothers were dragged out of their homes in the middle of the night and hanged (160).

**The novel is marked by racial tension; Celie is the daughter of a wealthy black man.** However, her father is lynched by white men because they are jealous of his financial success. In this case, hanging the blacks was usually done by whites, as Moss explains in *The Rise of Modern America*: "There was a tremendous increase in the amount of violence directed against black people during the 1800s." Lynch gangs terrorized the South, killing hundreds of African Americans" (18). This idea is sharpened by Moss in *Moving on: The American People Since 1945*, who writes that "many whites hated their new African Americans for housing, jobs, and schools for their children." "They resented coming into contact with African Americans at parks, beaches, and other public facilities" (11).

Indeed, history has shown that after slavery was abolished, the freedmen were perplexed about the continuity of their lives. Williams wrote:

The Negroes, when they gained freedom, had, of course, no property. They were forced, as a simple matter of survival, to become laborers or tenants, and most of them were unable to accumulate enough resources to rise above this status. As late as 1890, there were only 121,000 Negro landowners in the South (7).

As a result, many Afro-Americans had achieved financial success through their own efforts, as Johnson stated: "Southern blacks were economically successful during Reconstruction, but some were eventually disposed of their property due to the racist system" (<http://www.litencyc.com>).

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, African Americans were humiliated by a form of regulation called Jim Crow law that "segregated public schools, forbade or limited black access to many public facilities, such as parks, restaurants, and hotels, and denied most blacks the right to vote by imposing poll taxes and arbitrary literacy tests" (Howard, 174). Thereby, Afro-Americans were seen as inferior, as they should live separately from whites. The concept of segregation systems is revealed in *The Color Purple* through Nettie's view, as stated in her letter to Celie on the way to Africa.

What can I say about New York, even the train that brought us there? We had to ride in the sit-down section of the train, but, Celie, there are beds on trains! and a restaurant! And toilets! The beds come down out of the walls over the tops of the seats and are called berths. Only white people can ride in the beds and use the restaurant. And they have different toilets based on color (126).

It is proved that "slaves were granted their freedom, but not equality" (Howard, 175).

"Whites' violence is not limited to the black man." Black women are not restricted in their cruelty. Sophia is forced to be a maid by the mayor's wife, but she refuses. The mayor then slaps Sophia. Going mad at his act, Sophia knocks him down until the police come and drag her to the ground. After that, Sophia is put in jail only because she refused White's demand. Tragically, Sophia experiences violence there, as Celie shares in her letter:

When I see Sophia, I don't know why she's still alive. They crack her skulls and her ribs. They rip her nose loose on one side. They blinded her in one eye. She moved from head to toe. Her tongue was the size of my arm; it stuck out between her teeth like a piece of rubber. She can't talk. And she just mentioned the color of eggplant (87).

Besides, Sophia gets an inappropriate field and place. Celie said:

They put Sophia to work in the prison laundry. All day long, from five to eight, she washes clothes. dirty prison uniforms, nasty sheets, and blankets piled way over her head. We see her twice a month for half an hour. Her face was yellow and sickly, and her fingers looked like fatty sausages. Everything is nasty here, she says, even the air. food bad enough to kill you with it. Roaches, mice, flies, lice, and even a snake or two can be found here. If you say anything, they strip you and make you sleep on a cement floor without a light (88).

Being confronted with such conditions, Afro-Americans had no power to oppose or be protected by the law. Whites believed that blacks only wanted to be slaves, with no freedom to choose what they wanted to do. Blake showed it in *A History of American Life and Thought*: "Negro were sometimes whipped for refusal to work or for other infractions of discipline; they were rarely seriously injured" (122). Nonetheless, whites' objections to demand are bad luck for the future, as Sophia told Celie, "white folks are a miracle of affliction" (103).

The *The Color Purple* continually reveals the position of black women in the eyes of white men. They became sexual objects for whites. Sadly, Mary Agnes felt it. She is raped by a white uncle, whom she approaches to ask for his help getting Sophia out of prison. Celie said:

Poor little Squeak came home with a limp. Her dress ripped. Her hat is gone, and one of her heels has fallen off. Harpo came up the steps from the car, saying, "My wife beat me up; my woman raped me" (94).

