

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni

Filozofická fakulta

Bakalářská práce

The Everyday Reality of African American
Community in the Eyes of Selected Contemporary
American Poets

Kateřina Čapková

Plzeň 2017

Západočeská univerzita v Plzni
Filozofická fakulta
Katedra politologie a mezinárodních vztahů
Studijní program Mezinárodní teritoriální studia
Studijní obor Mezinárodní vztahy – britská a americká studia

Bakalářská práce

The Everyday Reality of African American Community in the Eyes of Selected
Contemporary American Poets

Kateřina Čapková

Vedoucí práce:

Mgr. et Mgr. Jana Kašparová

Katedra anglického jazyka

Filozofická fakulta Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

Plzeň 2017

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně za použití výhradně zdrojů uvedených v seznamu pramenů a literatury.

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	History of Black America	5
	2.1. Slavery and Daily Reality of African Slaves	5
	2.2. Civil War, Abolition and the Consequences	7
	2.3. Harlem Culture	10
	2.4. Civil Rights Movement	11
	2.5. The Community Today	13
3.	Selected Authors and Their Poetry	16
	3.1. Evie Shockley (*1965)	16
	3.2. Yusef Komunyakaa (*1947).....	16
	3.3. Maya Angelou (1928-2014).....	17
	3.4. Latorial Faison (*1973)	17
	3.5. Claude McKay (1889-1948).....	17
	3.6. Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000).....	18
	3.7. Toi Derricote (*1941).....	18
	3.8. Langston Hughes (1902-1967).....	19
	3.9. Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880 - 1966).....	19
	3.10. Angela Jackson (*1951)	19
	3.11. Dudley Randall (1914-2000)	20
	3.12. June Jordan (1936-2002)	20
	3.13. Audre Lorde (1934-1992)	20
	3.14. Afaa Michael Weaver (*1951)	21
	3.15. Annie Ruth (*1963).....	21
4.	Analysis of Chosen Poems	22
	4.1. Slavery and Daily Reality of African Slaves	22
	4.1.1. <i>Evie Shockley – waiting on the mayflower</i>	22
	4.1.2. <i>Yusef Komunyakaa – The African Burial Ground</i>	24
	4.1.3. <i>Maya Angelou – Caged Bird</i>	25

4.2. Civil War, Abolition and the Consequences	27
4.2.1. <i>Latorial Faison – Buffalo Soldiers</i>	27
4.2.2. <i>Claude McKay - America</i>	28
4.2.3. <i>Gwendolyn Brooks – the sonnet-ballad</i>	29
4.3. Harlem Culture	30
4.3.1. <i>Toi Derricote – Black Boys Play the Classics</i>	30
4.3.2. <i>Langston Hughes – Harlem</i>	31
4.3.3. <i>Georgia Douglas Johnson – Foredoom</i>	33
4.4. Civil Rights Movement	34
4.4.1. <i>Angela Jackson – Miz Rosa Rides the Bus</i>	35
4.4.2. <i>Dudley Randall – Ballad of Birmingham</i>	36
4.4.3. <i>June Jordan – 1977: Poem for Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer</i>	37
4.5. The Community Today	39
4.5.1. <i>Audre Lorde – Power</i>	40
4.5.2. <i>Afaa Michael Weaver – American Income</i>	41
4.5.3. <i>Annie Ruth – Ghetto Woman</i>	43
5. Conclusion	46
6. Bibliography	49
6.1. History	49
6.2. Biographies	50
6.3. Poems.....	51
7. Abstract (French)	54
8. Appendices	55

1. Introduction

The central subject-matter of the bachelor thesis is a common daily life of the African American community in the United States. The African culture brought to America with the first black slaves played an essential part in the development of the American history and it greatly affected the character of today's United States. Therefore, the general focus in the bachelor thesis is aimed at the African American culture and mainly at an everyday life of ordinary black people in the country. The issue will be introduced from the perspective of the past as well as in these days, in the way it is described by contemporary poets and artists. Undoubtedly, there is a great number of African American writers or writers in general, focusing on African American culture, who have a bright insight not only into the present state of the community, but also into its development through the history. The authors that will serve as the main sources for the textual analysis are themselves representatives of the community as they have the first-hand experience. The poems of such poets as Maya Angelou, Dudley Randall or Audre Lorde will be analysed. Above all, to set the context for further understanding of the issue it is necessary to discuss topics related to the history of African American community, as for example slavery, discrimination and poverty, but also hidden discrimination in the 21st century, ghettos and street culture.

Further, an extra attention is paid to role of women in this part of society by monitoring their daily life. The change of stance towards black females will be mapped. In history, all women were inferior to men, and even more when they were black. The women's role will be seen in every aspect and era further described and then compared with the opinions originating in chosen poems.

As far as the methods are concerned, mainly comparison and analysis are used. Apart from the poems themselves, also the historical facts are going to be analysed and compared to the reality described in those poems. Using

comparison, the change of the stance of the white majority towards the black minority will be captured as well. The key aim of the work is to find out how the life of African American community is and was in history and how it was evolving, mainly in eyes of a common woman. The primary sources for the practical section are the poems, in which are anatomized the emotions and subjective perceptions the poets had about the events. All facts included the community was supposedly dealing with great discrimination, degradation and humiliation from the side of the white majority, and even today they are to certain degree discriminated at some places. According to these facts the hypothesis is that the relationship between the minority and majority has never truly changed so much, even nowadays, when the world has so many troubles with racism and xenophobia, and the same point of view will be prevailing in the analysed pieces of American poetry.

For the comprehensiveness, it is yet needful to specify the terms used in the thesis. The community of the subject will be throughout the text referred as *the minority*, *the community*, *African Americans* or *Afro-Americans* and *the Blacks* (the last term denotes specifically members of Negroid race and is meant exclusively ethnically). If labelled as *coloured people* or *negroes* the quotation marks will be used to indicate that the name was taken from the paraphrased or quoted source. In the case of the other group, it will be referred as *the majority*, *the Whites* or *Caucasians*.

2. History of Black America

Initially, prior to discussing poetry and poets related to African American community, it is necessary to mention the most important events, that formed the African American community into the shape it has today, and thus set the historical background. There is no doubt that the minority suffered a lot through centuries. This chapter will be divided into five parts according to the milestones of African American history and is going to map the most important dates and facts changing the course of the whole face of the Blacks in the United States, such as slave trade, American Civil War, abolition or the Civil Rights Movement. The division of the chapter is inspired mostly by the book *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* written by Lerone Bennett Jr., and a file of the history of African American culture from National Archives of United States.

2.1. Slavery and Daily Reality of African Slaves

Speaking of Afro-Americans and Black America, we must ever concern in researching one historical topic, which can never be underestimated, as it deeply influenced lives of most African Americans even today – the slavery. The slavery is considered the root of all racial problems the Whites and the Blacks had through ages, blaming the division of masters and servants, which put the ‘negroes’ into the position of inferior subjects. Even though the start of slaver’s history dates back to 1500, the beginning of slave trade and slavery in the United States is deemed to be a shipping of 20 captive Africans to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, where they were deliberately sold as servants to British Colonists (Bennett 1993: 43; National Geography). This event gave Britain the inspiration, which cost lives of millions of African Americans – British naval commander, John Hawkings, came with the idea of Triangle Trade, which promised a great profit for England’s economy. It simply meant purchasing and bringing slaves from Africa to sell or exchange in America for cotton, sugar or other goods, but it was not an exception to exchange them also for other slaves,

e.g. Indians (National Geography). In 1641, the state of Massachusetts was the first officially legalizing slavery and slaver's trade and the ship known as Desire was constructed to carry slaves. They were brought to New World's markets and then sold to work in cotton, coffee, sugar, rice, crops and tobacco plantations, for heavy labour in docks or as house servants. The main reason for purchasing a black slave was though quite simple – they were fast and hard-working, in contrast with the Caucasians they were able to work in the harsh conditions of plantations for a long time and what is more, it was less economically exhaustive to keep a slave, than a full-time servant (Thomas 2015; Bennett 1993: 49-50).

Through ages institution of slavery was improving to be more suitable for masters. The fugitive slave law was passed, which settled more serious punishments for escaping slaves. Hereditary slavery law laid down the rule that the new born child of an enslaved women is becoming a property of the master. A wedlock between Caucasian and African American was prohibited and many more orders and rules were adopted that put black slaves into even more humiliating position than they had been before (Draper). The status of the black ethnic started getting little better during the 18th century – they were becoming very skilled laborers and their masters enabled them to learn to read, write or speak different languages. They were settled in the family they worked in and got special place there¹. Although not free, the Blacks climbed the social ladder to get higher level in society than poor Whites, sometimes getting paid by their masters (ASALH 1916).

Women naturally had their place in this institution, too. Whilst the men were sold to construct houses and do the heavy work such as blacksmithing, women were placed to the fields or plantations and in case of wealthier master

¹ There is to say that for that function the Blacks with more European appearance were often chosen, because they were “more aesthetically appealing and intellectually superior to slaves with pure African ancestry” (Keith 2009: 27).

to be house-keepers, nannies and servants (and if they were lucky, they became a part of the family they served in), but especially the younger ones were often sold to brothels or as fancy ladies to a single master. The average woman slave in productive age working in a household or a farm was supposed and sometimes forced to have children, because it gave more free workers to her master. The only benefit for a woman was that she was given more food and worked less hours during the pregnancy (Hallam 2004).

In total, the era of slave trade lasted for about 200 years and more than 20 million people were carried to America – part of them were brought and sold, but huge amount of them died on slavers' ships. The slavery was finally abolished after the American Civil War, but as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the consequences can be seen even in today's society (Bennett 1993: 43).

2.2. Civil War, Abolition and the Consequences

The great milestone for the institution of slavery and the black population itself emerged during the 19th century. At the very beginning of the century, in 1807, the slave trade was prohibited by a law passed by the British Parliament (Bennett 1993: 43). Although the law included the ban of all transporting and marketing African Americans, it is worth saying that it completely missed keeping slaves already purchased, so the basic principle of slavery was still running in young independent United States (Draper). However, it was not a long time after signing the Declaration of Independence, when the black people started to call for their rights, this time with more significant success than before. Of course, Africans were struggling with the destiny of slaves from the beginning, whether by escaping or rioting, but it was not before settling the first American Constitution, when the ground was finally ready for laying down the new rules arranging the social position of the black population (Thomas 2015; National Geography). The independent church movements,

black schools and cultural organizations were settled and the African Americans started to call for the black polity and self-definition in terms of the American society (Bennett 1993: 70).