This incident indicates that Afro-American women should be ready to be exploited by white men, as Blake said: "Slave women might become the paramours of overseers or masters" (123).

Among the complicated situation of white discrimination, *The Color Purple* depicts the effort of Afro-American women to fight with their own abilities, as demonstrated by Sophia and Nettie. Sophia exemplifies the struggle of blacks by refusing to work for whites and refusing to let them slap or beat her, despite the fact that she cannot bear the physical injuries she received as a result of her actions. Nettie is a strong character who defies the rule that black women are not allowed to attend school. She is a hard learner, and when she joins the missionary to Africa, she becomes a teacher, as she said: "We teach the children English, reading, writing, history, geography, arithmetic, and stories of the Bible" (144). It indicates that education for women is important as a guide that helps someone determine her future and what she can do to help others. At the end of the novel, the playwright describes Celie's family reunion on the Fourth of July. It reveals Frederick Douglass, one of the finest writers of the slave's narrative and the creator of the famous Fourth of July Speech that protested the institution of slavery (<http://www.litencyc.com>).

### **Afro-American Women Struggle against Black Discrimination**

The Color Purple depicts how women were treated seriously. The idea that women are inferior to men led black men to discriminate against Afro-American women. This condition delivered the black community to destruction in the times when they were united against the common evil of the discriminative white man. Instead of bonding together to figure out the problem, black men are depicted oppressing women cruelly.

Celie's experiences with black discrimination against Afro-American women are vividly depicted as she suffers sexual abuse, physical abuse, and economic depression at the hands of men who must give her love and affection. These treatments are seen as the proper action to be taken because Afro-American women are meaningless from a man's point of view, as Mr. Smith said to Celie: "Look at you." You are a woman, you are black, you have pores, you are ugly. "You are nothing at all," he said (187). In some way, Celie is hopeless. She thinks that she deserves to be treated like dirt because she is ugly and black. Furthermore, Mr.'s statement implies that most Afro-American women were not doing anything to combat black oppression because the culture has placed women in a position of obedience to men's decisions, whether they are good or bad for their lives.

### **Sexual abuse against Celie**

Celie, the main character, is going through so many hard times for African American women in general. The major conflict occurs while Celie is still a young girl and living at home. Her mother is sick and cannot provide sexual relief to her husband. While she is out one day, he comes up behind Celie and tells her, "You're going to do what Mama wouldn't" (11). Then he starts raping her. When she cried, he choked her and threatened, "You better shut up and get used to it" (11); This scene depicts a major conflict in the book because Celie believes this man to be her father, and her self-esteem is lowered by his actions so drastically that they affect her for most of her life. Pa also impregnates her for two children.

Pa is continually insulting Celie. When Pa proposes to Mr. that Celie marry him, Celie dismisses him by saying, "She ain't fresh tho.. she's spoiled." She has admitted twice that she is not a good cook. "And she's big already" (17). This statement indicates a rapid decline in Celie's self-honor, which affects her life because she thinks that she is worthless and appropriate to receive all the turmoil she has. Meanwhile, Pa is the picture

of the black men who have power and authority to discriminate against women in Afro-American families. Whether she likes or dislikes it, Celie should be ready to accept and agree with all of Pa's bad treatments and decisions.

### **Physical Abuse and Economic Depression**

Afro-American women live in deplorable circumstances. Aside from being sexually abused, they are expected to do all household chores, work in the fields, and are constantly beaten by black men.

Father and husband are the family figures who share their love and affection with their wives and children. Nevertheless, *The Color Purple* also beats her, as Celie shared in her letter: "He beat me for dressing trampy, but he did it to me anyway" (17). Celie's anguish is palpable whenever she is married to Mr. She experiences the most violence she has ever experienced.