As it is known, the northern states were commonly taken for the protagonists of abolishing the slavery– the first one, who freed the black people, was Pennsylvania in 1775 (Bennett 1993: 84), soon followed by the states of New England as well as New York, New Jersey, Delaware and few others as the base of the upcoming Union. In that moment, slavery became the source of a political tension, because the American society was becoming divided in abolition concerns. In the north, the Union was forming, created by industrializing states, which were eager to change the social, economic and political status of the nation by making the people free no matter of their skin colour. In contrast eleven southern states, such as Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee or Virginia, were focusing on an agriculture and cotton plantations, so there was a constant need of free workers. The conflict line crystalized, because the slavery was unbearable in the eyes of the most of the world and the United States itself, but necessary for southern farmers, who were not prepared to relinquish their workers. What is more, in 1860 Abraham Lincoln became the 16th American president and he expressed the support to the Union states. As a reaction, the Confederacy was created in the south and in 1861 the Civil War begun with an attack on Fort Sumter (Riddell 1931; Hassler – Weber 2016).

The war lasted for four years and claimed an enormous amount of lives, but in the broader view it had an indispensable meaning for the evolution of the black community. Mostly because of the technical development, superior armed forces and financial resources the North had a bigger chance to succeed, so that in 1865 the Civil War ended with the victory of ‘Yankees’ and the slavery was abolished throughout the United States by the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution (Hassler – Weber 2016; Draper).

The Blacks played many roles in this event. Of course, the significant part of the 'negro's population' in the south kept on working for their masters and had no seeming interest in the running conflict, at least until it became too imminent, but many of 'their brothers' either organized demonstrations and riots or circulated petitions and held meetings to get involved. A great deal of African Americans even enlisted to military service, in the case of Civil War the special United States Colored Troops, to directly participate in the fight for their freedom² (Bennett 1993: 72). Regarding to black women, their position was quite different. Even though there was about 100,000 of former slave soldiers, none of their wives was promised any pension, like white women were, because marriages between slaves were in that matter illicit. For that concern, a new legislation was passed to give those widows at least a little amount of money to care for their children, but the process was very slow and complicated and sometimes they did not manage to prove their right (Frankel 1997).

As for the new reality of freed Afro-Americans, the majority of them kept on working in the sphere where they were trained, so that they became blacksmiths, craftsmen, fieldworkers and housekeepers, this time insured by contract between employer and employee and naturally getting paid. Ex-slaves were sometimes also given land and money by their former masters as the form of treat (Mandle 1991). Furthermore, the model of the traditional family was applied – black women finally had time to be with their children and looking after their own family and freed men were supposed to earn money and care for the relatives. Sadly, the abolition brought many problems, too. Not only that 'the coloured people' did not actually understand the basic principles of how to be free in the terms of American society, but also the whites did not know how to exist around free black people. After some unsuccessful efforts to recreate

² At the matter of fact, black soldiers were highly common even in the previous War of Independence, where they were educated in strategy and battle planning and were placed to naval forces as well as special units such as spies and undercover agents (Bennett 1993: 80-82).

slavery, they became very hostile towards former slaves and it led among other things to creation of infamous Ku-Klux-Klan (Frankel 1997).

It took decades to the community to settle down and create the heritage attributed to the Afro-Americans today. One of the most known places chosen by the Blacks is Harlem, which became the first centre of the black arts and culture.

2.3. Harlem Culture

During the years, the minority was trying hard to cope with the Caucasian society, but even a century after the abolition of slavery, it was still segregated and considered inferior to the majority. At the end of the 19th century, only a small percentage of the black ethnic was able to attend university or even primary school, either because of their skin colour, or simply because of a low income. Majority of Africans Americans had manual low paid jobs – men worked mostly as farmers or blue-collar manufacturers, women as housekeepers, cleaning ladies or seamstresses. The situation got slightly better after 1900, when the community noticed more job opportunities, chance of home ownership and education rate, but despite climbing the social ladder, they still faced a number of disadvantages (Malony; Mandle 1991). Southern states soon pushed ahead Jim Crow laws, which simply meant a legalization of segregated schools, restaurants, hospitals, swimming pools, libraries, theatres, transport and facilities for the Blacks and the Whites, with government investing primarily into the white's ones and worsening the live conditions of 'coloured people'. This was the actual reason for waves of migration during the first half of the 20th century, that lead the population of African Americans to the new working places in northern factories (Malony; Baldwin).

Through the Great Migration Afro-Americans were coming to Harlem, a part of Manhattan in New York City, which soon became a centre of African American culture. During 1920's 'Harlem Renaissance' was created, the artistic

movement, which included all phenomena the black community was creating from jazz music to poetry and literature, in this era for example Langston Hughes. Unfortunately, the 'dreamy period of Harlem Renaissance' was interrupted by the Great Depression. As the reaction for rising rents, poverty, unemployment and escalating racist hostility, many demonstrations were held and a rate of criminality in this city borough increased rapidly (Harlem Heritage).

Soon enough, about thirty years after 'Harlem Renaissance' was coined, the situation of the community was becoming intractable. The great deal of activists began to operate and the Blacks started to call for their rights. This era is called Civil Rights Movement and is probably the most known period of African American resistance against the majority in the United States.

2.4. Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement era is with no doubt an unforgettable part of the history of Black America. Even though we can notice some marks of civil rights activism before the 1950's, it was in the middle of the 20th century, when the situation of the black community was suddenly unbearable. The segregation reached the point of factual exclusion from the society and the community was missing elementary rights of citizenship, including the right to vote or any other participation in politics³ (Patterson 2009). The African Americans protested in many ways against the nation's order. Above all they united in organizations such as National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and tried to deal with Jim Crow laws formally, mostly through courts by pleading with the system. One of the most known trials is the Brown v. Board of Education, which officially outlawed

³ In the interest of national image of the United States, Harry S. Truman recognized the need of dealing with the oppression of the black citizens. Despite the fact, that his legislation proposals, related to desegregation of armed forces and adjusting the civil rights, were immediately rejected by the Congress, he was the first American president, who made such effort to help to improve the life of the black community (Patterson).

segregated education. However, this change was not so remarkable in wider perspective. Nevertheless, except of the formal and non-violent processes, this period is also known for the riots and demonstrations, often violently suppressed by the police and passive resistance and boycotts, which ended with an arrest and public humiliation in better cases (Janke 2000; Baldwin).

The women also played their role in most of the events of the era. Of course, that many problems women had in this era were quite alike those in the previous centuries – they had to work hard for little money, mostly as housekeepers, nannies and cleaning ladies, but this time also as blue-collar labourers and manufacturers in factories, they still faced the outrageous discrimination and were treated inferior. Still, something changed in this part of history. As white women were gaining more and more emancipation, black women did not want to stand behind. The most known woman of this period is Rosa Parks, who was arrested because she did not want to vacate her seat in a bus for white travellers. This event gave an impulse to Women's Political Council in Montgomery, Alabama, to boycott city buses and white-owned businesses as the form of social protest, which helped to cancel segregation of the buses all over the South. Another influential black woman of the Civil Rights Movement was Ella Baker, who happened to be the activist fighting Jim Crow, as well. She joined the most influential organizations like NAACP and cooperated tightly with M. L. King (Baldwin; Patterson 2009).

Reverend Martin Luther King is the most known person connected to civil rights activism. He became the leader of the movement soon after the Montgomery Bus Boycott and in 1957 he created Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which pushed for non-violent means of protest (Patterson 2009). The problem was that the non-violent protest got even more brutal answer from the white majority and after the famous 'I Have a Dream' speech in 1963, the xenophobia escalated in whole United States with attacks, bombings and inadequate using of force. However, this strong-arm kind of interferences

outraged the significant part of the society and questioned the bearing capacity of the segregation and racist behaviour (Baldwin; Patterson 2009).

The effort of Afro-American community was compensated in 1964, when The Civil Rights Act was applied, which certainly invalidated Jim Crow and outlawed discrimination in social spheres, especially regarding working conditions, hiring, wage, promotion and leaving the job. The new rules about antidiscrimination were also adopted and these policies had a very positive impact on employment, residing and living conditions of the Blacks. The year after, in 1965, Voting Rights Act was put down and it enabled black people to participate in the electoral process (Malony; Janken 2000).

2.5. The Community Today

It is more than fifty years from the approval of the Civil Rights Act and lots of changes in the social position of the community can be distinguished since then. However, it is more matter of several recent years. According to the article by James T. Patterson, Professor at the Brown University, published in 2009 by The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, at the very beginning of the 21st century many Afro-Americans still resided in low-income neighborhoods with a high degree of criminality, easy access to drugs, without possibility to get health insurance and often in incomplete families. What is more “gaps in educational test scores between black and white students, always high, have widened [and] rates of poverty and unemployment among African Americans remain roughly twice as high as those of whites” (Patterson 2009). Nevertheless, in these days a great progress can be seen and the situation is eminently better, even though some areas still remain untouched.

At the turn of the centuries, there was an enormous gap between the wealth of African American and white households. For a black family, it was a difficult task buying a home, blaming their low income as well as a disability to get a loan because of the lack of insurance. They resided in poor conditions of

the ghettos and as mentioned earlier, the probability of involvement in crime and illegal businesses or expulsion from school increased (Malony; Massey – Denton 2006: 107). Based on recent surveys, African Americans still prefer to live in black neighborhoods in these days, because as the result of the long-lasting residential segregation they were experiencing, they are ‘just used to live like that’ and it became ‘natural’ for them. The problem is that many of these city boroughs and housing estates yet fight with unstable living conditions and excessive rate of criminality, which inevitably causes social and economic isolation from the rest of the city and prevent the society to desegregate fully (Massey – Denton 2006: 104-105). Other problems going hand in hand with the inappropriate state of living are poverty and unemployment, although these issues themselves are rather reasons than consequences of the residential behaviour of black citizens. If we take in the situation simple: the previous discrimination and oppression of African Americans caused a lack of opportunities for children to study and adults to get a job, which resulted into poverty and consequently segregation and demise into ghettos and separated neighbourhoods. It is more than obvious, that despite of many efforts to deal with this model, it is still an enormous problem of United States society, which has not been resolved yet (Massey – Denton 2006: 107-109).

But as far as the education and working sphere are concerned, the situation is considerably better in these days. In contrast with the previous years when, because of the bad education system, the black people became underqualified even for the job they were practicing before, like blue-collar positions in factories and manufacturing, today more and more well-educated African Americans often enter very prestigious and influential positions (Malony; Wilson 2006: 142). Even though, we can still see evidences of barriers between black and white Americans, it is mostly the result of the racial oppression from previous times and in today’s eyes considered to be rather question of class emplacement than some form of racism, for example in the

economic sphere, where the class plays the most important factor (Wilson 2006: 142-143).

Judging by the article by Verna M. Keith, Professor of Sociology at Florida State University, who focuses on place of skin color in woman's life, colorism affects rather African American women than men in this century. She says "we live in a colorstruck world" (Keith 2009: 25), but "The gendered nature of colorism stems from the close link between skin tone and perceptions of physical attractiveness, and from a double standard that applies expectations of attractiveness more rigidly to women" (Keith 2009: 26). Even though the article primarily deals with the skin tone amongst African American women and its influence on their social status and achievements, it nonetheless inevitably shows the importance of this aspect for black women, who are in their everyday lives going through a 'selection', when more European visual appearance is preferred at most places because considered to be more attractive (Keith 2009: 25-29).