Harpo asked his dad why he beat me. "Because she's my wife," Mr. Say says. Plus, she's stubborn. He doesn't finish what all women are good for. He just tucks his chin over the paper like he always does. remind me of Pa. He beat me like he beat the children. It's all I can do not to cry. I make my own wood. I say to myself, "Celie, you are a tree." That's how I know trees fear men (30).

Mr.'s concept of "wives" is like that of children. He also teaches his son, Harpo, how to beat his wife: "You have to show 'em who's got the upper hand." "Nothing can do that better than a good, sound beating" (42). In this case, the black men do not consider beating their wives because they have been doing something right or wrong. It is described in the relationship between Harpo and Sophia. Although they love each other, Harpo tries to emulate his father by making Sophia obey him the way Celie obeys Mr. As a result, beating women has become a culture that black men should practice on their wives whenever they want to demonstrate their authority. It also indicates the powerlessness of Afro-American women, as they live as subservient wives to their husbands.

Aside from beating, there are other rules that limit Afro-American women's ability to develop. These are pictured *Purple is defined as follows:*

- Afro-American women should live at home, as Harpo said: "A woman needs to be at home" (82). In addition, the black women cannot get relaxation at the place

of entertainment, as Celie said: "Mr. didn't want me to come." "Wives don't go to places like that" (74). It is our own behavior around

- Women cannot wear pants, as Celie said: "Mr. is not going to let his wife wear pants" (136). This rule communicates that Afro-American women are powerless and have no equal rights as men.
- In making a conversation, women are prohibited from looking at the men's faces.

There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They just listen enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when they are speaking. They look at the ground. The women also do not "look in a man's face," as they say. To "look in a man's face" is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet and his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around Pa (149).

All the strict regulations for Afro-American women above clearly portray that black women are oppressed by black men.

The most significant factor influencing Afro-American women's perception as lower creatures is their lack of education. The limitation on receiving knowledge affects black women, who struggle throughout their lives for self-esteem, economic independence, and freedom. This case can be found when Pa is preparing Celie to be married and ignores Miss Beasley's attention and suggestion for Celie to be taught:

Next thing I know, Miss Beasley is at our house trying to talk to Pa. She claims that in her many years as a teacher, she has never met anyone who is as eager to learn as Nettie and me. But when Pa calls me out, she stops talking and goes (20).

Pa pulls Cellie out of school daily, claiming she is dumb and has no need for education. Nonetheless, Pa's words and acts influence Celie mentally until she loses her self-confidence.

Nettie also reveals African customs by calling on the Olinka tribe. Nettie shared with Celie:

The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: "A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something" (144).

The above quotation proves that black women depend on their husbands. On the other hand, black men put undue pressure on their wives.

The use of names is one of the playwright's favorite ways to identify how much power one character has over another. This can be seen by the fact that Celie is unable to call Mr. by his first name and, in fact, barely even recognizes the name when Shug uses it: "Who is Albert, I wonder?" Then I remember Albert, "Mr. First Name" (51); Without knowing Mr.'s first name, Celie lacks any power over him and is forced into her role as a subservient wife.

Another example of the power of names arises between Harpo and Mary Agnes. As long as Harpo calls her Squeak, she is powerless to defend herself. Celie even notices how Squeak acts and obeys much the same way she does. However, after being raped, Squeak announces to Harpo that her name is Mary Agnes. By demanding to be called by her real name, she asserts herself as an autonomous individual and demands respect. Thus, the use of a character's name becomes a tool towards empowerment within the novel.

The arrival of Shug Avery marks the low point in Celie's status and power. Celie is tasked with looking after her husband's mistress. Up until this point, Celie has at least had the status of being Mr.'s wife, allowing her to maintain control over her household. However, Mr.'s decision shocked and hurt Celie, as she said:

I don't know what to do; I'm so beside myself, standing there in the middle of the kitchen. Mind whirling. I feel like "Who Would Have Thought?" Come on in; I want to fry. To shout. Come on in. with God's help. Celie is going to make you well. But I don't say anything. It is not my residence. In addition, I haven't been told anything (49-50).