Comparing to the previous events mentioned in this chapter, the African American community is in the most favorable situation today than it has ever been in the history of Black America. But even though the Blacks have every citizenship rights (including the right to be elected for the President of the United States), ability to apply for the prestigious work positions, attend university, own a house in a decent neighborhood and live their lives side by side with the Whites, it is not yet impeccable. There are still places in the United States, where the minority is 'mistreated' and marginalized, especially when looking to the southern states, and the prejudices and stereotypes are spread through the whole nation, though remaining only in the minds of the people.

3. Selected Authors and Their Poetry

Firstly, in order to fully understand and appreciate the chosen poems in context, this chapter is bestowed to their authors. Brief information on their life and their position in the community is given, providing all of them are African Americans. For each part of the history of the Black America given in the first chapter, three authors writing during 20th and 21st century⁴ were selected – one male and one female focusing on the era and one female describing the position of women. Furthermore, the poems were collected to differ by length, structure and language, which is to be the part of the analysis as well.

3.1. Evie Shockley (*1965)

Evie Shockley was born in Nashville, Tennessee. For her entire childhood, she was growing up in the South, hence her poems deeply reflect the atmosphere of her country and its history – from the language, the used form, to the way she sees things. She received a great deal of awards for her work and she also contributed with her poems to the anti-apartheid exhibition commemorating Steven Biko⁵. In these days, she is a Professor of African American literature at Rutgers University in New Jersey (Academy of American Poets).

3.2. Yusef Komunyakaa (*1947)

Yusef Komunyakaa is a former Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He was born in Louisiana, when the Civil Rights Movement was at its beginning and his memories of childhood together with his military service in Vietnam War (he was a correspondent and received a Bronze Star for his service) gave him the greatest inspiration for his work. His poems are inevitably

⁴ 20th and 21st century define the term *contemporary* in the title of the thesis.

⁵ South African activist, who was fighting against apartheid in South Africa during 1970's

realistic due to the usage of vernacular language and jazz rhythms creating the self-consistent atmosphere (Poetry Foundation).

3.3. Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Maya Angelou is a pseudonym of one of the most famous African American poets, Marguerite Ann Johnson. She was born in southern Missouri and she suffered a lot during her childhood and young life, which is among other things captured in her best-selling memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She received a great number of awards for her work, including e.g. Pulitzer Prize nomination, Langston Hughes Medal, Grammy Award for the audio version of her poem *On the Pulse of Morning* and Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama. Furthermore, she is known for reading her poem in the occasion of inauguration of Bill Clinton. Apart being a poet and a screenwriter, she was also a dancer, an actress, Civil Rights activist and a close friend to M. Luther King (Biography).

3.4. Latorial Faison (*1973)

Latorial Faison was born and raised in the South, specifically Virginia. She focuses on such topics as race, equality and gender in her poems, all of them inspired by her own experiences, but the main reason she was chosen for this work is her writing about war. As a military spouse, she created numerous poems dedicated to her husband's work, especially mission in Iraq, many of them featured by the Pentagon, the Department of Defense and the Department of the U. S. Army, but as a southern African American she also did not omit position of the black soldiers during the Civil War (Latorial Faison Websites 2004).

3.5. Claude McKay (1889-1948)

Claude McKay was born in Clarendon Parish, Jamaica, however he is considered to be American (African American) author and a representative of

the Harlem Renaissance. While growing up in Jamaica he never faced such racial hostility and segregation as he later did when coming to the United States and it inspired him for composing a great number of his poems. He was writing them in his native language, creole (English words with African dialect structure). In addition to writing, he was a member of the radical revolutionary organization African Blood Brotherhood, which pushed for better social conditions for African Americans (Poem Hunter).

3.6. Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000)

Gwendolyn Brooks grew up in Chicago, Illinois, and she published her first poem when she was 13. Soon enough she began to contribute to *Chicago Defender*, the newspaper of city's Afro-American population, and focused on poor urban life of the black community, which earned her the Pulitzer Prize and made her the first African American, who received it. During the presidency of J. F. Kennedy, she also became the first black woman holding the position of poetry consultant to the Library of Congress. In her work, she was inspired by Langston Hughes and she combined topics of racial identity and equality with new poetic techniques (Williams 1997).

3.7. Toi Derricote (*1941)

Toi Derricote is the contemporary Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She was born in Michigan during the World War II. and she started to write her poems very soon, though she did not publish them before the 1960's. In contrast with other African American authors of Black Arts Movement, who focus on social justice and racial equality, she rather gets inspiration in her family experiences and writes deeply personal poems about life and womanhood (Toi Derricote Websites).

3.8. Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

Langston Hughes is the main representative of the Harlem Renaissance. He was born in Missouri, growing up in Kansas, Illinois and Ohio, and became famous in Harlem during the 1920's. His early work was though unsuccessful amongst African Americans because showing the community in a negative way to the white majority. His book *Fine Clothes to the Jew* was called a 'disgrace to the race' and during his entire career he was abused by critics from the Caucasians and also his own people, because he undesirably experimented in his poems. He used African American rhythms, especially jazz and blues in connection with a free verse in his poems to create an authentic atmosphere (Kansas Heritage 2015).

3.9. Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880⁶ - 1966)

Georgia Douglas Johnson was born in Atlanta, Georgia, but the sources differ in actual year of her birth. She is another member of the Harlem Renaissance and in fact one of the most famous women of the movement, who even hosted meetings of the poets in her house called S Street Salon. Her poems are oriented particularly on women and their atmosphere is often full of sadness, loneliness and isolation, but she wrote about race and social situation of the Blacks, as well. Apart from the poems she also authored several plays (Palumbo 2003).

3.10. Angela Jackson (*1951)

Angela Jackson was born in Mississippi, but while growing up her family moved to Chicago, where she got inspired by Gwendolyn Brooks' poems. She joined Organization for Black American Culture there and published in *Black World* magazine. Her poems written mostly in a free verse are based on her

⁶New Georgia Encyclopedia claim the year of birth 1877, but mostly 1880 is preferred

own experiences and as well as her screenplays and novels focus on Afro-American culture (The History Makers 2005).

3.11. Dudley Randall (1914-2000)

Even though born in Washington, Dudley Randall lived in Detroit for his whole life, where he in the age of 13 published his first poem. During the years of writing he alternated many subjects and topics – his poetry reflects his working career, service in military during World War II, love, his affection towards Africa, political situation and he naturally also mentioned topics connected to the African American community – as well as writing methods and styles. Apart of being poet himself, he was deeply interested in Russia and translated poems of such authors as Konstantin Simonov and Aleksander Pushkin (Long Madget).

3.12. June Jordan (1936-2002)

June Jordan was born in Harlem to Jamaican immigrants and grew up in Brooklyn. Her childhood was difficult, which is often reflected in her autobiographical poems inspired by her life experiences. In her work, she mostly focused on family, identity, political oppression and racial inequality, that so through her work, not only poems, but also drama and essays, she became known as a fierce activist for human rights – she pushed for freedom and gaining rights for women and the community as well as e.g. inclusion of black studies at universities. The interesting fact is, that she also cooperated on the architectural redesign of the Harlem borough (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2012).

3.13. Audre Lorde (1934-1992)

Audre Lorde, who defined herself as ‘a black lesbian mother poet’, was born and grew up in Harlem during the Great Depression. She was different starting from her childhood even in the African American community and she started to identify herself with poems, which helped her with her self-

acceptance. In her adult age, she then gave a great importance to the beauty of divergence and need of self-identification. Being black woman and lesbian, she was going through 'a triple discrimination', which is recognizable in her poems dedicated to questions of racism and gender oppression in combination with homophobia (Kulii – Reuman – Trapasso 1997).

3.14. Afaa Michael Weaver (*1951)

Afaa Michael Weaver (or Michael S. Weaver) was born and grew up in Baltimore, Maryland and during his studies he was focused mainly on playwriting. When starting writing poems, he got inspired by Black Arts Movement, with such members as Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde or June Jordan, exploiting his life experiences, in particular his memories from childhood and growing up in a poor black neighbourhood. Above all, he is greatly interested in Asia, especially Chinese culture, for instance he cooperated in certain projects with Chinese poets, taught at National Taiwan University and in 2005 he received the Gold Friendship Medal from the Beijing Writers Association (Afaa Weaver Websites).

3.15. Annie Ruth (*1963)

Annie Ruth is an alternative African American poet. She was born in Ohio, where she also grew up, and later studied arts in California. With her company (A. Ruth Creations) she organizes workshops, educational projects and poetry performances primarily addressed to children to encourage them to read and write. Furthermore, she emphasizes sisterhood and womanhood and she cooperates with several programmes for African American women. On the top of that she received many awards, amongst them e.g. Leading Woman award for Arts & Entertainment, Enquirer Woman of the Year and a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize (New American Art Gallery II).

4. Analysis of Chosen Poems

As it was mentioned before, this chapter is divided into five parts according to the periods of the history of the Black America and development of Afro-American community. For each part, there are three different poems chosen in accordance with the given parameters to be analysed and then compared with the historical reality given in the first chapter. In the first instance, the poem will be introduced (poems themselves with the quotations highlighted in bold are included in *Appendices* – see p. 55) followed by the analysis and comparison.

4.1. Slavery and Daily Reality of African Slaves

As the representatives of the era of slavery in the United States will serve Evie Shockley with one of her early poem *waiting on the mayflower* (see p. 55), Yusef Komunyakaa and *The African Burial Ground* written in honor of slavery's memorial in New York (see p. 59) and finally Maya Angelou and one of her most famous poem *Caged Bird* (see p. 60).

4.1.1. Evie Shockley – waiting on the mayflower

One of the notable characteristics of the poem possible to be seen at the first glance is the absence of capital letters as the typical signature of Evie Shockley. She mostly omits the capitals even in the titles of her books and poems in order to make the reader to focus simply on the lines and not the sentences and for the non-interrupted flow of the text. Another Shockely's sign is a free verse also used here.

The poem is divided into four parts connected to the historical events changing the face of the Black America and together with the title itself it is inspired by the mentioned book *Before the Mayflower: History of Black America* by Lerone Bennett Jr. (Bergeron 2005). In the bottom of the work a quotation by

Frederick Douglass⁷ is presented linking to the celebrating of the Independence Day, which while giving the freedom to Americans from the oppression of British colonists preserved the Blacks in their existing positions.

The first part of the poem reflects the event mentioned at the beginning of the thesis (see p. 5) – bringing 20 imprisoned Africans to Jamestown in Virginia to sell them as the slaves in 1619. Shockley masterly captures the desperation of the people with no or already forgotten names, torn from their homeland, where they were raised, forced to settle in completely different culture, deliberately “shedding servitude” and giving birth to children, which no longer belonged to them (which is possibly implied by the phrase “on rough virginian citizenship, baptized their son, william, into the church of england”).