Mr. Celie's mistreatment has hampered communication between husband and wife. Celie was unable to do what she desired. On the contrary, Celie should keep silent, as she said: "It's all I can do not to cry; I make myself wood." I say to myself, "Celie, you are a tree." That's how I know trees are afraid of men" (30). Celie believes that, while she will not meet other women for her husband, she cannot go against him. As a result of Shug's arrival, Celie's position is reduced to that of a servant to Shug.

Black women are clearly seen as inferior and treated as slaves, as Harpo told Celie: "Women work." "I'm a man" (29). Their energy is used up to motivate the family's life by working all days without enjoying the results of their own hard work to please themselves. It is heightened by a conversation between Mr. and Celie just before Celie moves to Memphis:

You're not getting a penny of my money, Mr. Say something to me. not one thin dime. Did I ever ask you for money? I say. I never asked you for anything. not even your sorry hand in marriage (183).

Economic depression cannot be endured. According to Blake, the old English common law, a product of Medieval civilization, was still in effect in the early nineteenth century:

Both the wife's property and her earnings belonged to her husband. She had no right to make a deed contract or a will, nor to sue in court without his consent. Women's inequality, based on tradition rather than reason, is inevitably under attack (215).

Celie has no economic rights as an Afro-American woman in general. She is conscious that the oppression of her husband by her is a custom in society. Therefore, she always obeys Mr. After finishing the work of the household, the black women should work on the field. Meanwhile, the black man is only sitting and watching the black woman go to work. Celie describes her husband's attitude:

He told me, "Wash this." Look for that, look for that, look for that. Find this. Find that. He's grown through the holes in his socks...He wakes up while I'm in the field. By the time he arrived, I had been chopping cotton for three hours. We don't say anything to each other. Mr. Pick up a hoe and start to chop. He chops for about three chops and then stops. He dropped the hoe in the furrow, turned right back on his heel, walked back to the house, went to get him a cool drink of water, got his pipe, and sat on the porch and stared. I'm following him because I believe he's sick. Then he said. You better get on back to the field. Don't wait for me (32-34).

All the black men behave brutally. Women are treated abominably, not allowed educational independence, and live under the protection of men. However, this protection is no better than dominance and subservience. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of outrage that women are driven out to get a better life.

Through the protagonist's life, *The Color Purple* reveals how black men discriminated against Afro-American women. Celie faces many hardships from her father and her husband. In the beginning of the story, Celie does not fight back, as she says, "I don't know how to fight." "All I know how to do is stay alive" (26). When Celie passes all odds affected by Pa, she only shares everything she does, feels, hears, and sees in letters to God because she remembers that her father told her to never tell anyone about



the abuse that was occurring. Celie begins every new entry with "Dear God," which gives her the sense that no matter how terrible the problem she faces, she believes inside it will somehow be all right. It also indicates that Celie is a religious person, as she said, "If I were buried, I wouldn't have to work." But as long as I can spell God, I'll get someone" (26). As a result, the form letters she created become a tool for alleviating her grief as she struggles to survive in the face of black man discrimination. The importance of letters to Afro-American women is written in Sparknotes.

Letters tell us about the objective conditions of a person's life while also being a subjective reflection on her life. The letter is a form of narrative that combines both the objective and the subjective. This dual quality may be one of the reasons why letters were written so consistently by women in the past, when their experience was considered trivial and was usually omitted from history. Through writing letters, women not only recorded their lives but also reflected upon them, a source of personal growth.

Walker arranges the letters of *The Color Purple* in terms of the Afro-American literary tradition, specifically the genre of the slave's narrative, which usually traced the slave's growing awareness of her oppression, her increasing resistance, her escape, and the final realization of freedom in body and spirit. like the slave in the nineteenth-century narratives. Celie's body and spirit are brutalized (<http://www.sparknotes.com/li/purple/facts.html>). The above quotation indicates that most Afro-American women were using the form of letters to express their feelings, while black men could not be prosecuted for sexual or physical abuse.

Another thing to be considered as the mirror of Celie as she progresses from subservience to independence is the presence of other Afro-American women. They have banded together in support and consolation. Each of them motivates Celie to fight, as described below:

*Nettie*, She advises Celie when she watches her being exploited by me and his children:

Don't let them run over you, *Nettie*, You've got to let them know who has the upper hand. I tell them they've got it. But she persisted. You've got to fight. Celie, you have to fight them, she says. I can't do it for you. You've got to fight them for yourself (25).

*Nettie* also motivates Celie to learn together:

She's helping me with spelling and everything else she thinks I need to know. No matter what happens, Nettie will try to teach me what's going on in the world. And she's a good teacher too. It nearly kills me to think she might marry somebody like Mr. or wind up in some lady's kitchen. She read, studied, practiced her handwriting, and tried to make us think all day (25).

*Sophia.* She is a person who inspires Celie to fight.

I adore Harpo, she says, and I certainly do. But I'll kill him before I let him beat me. "You ought to bash Mr. Head open," she said. Think about heaven later (46).

Moreover, Sophia leads Celie to realize that "some women can't be beat" (66).

*Shug Avery* is the most beautiful woman in the eyes of Celie; Celie admires Shug and wants to be like her. Shug expresses her creativity and is economically independent in the way she works as a singer. She also shows eroticism, as she can make the man long for her. The presence of Shug influences much of Celie's metamorphosis. She helps Celie find her identity and shares knowledge and insight.

Celie said, "A lot of people love Shug, but nobody but Shug loves me" (246). It indicates that Shug Avery has the power to control men. When Shug kisses Celie, she transfers the spirit to a dominance man, which influences Celie's transformation to seek equality with Albert.

Celie's pain at losing her sister Nettie is cured by the presence of Shug, who comforts her as she says, "For the first time in my life, I feel just right" (61); Shug then helps Celie find Nettie's letters, which are kept by Pa. Shug motivates Celie to have self-defense in order to develop her life economically by taking her to Memphis with the hope that one day she will be united with all the people she loves. Shug said: "You're not my maid." I didn't bring you to Memphis to be that. "I brought you here to love you and help you and get on your feet" (190).

-Celie sees God in the beginning: "He is big and old and tall and gray-bearded and white" (175). Celie recalls God's attitudes as well as his appearance: "He gave me a lynched father, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a steppa, and a sister I probably won't see again. "Shug totally changes Celie's ideas about God. God is everything: "He gave you life, good health, and a good woman who loved you to death" (175). God is not in the church, Shug explains; "God is inside you and inside everybody else." You come into the world with God. But only those who look inside will find it" (177). Through God, we

can "be happy" and "have a good time" (176). It is most significant that at the end of the novel, Celie is able to address a letter of thanksgiving to God: "Dear God, Dear Stars, Dear Trees, Dear Sky, Dear People, Dear Everything, Dear God" (249).

Celie is involved in this close sisterhood together with Nettie, Sophia, and Shug. This relationship enables her to move toward her own self-acceptance and self-definition. This begins on the day she announces that she will leave Mr. to live with Shug in Memphis. Mr. Smith dismisses her with the words, "You'll be back. "There's nothing up North for you...You ugly. You skinny. You're shaped funny. "You're too scared to open your mouth to people" (186). However, Cecilie was brave against Mr., as she said:

"Every lick you give me, you will suffer twice," I say. Then I say, "You better stop talking," because all I'm telling you ain't coming just from me. When I open my mouth, air rushes in and shapes words: "I'm black, I'm pore, I might be ugly, and I can't cook," a voice says to everyone who is listening. But I'm here (187).

The above quotation describes how Celie has struggled for her existence to be acknowledged. Thus, Celie is now fully aware that she is a person who deserves to be looked at as a person. This is a sense that helps empower her to break away from Albert and the men who cannot ever look at her as a person.