The second part titled as *december 1638* is devoted to the voyage of the Desire ship carrying slaves from Barbados to Boston, Massachusetts, in exchange for Indians, describing the actual advent time of that people (“envy anticipated their advent”) shipped like animals, awaited by “flocked a people whose eyes sparked like stars, even near death”. Shockley offers the reader the atmosphere of the slavers’ ship and by the properly chosen words indicates the attitude of the Boston inhabitants waiting for the “*desire’s* cargo to good use”.

The third part of the poem leads the reader to Boston as well, but this time in a perspective of the Boston Massacre, which is considered to be the beginning of the battle for American liberty with an Afro-American man, Crispus Attucks, as the first casualty of American Revolutionary War. This poem section is exploring the finale of Attucks’ life, his determination, motives and place in the gaining of American independence, though evoking the feeling his death was useless as “dreaming great britain was the enemy”.

Finally, the last part continues with the idea of Frederick Douglass and discover the place of the Independence Day in the measures of African Americans, who gained no actual liberty via the deliberation (“africa’s

⁷ A former slave, who fled from his master and joined the abolitionists.

descendants, planting here year after year the seeds of labor, sweating bullets in this nation's warts, have harvested the rope, the rape, the ghetto, the cell, the fire, the flood, and the blame for you-name-it"), but according to Shockley they through the years forgot, who they were and where they came from.).

4.1.2. Yusef Komunyakaa – The African Burial Ground

In this poem as well as in other pieces of his work Yusef Komunyakaa applies elements of the dialect spoken by the community to fill the coveted atmosphere and make the words more credible for a reader. Although a free verse is used here and the model of sentences is not followed (e.g. a sentence begins in the middle of a verse and sometimes is cut by a gap between strophes), the poem has a strict structure of three line strophes all of this to create a voltage and dramatic effect. It was also mentioned before, that the author is known for taking inspiration in music, particularly jazz rhythms, which results in selecting various phrases to make the reader to actually hear the sound ("tuned to rhythms of a thumb piano ", "footsteps [...] strutted", "The click of heels the tap of a drum"). Another interesting fact concerning the structure is, that Komunyakaa aplenty uses the symbol '&' instead of 'and' passing reader the impression that certain words are bond together and thus giving them the new perspective.

The title of the poem refers to the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York, memorial built up on a place of former slaves' cemetery discovered in 1991 during construction works in the area. The museum commemorates the history of slavery and everyday life of the black slaves. The poem itself is then focused on the journey of the enslaved Africans coming from "Congo, Guinea, & Angola" to New York (in that times known as New Amsterdam).

Concerning the motives of the poem Komunyakaa interlaces the destiny of the coming blacks with the year when the cemetery was found without

anybody knowing it was there and regarding the fact, it was the burial ground, one of the topics it inevitably the death. The poem speaks about tribulations of the Africans who “came to work fields of barley & flax, livestock, stone & slab, brick & mortar, to make wooden barrels, some going from slave to servant & half-freeman”, offers the reader a brief insight into the slaves’ life, but moreover their death, which meant nothing more than a loss of working power and did not free them (“They lived & died. Shrouded in cloth, in cedar & pine coffins, Trinity Church owned them in six & a half acres of sloping soil”). Komunyakaa works with the meaningless of the black slaves, forgotten and erased and in the last four stanzas deals with the event, when the African Burial Ground was accidentally uncovered ironically during building a bureaucratic office house (“footsteps of lower Manhattan strutted overhead, back & forth between old denials & new arrivals [...] The click of heels the tap of a drum awaking the dead”).

4.1.3. Maya Angelou – Caged Bird

Looking at the poem the reader can see, that Maya Angelou gives no significant importance to the fixed structure, but uses alternative length and form of stanzas together with a sporadic rhyme. However chaotic it may seem for the first sight, Angelou is though very skillful with sound and rhythm of her eclogues, so that the free structure gives her more space to work with the melody and create unforgettable word combinations. Another interesting element is the repetition of the third stanza, which substitute the place of refrain in a song and make the reader to feel through the story of the caged bird more deeply.

Even though the poem was primarily written in connection with Civil Rights Movement era, it can be easily used for the period of slavery as well. When writing the *Caged Bird*, Angelou was inspired by Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem *Sympathy* being the first, who came with the polemic about a caged bird

and “why the caged bird sings” and gave her the idea of comparing the position of a free bird and a caged bird in her poem. Despite the fact this piece of work can be applied on the whole era of slavery, it was chosen specifically to narrate the story of women, because Angelou typically projects herself and her own experiences into her poetry, hence it suits preferably to women.

It is clear, that the caged bird symbolizes the African Americans, tied and prisoned with “wings clipped and feet tied” in contrast with the free bird, representing the white majority. The contrast is colorfully depicted by the charge of the words: the free bird “leaps on the back of the wind”, “dips his wing in the orange sun rays”, “dares to claim the sky”, enjoys the wind and flies wherever he wishes to, whereas the caged bird “stalks down his narrow cage” and “can seldom see through his bars”. The tension and desperation of the caged bird reaches its summit in the fifth stanza, where he is described as he “stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream”. Angelou properly chooses the words to urge the reader about the situation and her resourceful parable of African Americans as the caged birds singing of freedom is highly effective.

Regarding all the facts learned from the short comments in the chosen poems, there is no significant difference between the historical facts connected to the era of slavery, on the contrary going through those pieces of work written by the representatives of the community themselves, the reader may be able to understand the problematic further and find the facts in history books inadequate with what the actual reality was like in conformity with those poems. Shockley’s settling is even more credible when considering her growing up in the south facing the persistent results of the slavery era, though the feminine factor is not to be recognized in the very poem. Komunyakaa then finely compared forgotten factor of the period with today’s reality. The third poem, *Caged Bird*, thereafter concluded the topic with melancholic personal

description of the feeling of the imprisoned human, precisely woman captured and standing on her crushed dreams.

4.2. Civil War, Abolition and the Consequences

The era of Civil War and its consequences will be analysed through Latorial Faison's *Buffalo Soldiers*, poem primarily written as the reaction on the position of the black soldiers in the Civil War (see p. 61), relatively patriotic and concurrently bitter *America* written by Claude McKay (see p. 62) and Gwendolyn Brooks with her sad and melancholic poem called *the sonnet-ballad* (see p. 63).

4.2.1. Latorial Faison – Buffalo Soldiers

In her poems, Latorial Faison uses predominantly simple language for her work to be more graspable for any person, which is possibly also a sign that a great deal of her poems is composed with the idea to educate people, particularly children and young adults, about the history of the Black America. In this specific piece of work, she also relies on predictable structure of four-line strophes, however, she omits the 'abab' rhyming scheme, as it could be expected, but instead she applies the so-called ballad stanza, which sounds more dramatically and adds the flowing melody to the words.

As the title alone denotes, the poem is dedicated to the buffalo soldiers, African American regiment connected to United States Colored Troops, whose prior mission was to protect the settlers against the Natives on the western frontier, then they were part of the Union Army during the Civil War and fought in Spanish-American War in 1898 (Hill 1998).

The topic of the black soldiers' destiny is followed in the poem, mapping their role in the American history. Faison considers them "Brave and strong", dexterous and courageous, addresses them as the soldiers, who "Helped win the West" and highly appreciates their contribution in protecting the American land, especially in the sixth stanza claiming that "Much of what we see In

America today Began with Buffalo soldiers Leading the way". The last strophe and the last verse though refers to the final slavery abolition (which was the major reason for African Americans to participate in the Civil War) and their fight for freedom to be redeemed by their death.

4.2.2. Claude McKay - America

The poem by Claude McKay is written in the form of single strophe, though it consists of uniform integral parts known as quatrains and a couplet, which can easily be transformed into shape of stanzas. The rhythm is inspired by iambic pentameter introduced by William Shakespeare in his sonnets and then becoming one of the typical signs of British poetry, which is quite interesting regarding the fact, that it is recognizable here in the irrefutably American poem.

The title of the eclogue, *America*, is undoubtedly meaningful in its core. McKay wrote this poem as a reaction for the situation in the United States, the position of the Blacks he observed when coming from Jamaica and faced completely different treatment of him and all Afro-Americans than he knew from his homeland. However, two contradictory feelings meet in the poem – hatred towards the majority's behavior in contrast with love of the land and the nature of the country itself (eloquently addressed by a feminine).

The text is based on opposites, McKay describes misdoings and the hurt his country caused him ("she feeds me bread of bitterness", "sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth", "Stealing my breath of life"), but he also prays her, extolls her and puts her into the position, when she in actual fact protects him against the said misdoings ("Giving me strength erect against her hate"). The possible meaning of the application of these contrasts is an effort to indicate the gap between the minority, silenced and oppressed, and the majority enjoying 'the gifts of America' fully with the Blacks eager and struggling to have it the same, "with not a shred Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer".

4.2.3. Gwendolyn Brooks – the sonnet-ballad

Being a sonnet too, this poem similarly as it was in the case of McKay's *America* consists of a single strophe comprising quatrains and a couplet and uses iambic pentameter, only this time with an application of innovative rhyme, which gives the poem a distinct atmosphere. Gwendolyn Brooks' ability to work with the charge of the text by the rhyme and melody is extensive, as well as an art of composition of the words, e.g. creative introduction of the repetition transmitting the reader the desperate and forlorn feelings the protagonist undoubtedly has.

The main motive of the poem is a death, loss of a lover and hopelessness. As the speaker is a woman, this text was chosen to approximate the feminine role in the Civil War era, despite the fact Brooks did not write it primarily in connection with this period. It is a timeless story of a woman, who lost the closest person in her life, which was naturally also the reality of African American women during the Civil War.

The ballad speaks of desperation using such resonant expressions as "Left me lamenting" or "empty heart-cup", which cooperate with the recurring question "Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?" to make the reader sympathize with the depressed woman. The choice of words even establishes the impression that the protagonist goes insane, imagining "Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort) Can make a hard man hesitate – and change" and speaking of it (the death) as if it was a lady tempting her lover away in battlefield. Whole poem fills the reader with melancholy and despair.

The Civil War era was indeed another difficult milestone for African American community, though it may be considered challenging for the whole American society while many changes came up. Anyway, the poems showed three different aspects of this period. In the first place, there is Faison's text evaluating contribution of the black soldiers in protecting of American nation,

which is often disregarded when speaking of the African American history. Secondly, the reader meets the poem by Claude McKay, which shows the contradictory feelings of the Afro-American man about his nation, which he loves and hates in the same time - in this era the community is comprising of descendants of originally African peoples, so that they are on the edge of not yet being Americans, but not Africans either, which causes those completely opposite emotions towards the country. And finally, there is the Brooks' ballad bringing the reader to the women's situation iterant in every war, but this time in the eyes of a black woman living through the Civil War. However, it makes the reader realize, that this woman was in the equal situation as the white women were, waiting for their husbands to come home from the battlefield, so that for a very short moment, there was no difference between those ethnics.

4.3. Harlem Culture

When capturing the atmosphere of Harlem, as the main sources were selected primarily representatives of the Harlem Renaissance. For the first analysis was chosen Toi Derricote and her *Black Boys Play the Classics* to capture the artistic atmosphere of the neighbourhood (see p. 64), Langston Hughes' most famous *Harlem* (see p. 65) and to explore the position of women the poem *Foredoom* written by Georgia Douglas Johnson (see p. 66), another member of the Harlem Renaissance.

4.3.1. Toi Derricote – Black Boys Play the Classics

The first visible thing looking as the short poem by Toi Derricote is the last two verses written in italics, which represent two alternative answers to a previously given question and introduce the principle point of the poem, but they are concurrently the only lines bond with rhyme, since the whole text is written in the free verse. With regard to the language, Derricote uses very

descriptive words to delineate the scene, create the colourful picture of the given situation and bring the reader right into the happening.

As the title of the poem itself offers, the text is based on joining together ostensibly divergent subjects, sometimes can even be called oxymoron in the eyes of the society at the time, because on the one hand there are those black children, considered to be neglected, illiterate and offending, and on the other one there is the classics, the finest music connected to fancy and sometimes actually wealthy events. Derricote deliberately evolves this concept through the writing to make the reader to think about the factors causing the irony of the situation. The final question then leaves no doubt about the message of the poem.

The main purpose of the used contrasts is to destroy the stereotypes about the Afro-American community. There are four allegory groups meeting in the train station – first of all, “the three black kids in ratty sneakers & T-shirts” representing the image of the Blacks, who are not expected to accomplish any good, especially playing Brahms. Another groups are “White men in business suits”, who “toss in a dollar or two without stopping”, who are personating the majority blind to the skills hidden under the dark skin, and “Brown men in work-soiled khakis” watching the kids with respect and maybe surprise that they are capable of the great things. And then there is a child impressed by the players. A little child, who is the messenger of the answer “A: *Beneath the surface we are one*”, because he heard the beautiful music and was not blinded by the stereotypes. However, the poem ends with the second explanation, which brought up very negative point of view and was likely to be adopted by the society of that time.

4.3.2. Langston Hughes – Harlem

The *Harlem* is considered one of the most famous poems by Langston Hughes and also the Harlem Renaissance. It is a rather short reflection of the

question set at the beginning: “What happens to a dream deferred?”, and that is why the poem comprises merely of possible answers to this issue. Concerning the rhyme, Hughes changes the melody of the poem by alternating the rhyming words – in the longest strophe the so-called ballad stanza is applied (the ‘abxb’ rhyme pattern) there and then the last two lines of the poem are connected by rhyme, even though they are not parts of the same strophe and even have a different structure. The new element in the text are also the question marks, which give the poem more cogitate-like appearance and make the reader to think about the topic together with the author.

Another title is *Dream Deferred*, which is very meaningful, since the basic message of the poem is Hughes’ wondering, what can happen if the dream is postponed or delayed for some time. There is an allegory with the African Americans, who were forced to give up on their dreams in response to the situation in the United States, who were dreaming about freedom, equality and dignity, but had never experienced their desires, because they were pushed aside. The dreams themselves are very important topic for the community in this era, as for the notice, the motive of crushed dreams is used e.g. in the analysed *waiting on mayflower* by Evie Shockley, *Caged Bird* by Maya Angelou or Georgia Douglas Johnson’s *Foredoom*, but also in the speech by Martin Luther King Jr. *I Have a Dream*.

At the beginning of the poem, the main purpose is to bring the desperate atmosphere to the reader to let him believe, that the postponed dreams can never be fulfilled. Hughes offers quite disturbing strong consequences, what can happen with the dream deferred, such as it can “dry up like a raisin in the sun”, “fester like a sore”, it may “stink like rotten meat” or that it might just left sentimental memories. All of the suggestions are chosen purposely to provoke and to give no promise to the ‘further use of the dream’, but at the end of the poem, there is suddenly a hope. In the last three lines the mood changes, because the author comes up with another outfall – “Maybe it just sags like

a heavy load. *Or does it explode?*” – there can be more interpretations of what Hughes meant by those last words, but the most probable explanation is that in some time the African Americans will have too much to carry, that their load will be too heavy and they will explode and call for their rights louder, because the situation will not be bearable anymore. They will explode and they will win.

4.3.3. Georgia Douglas Johnson – Foredoom

The poem *Foredoom* is the shortest one in this thesis. It is a minimalistic one strophe poem consisting of four lines and using simple ‘aabb’ rhyme. This combination usually makes a poem more predictable and understandable and is often used for children’s rhymes, but this is a completely different case. Despite the simple structure Johnson uses, the reader does not expect what comes next. The selection of words together with every line starting with “her” creates a heavy and melancholic atmosphere, which is completed by the melody, which helps the poem to settle in the reader’s head.

The title of the poem, *Foredoom*, means to be destined to perish or to be doomed. This term potentiates the helpless atmosphere and perfectly creates the complex image, what the poem is about. Apart from being despondent, Georgia Douglas Johnson is known for being aplenty personal in her work, so that we can see her own feeling spouting from the poem. She shows the purely feminine view of the situation and gives the reader her opinion about the role of women in her era.

While describing the role of women Johnson uses such expressions as “Her life was dwarfed”, useless and meaning nothing in the eyes of the society, “Her very days were shades of night”, invisible and overlooked, “Her every dream was born entombed”, having no opportunity to fulfill her desires, and “Her soul, a bud,—that never bloomed”, buried in the stereotypes, oppressed and never having the chance to accomplish anything. In the eyes of the author, women were forgotten and left out in this era. She masterly shows how it feels

to be invisible and presents those forlorn feelings to indicate, that there was no place for a woman in the society of men and more there was no place for the Afro-American woman in the society of the Whites.

The era of Harlem Renaissance brought something new. Even though the relationship between the minority and the majority was still cold, for the first time since the first black slaves, African Americans were relatively free. This position was of course closed within their community, because they were still oppressed by the Caucasians and the phenomena can be recognised in the analysed poems. In the first instance, there is Toi Derricote, who establishes the creativity of the Blacks linking to the culture of the musicality presenting those three boys playing Brahms on the station, but she also points out the deep-seated stereotypes, which make the people blind to their talent. Then it comes Langston Hughes, who gives us consequences of the unfulfilled dreams of the Afro-Americans, who though being freed are not feeling free and on the top of that, there is Georgia Douglas Johnson's *Foredoom* evoking the impression that the role of women was harder than ever before in the history. To conclude this period, it is definite, that even though the time of the Great Migration and Harlem Renaissance is commonly presented as the time of the relief of the pressure on the community, the African Americans themselves did not see it this way. Judging by the introduced poems, they were still feeling oppressed, pushed aside and over-looked.

4.4. Civil Rights Movement

There is a great deal of authors dealing with the topic of the Civil Rights Movement, because for the African Americans it was the greatest era of the modern history. Although it is very difficult task to select only three of the poets, it is necessary to compare the same number as it was in the previous eras to gain the similar structure. Therefore, for the analysis is used *Miz Rosa Rides the Bus* by Angela Jackson (see p. 67), Dudley Randall and his *Ballad of*

Birmingham (see p. 69) and *Poem For Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer* written by June Jordan (see p. 70).

4.4.1. Angela Jackson – Miz Rosa Rides the Bus

Looking at the poem, it seems quite chaotic for the first glance, but with the further research the reader can recognise some repetitive patterns, even though each of the strophes has a different structure. Jackson uses a free verse, but through the poem she repeats or rhymes some of the lines' ending words (down-own; blind-ride-mine; Montgomery; flies). There is also an iteration of certain sentences, expressions and names ("Jim Crow flies"; "Miss Liberty Muffet of Montgomery") within the whole poem or a stanza. Jackson applies these repetitive patterns to emphasize the meaning of the words and urge the reader to understand the message of the poem. The language is rather casual, which helps to follow the atmosphere and enables the natural flow of the text.

The theme of the poem is given instantly while reading the title. Angela Jackson wrote this eclogue inspired by the event comprising Rosa Parks not willing to vacate the seat for the white travellers and based the poem's story on the absurdity of the Jim Crow laws - the interesting thing is, that she puts Jim Crow into the role of actual crow flying to the place and floating above the heads of the participants in the given situation. Farther, the poem is narrated by the eyes of Rosa Parks, who sits next to Miss Muffet of Montgomery (which could be quite a convenient allusion to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, moreover when the lady's name is Liberty, though in this case it presents retrograde face of the liberty, giving no help to Rosa Parks, leaving her behind) and maps the journey of the bus by the events that happen there.

In the first strophe Jackson establishes the situation of "Miz Rosa", who is returning from her work, exhausted and with her "Feets swole from sewing seams on a filthy fabric" and "tired-sore a pedalin' the rusty Singer", which is the straight reference to the African American women working as the

seamstresses in the factories not providing at least bearable conditions for them (“filthy fabric”; “rusty Singer”; “dingy cotton thread jammed in the eye”). Rosa is dreaming about her better future, when she is distracted: “They hauled me away—a thousand kicking legs pinned down”, there is the reference on the historical fact of Rosa being attacked to vacate the seat, but more importantly, there is this Miss Liberty. Angela Jackson speaks about this character like it is a person, but it more likely represents Rosa’s effort to gain the liberty, when she does everything for it (“My heart was raw from hemming dirty edges of Miss L. Muffet’s garment”), but when she rides the bus, she understands, that liberty left her, that Liberty is not sitting next to her in the bus, but she “disembarked, settled in the suburbs, deaf, mute, lewd, and blind” and will not help her. The poem creates the picture of the despair that not only Rosa, but all of the Afro-Americans felt in this time. The fear of not gaining liberty or justice anymore.

4.4.2. Dudley Randall – Ballad of Birmingham

In the most of his poems, Dudley Randall uses a firm structure. The text consists of exclusively four line strophes with united ‘abxb’ rhyme (ballad stanza), possibly the most used type of rhyme in African American poetry. It is usually applied to create a free flow of the text and also because together with the melancholic topic it helps to set the melody of a dirge and produce a sad atmosphere. Furthermore, this poem is narrated in a form of a conversation between mother and daughter, which makes the situation more personal. Randall has a great talent to work with the words composition to affect the reader and draw him into the situation, in this case by reproducing the dialogue and choosing the words in the patterns of what daughter would say (“Mother dear, may I go”, “But, mother, I won’t be alone. Other children will go with me”) and what mother would reply (“No, baby, no, you may not go”, “you may go to church instead And sing in the children’s choir”) for it to be even more credible.

As Dudley Randall himself submits, the poem was written in response to the bombing of the church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. The basic plot of the text is a girl wanting to participate in the Freedom March⁸, but her mother considers it too dangerous and sends her to the church to sing in a choir. It is quite obvious what is going to happen, but Randall works with the reader knowing it by stretching the tension by spending all fifth stanza describing mother preparing the daughter to the church to be lovely in the holy place (“She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair And bathed rose petal sweet, And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands, And white shoes on her feet”).