The importance of sisterhood as described in "*The Color Purple*" is felt by Afro-American women, as nowadays there is a Sisterhood Organization with the mission to uplift and aid in the self-development of women and girls of African descent, a unique population with special needs. It is an internationally recognized, non-profit, publicly supported, cultural, and economic concern of African-American women and girls. The mission of Sisterhood Agenda is achieved through the research and development of new initiatives and programs. Social impact is expanded through the dissemination of information, such as educational materials, training, and consulting activities, through Sisterhood Agenda Enterprises. The vision of Sisterhood Agenda's global strategy is to create a global network of sisters and friends of sisters who are empowered with sisterhood's self-knowledge, self-development, and self-esteem ([www.sisterhoodagenda.org/programs/services.htm](http://www.sisterhoodagenda.org/programs/services.htm)).

Moving to Memphis symbolically marks the black community's twentieth-century migration to the North, with the emphasis on the economic liberation the North provides

(<http://www.123HelpMe.com>). Celie's personal spirit to go to Memphis portrays the African American willingness to seek a better life, as Howard stated:

Between 1910 and 1930, a huge black migration from the South to the North took place, peaking in 1915-1916. Most settled in urban areas such as Detroit and Chicago, which held greater opportunities for jobs and personal freedom than the rural south. At the same time, an African American literary and artistic movement, termed the "Harlem Renaissance," emerged (253).

Through Shug's heel, Celie starts a successful business making pants for all the relatives. Celie demonstrates that a woman can do anything a man can do. Women were not supposed to rely on men for everything, such as food, clothing, and shelter. After Celie made her own money, she did not need a man.

The fact that Celie starts making pants for herself illustrates two moments of occupational and lifestyle freedom. Celie creates occupational freedom by making something for herself and other people. This is a highlight because it shows that she has acquired more individuality and is willing to assert herself. Freedom of lifestyle is achieved by wearing the pants, which make Celie look more like a man. The pants therefore show Celie's sexuality as well. After first being sexually awakened by Shug, Celie is now willing to dress and act in accordance with how she feels. Thus, she is willing to put on pants because she recognizes that she is more masculine. For Celie, changing her clothes is another manifestation of freedom.

Later, in a letter to Nettie from Mamphis, Celie clearly articulates a new and more positive vision of herself: "I am so happy. I have love; I have work; I have money; I have friends; and I have time. And you're still alive and will return home soon." "With our children" (193). And although Celie has never signed her letters before, she does so now emphatically, defining her new identity through her family relationships, her business, her love, and her new place in the world: "Your sister, Celie Folkpants, Unlimited Sugar Avery Drive, Memphis, Tennessee" (192).

Celie's transformation is incredible. Her employee, Darlene, tries to "improve" Celie's dialect to make it more "refined," which means making a different person out of her (193). It makes her different from what she used to be before she left for Mâché. When she came to visit Sophia and Harpo, she said, "I feel different." "Look different" (195).

Significantly, when she passes Mr. sitting on his porch, he does not recognize the new Celie.

Celie rises in power and fortitude as she creates a permanent life for herself. After Pa dies, Celie discovers that the house and the land he lived on belong to her and Nettie. Apparently, Pa had hidden their mother's will from them and had run the store as his own after getting rid of the two sisters. Celie and Shug then proceed to their home. After finding Nettie and her properties, Celie feels that for the first time, she has a place of her own to live in, and she decides to convert the store into a pants factory.

The change in Celie here also creates a change in other characters that look to her as a natural leader. She seems to have more control over what is happening, primarily because she runs her own business. For example, Sophia is put to work in her store as a salesperson under Celie's control. This is also apparent in the way other people react to Celie, which is with respect and difference rather than ignoring her.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Afro-American women were living in despair because the American people refused to acknowledge their existence. They suffered from white discrimination through violence, rape, and murder. In the novel, Celie struggles to survive. At first, Celie has only poured everything she does, feels, hears, and sees into a letter to God in order to cure her downfall. Then, she involves herself in the sisterhood together with Nettie, Sophia, and Shug, who motivate her. Thus, we can see how the Afro-American woman can increase her resistance to oppression by maturing and working hard to achieve self-esteem, self-acceptance, economic independence, and, most importantly, freedom for the rest of her life.

## **SUGGESTION**

Celie's experience communicates that people should be strong in facing problems and help and support each other while the burdens of life are felt, which gives one another hope that everything will be all right.

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