The message of the poem is visible during the first reading. The mother sends her daughter to church instead of letting her to march with the others, because “the dogs are fierce and wild, And clubs and hoses, guns and jails Aren’t good for a little child” and she fears “those guns will fire”. She thinks her daughter will be safe, since there is no safer place on earth than the church. Randall operates with the irony, that the mother with good intentions unconsciously sends her daughter to death and that the African Americans were not safe anywhere in that period of the Civil Rights Movement, not even in “the sacred place”. At the end of the poem the mother is mourning and grieving on the lost shoe of her beloved child killed in the explosion (“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore, But, baby, where are you?”), which makes the reader feel the anxiety and leads him back into the times, where the Birmingham bombing alarmed the American society, that something is not right with the escalated racist behavior.

4.4.3. June Jordan – 1977: Poem for Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer

June Jordan is known for composing structurally alternative poems. She usually does not respect united structure of the strophes, lines (the sentences

⁸ The Freedom March was an organized march held when the church was bombed in Birmingham (1963). It was a demonstration of the Blacks protesting about their situation in the United States.

are often cut in the middle) or a rhyme. This particular poem is written in a free verse with an application of a direct speech, slashed expressions (“bloody/battered/beat”) in some cases giving the reader to choose the most suitable description he wishes to, one stanza put completely into capitals or comments in italics placed in brackets. The author operates with the range of pattern to keep the reader’s attention alert. The language is rather informal or even vernacular using e.g. the shortened forms (meanin, votin, washin, lookin, singin, ...) and is creating an authentic experience, though sometimes it can be quite difficult to read.

The poem is inspired by a story of the Civil Rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, who is famous for fighting for the African Americans’ right to vote during the 1960’s (Biography). Jordan wrote the text in memoriam (posthumously) of this activist after her death in 1977 and deals about the situation before the Blacks were allowed to participate in the electoral process and shows the significance of this change as it was in this period. Besides, there is also a small pointer to Ruleville, the place where Fannie Lou Hamer lived and is buried (Biography).

Going through the text it is sometimes relatively brutal. In the first strophe, Jordan uses a straight-out description of a brutal treatment with the African Americans (“Then jailed you beat you brutal bloody/battered/beat you blue beyond the feeling of the terrible”) and the outlook of the majority: “No Nigga’s Votin in This Town . . . lessen it be feet first to the booth”. The author is not afraid to express the oppression and humiliation in the fullest meaning, she goes open and describes the outraging rate of racism the Blacks were experiencing (“whitemen don’ never see Black anybodies without some violent itch start up”). What is more, the meeting of the character of June and the character of Fannie is purposely chosen to happen in the laundromat, for the Afro-American women were usually housekeepers or workers in those washing houses and Jordan implies that nobody would ever expect Fannie to become

the fighter for freedom, because she just does the laundry. The author observes where the courage was born amongst the piles of dirty clothes, because “that took courage just to sit there/target to the killers lookin for your singin face perspirey through the rinse and spin”. In the second part of the story Jordan then puts Fannie Lou Hamer into the incredible role of the average black woman, who changed the history, who “stood mighty” and “loud callin”, who reached the impossible, “one full Black lily luminescent in a homemade field of love”.

When thinking about the Civil Rights Movement era, the history always gives us the fierce fight for the freedom of African Americans. The struggle against oppression, racism, humiliation and discrimination sparkles with an enormous range of people, who gave their effort to change the situation. As the matter of fact, those selected and analysed poems give us the same. The women, Angela Jackson and June Jordan, naturally focus on two stories of the female fighters for the liberty of the Black population – Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer. Although those two ladies did not push for the exactly same thing, their story is similarly inspiring. Angela Jackson shows the unexpected power of a tired seamstress going home after a difficult day wondering why the liberty left her and finding the boldness to take it back. In the similar way then June Jordan describes the acquired courage of the laundress, who is humiliated again and again. But in contrast with these powerful narratives, there is the poem by Dudley Randall describing the casualties of the freedom fight and showing, how brutally was the liberty redeemed, even though it was gained at the end.

4.5. The Community Today

After the severe period of the Civil Rights Movement now there is the place to map the situation of the African American community today. This chapter focuses on such authors as feminist poet Audre Lorde and her poem

Power (see p. 72), one of the most famous texts by Afaa Michael Weaver *American Income* (see p. 74), which focuses on financial position of the African Americans, and Annie Ruth's *Ghetto Woman* (see p. 75) describing the stereotypes given about the Blacks, especially Afro-American women.

4.5.1. Audre Lorde – Power

It is undeniable that the poem *Power* was written in a rage. The author was angry and distracted, which is visible not only in the selection of the vocabulary, but also in the structure. Audre Lorde keeps a systematic structure in all of her poems, so that a reader can see that the lines and strophes are finely put together in order not to create a monolithic text, but sometimes it can also seem chaotic while focusing on the single sentences (because of the need to express herself quickly, Lorde creates the sentences ad-hoc, e.g. the first, second and fourth stanza consists of only a single sentence). The language is sometimes disorganized as well (and that for the same reasons), but concurrently it persuades the reader, that the author was genuinely upset and the rage is true.

The poem was created as a reaction for the court discharging a police officer, who had shot a 10-year-old. Even though the text refers to this specific event, which happened in Queens, New York, in 1973, it can be easily transformed to describe a number of alike situations, which are not even slightly rare in recent decades throughout the United States (e.g. Ohio, Cleveland, Portland, New Jersey). That is why the poem was selected for the contemporary situation of the community even though it was written not long after the Civil Rights Movement era.

At the beginning of the text Lorde comes with a heartbreaking description of her (or the protagonist) holding a dying child with “shattered black face” and blood flowing from his “punctured cheeks and shoulders”. She situates the picture into a desert to create a dismal atmosphere, mother having

no hope for her son to survive, since there is no water and nobody to help. By choosing proper words Lorde manages to lead the reader to this forsaken place, to the desperate mother “trying to make power out of hatred and destruction trying to heal [her] dying son with kisses” and let the reader feel the animosity and rage. In the third stanza, the situation suddenly changes. The happening is moving to the trial, where the policeman allegedly defends himself by saying “I didn't notice the size nor nothing else only the color” and Lorde points out that the poor child was killed only because of the colour of his skin. What is more, the author’s grievance increases when describing the jury consisting of eleven white men and one black woman (notice that in Lorde’s interpretation woman is written with capital W), who decides to free the police officer. In this part of the text the poet also works with the position of women, when she claims the jury “had dragged her [(the only black woman in the jury)] 4'10" black Woman's frame over the hot coals of four centuries of white male approval until she let go the first real power she ever had” and despite the fact she was placed into the jury for it to look more objective, she had no voice there. The poem ends with a threat by the outraged author to the Whites (specifically to “85 year old white woman who is somebody's mother”), which is though attributed only to the infeasibility of the situation. The meaning of the poem is then quite clear – the discrimination is, when a Caucasian police officer shoots an Afro-American child and is acquitted by a mostly-white jury escalated racist behavior.

4.5.2. Afaa Michael Weaver – American Income

The *American Income* is a single-strophe poem created of one sentence, which consists of 22 long lines, thus the strophe is relatively extensive. The significant structural density together with the choice of the poetic expressions give almost impenetrable form to the poem, very difficult to understand for a common reader. It is typical for the author as well as a usage

of a free verse, so that during the first reading the text may remind a newspaper column, especially when Weaver deliberately starts the poem with the phrase: “The survey says”.

The reason of starting the poem this way is explained in its audio version published together with the text in Poetry Magazine in the issue of March 2007. The author claims the whole eclogue is inspired by an article about an American income and a salary potential of the American citizens when related to their race and gender. According to the article “all groups can make more money if they lose weight except black men”. Weaver borrows the same sentence for the beginning of the poem to clearly set the topic and then he through the whole text tries to monitor the development of the African American situation to find out, why “men of other colors and women of all colors have more gold” than the “black men” (Poetry Magazine 2007).

There is aplenty of themes Weaver mentions. At first, he compares the African Americans to “a lead thick thing on the scales”, which can be probably explained that the United States’ society perceives the Blacks as a ballast that “grow[s] heavy”, the overlooked group of people useless for the nation’s economy. Another allegory is to “the billion days of human hands working, doing all the labor one can imagine”, which is undoubtedly a reference to the times of slavery, according to the author slightly neglected in these days: “on a papyrus moon waiting for the fire” (distant and destined to perish). Furthermore, Weaver wonders if not only the era of slavery, but the whole history of the Black American is falling into oblivion (“the notes from all their singing gone”) and he lists the wrongs done on the African Americans through the centuries that changed them: e.g. “these feet that marched and ran and got cut off” (a reference to the slavery era as well); “these hearts torn out of chests by nameless thieves”; “gone down inside earth somewhere where women make no demands” (this part probably linking to the Civil Rights Movement, where the women made an effort to be noticed). The whole text is panoply of minds,

that can be connected to the community's evolution and Weaver bonds them all together to create a full context, why the Blacks are often still so left-out in these days and what caused their position in the society. In his opinion no excuses and apologies will ever change the injustices, which put the Afro-Americans to this place).

4.5.3. Annie Ruth – Ghetto Woman

The poem consists of ten strophes with a united four-line structure and one five-line strophe, which is placed to the very end of the text to conclude it. Ruth uses the mentioned most common ballad stanza ('abxb' rhyme), which is concurrently the most melodious one, as well as a simple writing form with no extraordinary deflection for the poem to be more approachable for common people, especially children (it can be compared with the *Buffalo Soldiers* by Latorial Faison – see p. 28). The language is also relatively simple, though she applies the vernacular speech figures and shortened forms (ain't, 'em, foolin', 'cause, ...) to raise the credibility of the poem's context.

The main themes of the text are the generally accepted stereotypes about the African Americans, in this particular case the Afro-American women. Ruth focuses on the significance of the concept of a ghetto, the label 'ghetto people' and the understanding of these phenomena across the American society. Through her entire work, the author tries to break all the acquired prejudices about the Blacks and this poem is no exception in this pattern.

The first part of the poem is dedicated to the stereotypical descriptions and the most common prejudices about the community ("Your grandma was a drunkard and your cousins live in cells"; "You either have ten babies or live a life of crime"), the other one is then built up to confute them or to show the true face of these affirmations. The lines in first six strophes predominantly start with 'you' and intently have a structure of an accusation: "Your family is ghetto people"; "You'll turn out to be just like 'em"; "you'll probably end up in a box";

“you are all the same”. Not only that these sentences have an offensive tone, they are given as a notification. Ruth uses this style on purpose for the reader to understand, how deep the stereotypes are entrenched. The speaker in the first half of the text has no doubts that the African Americans are ghetto people (“you’re bound to be ghetto people for you there’s nothing else”), he addresses the author herself, that she will not go to the collage, she will probably “marry a bum who beat [her] black and blue” and she will “either have ten babies or live a life of crime”, because according to him, all the ghetto people are the same. In contrast the second part of the poem serves for Ruth’s defense, or basically defense of a common African American woman. During her justification, she claims she is a ghetto woman, but she wishes not to be judged by the mistakes of her family (“I earned that people can’t be judged by their family’s actions, or the places which they call home”). Furthermore, the author gives certain examples of her life to disprove the previously given accusations, e.g. “I’m going to college and I’ll always keep my goals”. Ruth speaks about ghetto with love (“the ghetto is in my heart For in it I learned a sense of pride, dignity, and my most essential part”) and she leads the reader to the finding, that it is important to judge people by their actions and soul, not their skin and where they came from. It is though typical for Ruth to use the emotive words, such as ‘heart’, ‘soul’, ‘sense’ and ‘dignity’, and to touch the person’s feelings through her inspiring texts.

Despite the fact, that the world is getting more and more integrated, the policy of multiculturalism is experiencing a great boom and the society today is more ‘racially friendly’ than ever before in the history, in these poems it is visible that the community still feels the signs of discrimination and racial inequality. In the first poem Audre Lorde shows her rage about the story of a black boy of ten shot by a white police officer, not only story of this sort, and gives the evidence of persistent racial segregation. These phenomena can be recognized also in the second poem, where Afaa Michael Weaver deals with the

economic situation of the Afro-American men, who are depreciated and underpaid even in the contemporary society, and he thinks about the historical influences on this current situation. The topic is concluded by Annie Ruth focusing on the stereotypical opinions about the community, in her presentation concentrated on women and their place in these prejudices. All these authors together create the picture of the today's position of the African Americans, who in spite of having the best days since the first ship bringing those slaves, still sometimes have to face shop assistant expecting them to steal, teachers expecting them to accomplish nothing, bosses expecting them to have improper results and police officers expecting them to be criminals. Though it is worth saying that day by day the situation is improving and a great amount of effort is used for the minority to be entirely equal to the majority.

5. Conclusion

When exposing the capital outcome of the Bachelor's thesis, it can be concluded that the hypothesis given in the *Introduction* (see p. 3) was confirmed. During the analysis of the selected poems was discovered no significant deflection of the commonly known historical fact about the African Americans. Evie Shockley, Yusef Komunyakaa and Maya Angelou masterly covered the era of slavery, where they proved the negative influence of this institution of the today's character of the community. It showed that the period of enslavement and imprisonment of the African people put them into the degrading and humble position, which culminated by the Civil War and the abolition movements. Latorial Faison focused on the omitted contribution of the Buffalo soldiers to the character of the United States, Claude McKay introduced the riven emotions of the African Americans in this era towards their nation and Gwendolyn Brooks came with the lament of the military widow. These three authors together created the complex picture of the face of the Black America in the time of the Civil War. Another era, the era of Harlem culture represented by the members of the Harlem Renaissance, served to its purpose as well. Toi Derricote, Langston Hughes and Georgia Douglas Johnson demonstrated both faces of this period – the cheerful times of the bloom of the Afro American culture and concurrently the dismal situation of the oppression and discrimination. These phenomena are though better distinguished in the poems dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement era, which are the demonstration of the fight for freedom of the Blacks, with its negative and positive influences. For this analysis served Angela Jackson, Dudley Randall and June Jordan covering the most important events and personalities of the times. Finally, the position of the Afro Americans in today's society is mapped by Audre Lorde, Afaa Michael Weaver and Annie Ruth. These poems can be considered the most inconsistent with the facts given about the era, or precisely this era. Despite the fact that our society tries to promote the integration, equality and

freedom, the set statement proved to be right. The African American community suffers from the discrimination and a form of oppression even in these days.

Regarding the role of women, which was the key motive of the thesis, the situation was and is within expectations. During the era of slavery women, similarly as men, were going through difficult times being treated as possession, prisoned with no right to spend time with their children. The period of Civil War brought the grief of lost spouses and friends interlarded with the joy of the newly gained freedom, which though did not last for long. Before the wave of the feminist movement and civil rights activism, Georgia Douglas Johnson offered the view of a desperate woman lost in life and having no consolation in the hostile society, nevertheless Angela Jackson and June Jordan then shows the powerful stories of the strong women, who changed the history of the Black America. And there comes also Annie Ruth with her contribution giving the hope that the Afro American women are still determined to fight the stereotypes even in these days. During the analysis of those selected poems by the women authors was recognizable that for the women the journey to the freedom was relatively more difficult. Not only that they had to fight with the discrimination because of their ethnicity, but they also faced the oppression for being women and this aspect is included in all of the chosen poems by the African American female poets.

As for the work with the sources, it differs from the topic. There is a lack of authors corresponding with stated parameters following up the era of Civil War and its consequences, so that it was difficult to detect the settled three of them, whereas the period of the Civil Rights Movement is closely observed theme traceable in a significant number of African American poems. Anyway, all of the poems were selected to serve as the best sources for the analysis and the comparison and helped to find a satisfying outcome of the thesis. All in all,

I presume the research was successful to confirm the established hypothesis and answered the questions raised at the beginning of the text.

6. Bibliography

6.1. History

- ASALH - Association for the Study of African American Life and History (1916). Eighteenth Century Slaves as Advertised by Their Masters. *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 1, No. 2. str. 163-216.
- Baldwin, Davarian N. (undated). *The Civil Rights Movement*. Africana Age. (<http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-civil-rights.html>, 15. 2. 2017).
- Bennett, Lerone, Jr. (1993). *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Random House).
- Draper, Sharon (undated). *Timeline of Slavery in America 1501-1865*. (<https://sharondraper.com/timeline.pdf>, 18.1. 2017).
- Frankel, Noralee (1997). From Slave Women to Free Women: The National Archives and Black Women's History in the Civil War Era. *The Prologue Magazine: Special Issue*. Vol. 29, No. 2.
- Hallam, Jennifer (2004). *The Slave Experience: Men, Women, and Gender*. PBS - Public Broadcasting Service. (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/gender/history2.html>, 17. 1. 2017).
- Harlem Heritage (undated). *History of Harlem*. (<http://www.harlemheritage.com/history-of-harlem/>, 14. 2. 2017)
- Hassler, Warren W. – Weber, Jennifer L. (2016). *American Civil War*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. (<http://www.britannica.com/event/American-Civil-War>, 6. 2. 2017).
- Janken, Kenneth R. (2000). *The Civil Rights Movement: 1919-1960's*. National Humanities Center. (<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1917beyond/essays/crm.htm>, 14. 2. 2017).
- Keith, Verna M. (2009). A Colorstruck World. In: Glenn, Evelyn N., *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* (California: Stanford University Press), str. 25-39.
- Malony, Thomas N. (undated). *African American in the Twentieth Century*. Economic History Association. (<https://eh.net/encyclopedia/african-americans-in-the-twentieth-century/>, 10. 2. 2017).

- Mandle, Jay R. (1991). Continuity and Change: The Use of Black Labor After the Civil War. *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 21, No. 4. str. 414-427.
- Massey, Douglas S. – Denton, Nancy A. (2006). American Apartheid. In: Grusky, David B. – Szélenyi, Szonja, *Inequality: Classic readings in race, class and gender* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press), str. 103-118.
- National Geography (undated). *A History of Slavery in the United States – timeline*. (<http://nationalgeographic.org/interactive/slavery-united-states/>, 8. 1. 2017).
- Patterson, James T. (2009). *The Civil Rights Movement: Major Events and Legacies*. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. (<https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/civil-rights-movement/essays/civil-rights-movement-major-events-and-legacies>, 12. 2. 2017).
- Riddell, William R. (1931). Notes on Negro Slavery in the United States a Century Ago. *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 16, No. 3. str. 322-327.
- Thomas, Ian (2015). *The Atlantic Slave Trade*. Black History Month. (<http://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/history-of-slavery/the-atlantic-slave-trade/>, 18. 1. 2017).
- Wilson, William J. (2006). The Declining Significance of Race. In: Grusky, David B. – Szélenyi, Szonja, *Inequality: Classic readings in race, class and gender* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press), str. 141-160.

6.2. Biographies

- Academy of American Poets (undated). *Evie Shockley – biography*. (<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/evie-shockley>, 17. 3. 2017).
- Afaa Weaver Websites (undated). *About Afaa Weaver*. (<http://afaaweaver.net/about.html>, 23. 3. 2017).
- Biography (undated). *Maya Angelou – biography*. (<http://www.biography.com/people/maya-angelou-9185388>, 18. 3. 2017).
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (2012). *June Jordan*. (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/June-Jordan>, 22. 3. 2017).
- Kansas Heritage (2015). *Langston Hughes Biography*. (<http://www.kansasheritage.org/crossingboundaries/page6e1.html>, 20. 3. 2017).

- Kulii, Beverly T. – Reuman, Ann E. – Trapasso, Ann (1997). Audre Lorde's Life and Career. *Modern American Poetry*. (http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/lorde/life.htm, 22. 3. 2017).
- Latorial Faison Websites (2004). *Faison Biography*. (<http://latorial.faithweb.com/Biography.html>, 17. 3. 2017).
- Long Madget, Naomi (undated). Dudley Randall's Life and Career. *Modern American Poetry*. (http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/m_r/randall/life.htm, 21. 3. 2017).
- New American Art Gallery II (undated). *Annie Ruth: Inspirational Artist/Poet, & Community Advocate*. (<http://www.newamericanartgalleryii.com/annie-ruth.html>, 23. 3. 2017).
- Palumbo, Carmine D. (2003). Georgia Douglas Johnson. *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. (<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/georgia-douglas-johnson-ca-1877-1966>, 21. 3. 2017).
- Poem Hunter (undated). *Biography of Claude McKay*. (<https://www.poemhunter.com/claude-mckay/biography/>, 18. 3. 2017).
- Poetry Foundation (undated). *Yusef Komunyakaa Biography*. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/yusef-komunyakaa>, 17. 3. 2017).
- The History Makers (2005). *Angela Jackson Biography*. (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/angela-jackson-41>, 19. 3. 2017).
- Toi Derricote Websites (undated). *Biography*. (<http://www.toiderricotte.com/about.html>, 19. 3. 2017).
- Williams, Kenny J. (1997). Gwendolyn Brooks' Life and Career. Extract from *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, In: Andrews, William L. – Smith Foster, Frances – Harris, Trudier, Oxford University Press. (http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/brooks/life.htm, 21. 3. 2017).

6.3. Poems

- Angelou, Maya (1983). *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?*. (New York: Penguin Random House).
- Bergeron, Kelly (2005). Schwartz's "Cross-Cultural Poetics" archives, CCP Episode #77: Four Across, Leonard Schwartz's interview with Evie

- Shockley. *The Conversant*. (<http://theconversant.org/?p=157>, 20. 3. 2017).
- Biography (undated). *Fannie Lou Hamer – biography*. (<http://www.biography.com/people/fannie-lou-hamer-205625>, 10. 4. 2017).
- Brooks, Gwendolyn (1949). *Annie Allen*. (New York: Harper).
- Derricote, Toi (1997). *Tender*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press).
- Douglas Johnson, Georgia (1918). *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems*. (New York: The Cornhill Company).
- Hill, Walter (1998). Exploring the Life and History of the "Buffalo Soldiers". *The Record/National Archives*. (<https://www.archives.gov/publications/record/1998/03/buffalo-soldiers.html>, 17. 3. 2017).
- Hughes, Langston (1990). *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. (New York: Penguin Random House).
- Jackson, Angela (1998). *And All These Roads Be Luminous*. (Chicago: TriQuarterly Books).
- Jordan, June (2005). *Directed By Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*. (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press).
- Lorde, Audre (1997). *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc.).
- McKay, Claude (1921). *Liberator*. (New York: The Library of America).
- Poetry Foundation (2014). *Yusef Komunyakaa: The African Burial Ground*. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/56829>, 14. 2. 2017).
- Poetry Magazine (2007). *Afaa Michael Weaver: American Income*. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/49296>, 16. 2. 2017)
- Randall, Dudley (1968). *Cities Burning*. (Detroit: Broadside Press).
- Shockley, Evie (2006). *a half-red sea*. (Durham: Carolina Wren Press).
- Stripes Okinawa (2017). *Latorial Faison: Buffalo Soldiers*. (<http://okinawa.stripes.com/news/read-these-poems-about-black-history#sthash.y0tFer2o.dpbs>, 17. 3. 2017).

Tribute to Black Women (2006). *Annie Ruth: Ghetto Woman*.
(<http://www.tributetoblackwomen.com/poems/ghettowoman.htm>, 18.
3. 2017).

7. Abstract (French)

Le thème central de cet ouvrage de licence est L'Amérique Noire, son histoire et l'évolution d'une communauté afro-américaine sur le territoire des États Unis. Ce travail est orienté surtout sur la culture afro-américaine et sur la vie quotidienne de la population noire selon une description des poètes contemporains. Les auteurs, étant eux-mêmes des membres de cette communauté et ayant donc une expérience directe, servent comme sources principales pour une analyse de texte laquelle est successivement confrontée avec les faits historiques. De plus, ce travail est orienté sur une perspective féminine en considération d'une réalité que les femmes subissent une double discrimination en étant femmes et Afro-Américaines en même temps. Le but principal est alors de capter le changement de la position des noirs dans la société américaine et la relation entre la majorité et la minorité surtout du point de vue d'une femme afro-américaine ordinaire.

8. Appendices

waiting on the mayflower

Evie Shockley

“what, to the american slave, is your 4th of july?”
—frederick douglass

i. august 1619

arrived in a boat, named
and unnamed, twenty, pirated

away from a portuguese
slaver, traded for victuals.

drowned in this land of fresh,
volatile clearings and folk

with skin like melted
cowrie shells. soon **shedding**

servitude. soon reaping
talents sown on african soil.

after indenture, christians,
colonists. not english, but

not yet not-white. antoney
and isabella, whose marriage

stretched the short shadows
of america’s early afternoon

into the dusky reaches of evening,
whose conjugal coitus spent

first the choice coin of africa
on rough virginian citizenship,

**baptized their son, william,
into the church of england.**

ii. december 1638

fear must have shuddered
into boston on the backs
of true believers—men and

women of an unadorned god—

deep in the heavy black fabric
of their coats and dresses like

a stench. black a mark of
pride they wore as if branded,

never dreaming they could
take it off. **envy anticipated**

their advent. glittered at them,
settling in, from the knife

blades of the massachusetts.
seeped like low-pitched

humming from the fur
lining the natives' warm
blankets. but *desire* docked
in 1638. in from the harbor

**flocked a people whose eyes
sparked like stars, even near**

death. whose hair promised
a mixture of cotton and river

water and vines, a texture
the fingers ached for. who

wholly inhabited a skin the
midnight color of grace

that clarified the hue of the
pilgrims' woolen weeds. fear

and envy claimed pride of place,
put ***desire's* cargo to good use.**

iii. march 1770

that night, crispus attacks
dreamed. how he'd attacked

his would-be master and fled

in wild-eyed search of self-
determination. discarded
virginia on the run and ran
out of breath in salt-scented
boston. found there, if not
freedom, fearlessness. a belief
in himself that rocked things
with the uncontrolled power
of the muscular atlantic, power
to cradle, to capsize. awoke
angry again at the planter
who'd taken him for a mule
or a machine. had shouldered
a chip the size of concord
by the time the redcoat dared
to dare him. died wishing he'd
amassed such revolutionary
ire in virginia. died **dreaming
great britain was the enemy.**

*iv. july 4th: last
but not least*

17-, 18-, 19-76 and still
this celebration's shamed
with gunpowder and words
that lie like martyrs in cold
blood. **africa's descendents,
planting here year after year
the seeds of labor, sweating
bullets in this nation's warts,
have harvested the rope,
the rape, the ghetto, the cell,
the fire, the flood, and the**

blame for you-name-it. so

today black folks barbeque
ribs and smother the echoes

of billie's strange song in
sauces. drink gin. gladly

holiday to heckle speeches
on tv. pretend to parade.

turn out in droves for distant
detonations, chaos, controlled

as always, but directed
away from us tonight. stare

into the mirror of the sky
at our growing reflection,

boggled by how america
gawks at the passing pinpoints

of flame, but overlooks the vast,
ebony palm giving them shape.

(Shockley 2006)

The African Burial Ground

Yusef Komunyakaa

They came as **Congo, Guinea, & Angola,**
feet **tuned to rhythms of a thumb piano.**
They **came to work fields of barley & flax,**

livestock, stone & slab, brick & mortar,
to make wooden barrels, some going
from slave to servant & half-freeman.

They built tongue & groove — wedged
into their place in New Amsterdam.
Decades of seasons changed the city

from Dutch to York, & dream-footed
hard work rattled their bones.
They danced Ashanti. **They lived**

& died. Shrouded in cloth, in cedar
& pine coffins, Trinity Church
owned them in six & a half acres
of sloping soil. Before speculators
arrived grass & weeds overtook
what was most easily forgotten,

& tannery shops drained there.
Did descendants & newcomers
shoulder rock & heave loose gravel

into the landfill before building crews
came, their guitars & harmonicas
chasing away ghosts at lunch break?

Soon, **footsteps of lower Manhattan**
strutted overhead, back & forth
between old denials & new arrivals,

going from major to minor pieties,
always on the go. **The click of heels**
the tap of a drum awaking the dead.

(Poetry Foundation 2014)

Caged Bird

Maya Angelou

A free bird **leaps**
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and **dips his wing**
in the orange sun rays
and **dares to claim the sky.**

But a bird that **stalks**
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his **wings** are **clipped and**
his feet are **tied**
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird **stands on the grave of dreams**
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

(Angelou 1983)

Buffalo Soldiers

Latorial Faison

Buffalo soldiers

Brave and strong

Civil war veterans

Black men in uniform

Buffalo soldiers

Helped win the West

Fought many fights

With courage and finesse

They built forts

They protected land

Buffalo soldiers

Were in demand

On horseback

They served with pride

In the wild west

Many of them died

Oklahoma, Kentucky

Kansas and Texas too

Just a few states

Buffalo soldiers rode through

Much of what we see

In America today

Began with Buffalo soldiers

Leading the way

Buffalo soldiers

Way back in history

They fought to survive

And died to be free

(Stripes Okinawa 2017)

America

Claude McKay

Although **she feeds me bread of bitterness,**

And **sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,**

Stealing my breath of life, I will confess

I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.

Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,

Giving me strength erect against her hate,

Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.

Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,

I stand within her walls **with not a shred**

Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.

Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,

And see her might and granite wonders there,

Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,

Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

(McKay 1921)

the sonnet-ballad

Gwendolyn Brooks

Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?

They took my lover's tallness off to war,

Left me lamenting. Now I cannot guess

What I can use an **empty heart-cup** for.

He won't be coming back here any more.

Some day the war will end, but, oh, I knew

When he went walking grandly out that door

That my sweet love would have to be untrue.

Would have to be untrue. Would have to court

Coquettish death, whose impudent and strange

Possessive arms and beauty (of a sort)

Can make a hard man hesitate – and change.

And he will be the one to stammer, "Yes."

Oh mother, mother, where is happiness?

(Brooks 1949)

Black Boys Play the Classics

Toi Derricote

The most popular “act” in
Penn Station
is the **three black kids in ratty
sneakers & T-shirts** playing
two violins and a cello—Brahms.
White men in business suits
have already dug into their pockets
as they pass and they **toss in
a dollar or two without stopping.**
Brown men in work-soiled khakis
stand with their mouths open,
arms crossed on their bellies
as if they themselves have always
wanted to attempt those bars.
One white boy, three, sits
cross-legged in front of his
idols—in ecstasy—
their slick, dark faces,
their thin, wiry arms,
who must begin to look
like angels!
Why does this trembling
pull us?

A: *Beneath the surface we are one.*

B: *Amazing! I did not think that they could speak this tongue.*

(Derricote 1997)

Harlem

Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it **dry up**
like a raisin in the sun?
Or **fester like a sore—**
And then run?
Does it **stink like rotten meat?**
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

(Hughes 1990)

Foredoom

Georgia Douglas Johnson

**Her life was dwarfed, and wed to blight,
Her very days were shades of night,
Her every dream was born entombed,
Her soul, a bud,—that never bloomed.**

(Douglas Johnson 1918)

Miz Rosa Rides the Bus

Angela Jackson

That day in December I sat down
by **Miss Muffet of Montgomery**.
I was myriad-weary. **Feets swole**
from sewing seams on a filthy fabric;
tired-sore a pedalin' the rusty Singer;

dingy cotton thread jammed in the eye.
All lifelong I'd slide through century-reams
loathsome with tears. Dreaming my own
silk-self.

It was not like they all say. **Miss Liberty Muffet**
she didn't
jump at the sight of me.
Not exactly.
They hauled me
away—a thousand kicking legs pinned down.

The rest of me I tell you—a cloud.
Beautiful trouble on the dead December
horizon. Come to sit in judgment.

How many miles as the Jim **Crow flies**?
Over oceans and some. I rumbled.
They couldn't hold me down. Long.
No.

My feets were tired. My eyes were
sore. **My heart was raw from hemming**
dirty edges of Miss L. Muffet's garment.
I rode again.

A thousand bloody miles after the **Crow flies**
that day in December long remembered when I sat down
beside **Miss Muffet of Montgomery**.
I said—like the joke say—What's in the bowl, Thief?
I said—That's your curse.
I said—This my way.
She slipped her frock, **disembarked,**
settled in the suburbs, deaf, mute, lewd, and blind.
The bowl she left behind. The empty bowl mine.
The spoiled dress.

Jim Crow dies and ravens come with crumbs.

They say—Eat and be satisfied.
I fast and pray and ride.

(Jackson 1998)

Ballad of Birmingham

Dudley Randall

(On the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)

“Mother dear, may I go downtown
Instead of out to play,
And march the streets of Birmingham
In a Freedom March today?”

**“No, baby, no, you may not go,
For the dogs are fierce and wild,
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails
Aren’t good for a little child.”**

**“But, mother, I won’t be alone.
Other children will go with me,
And march the streets of Birmingham
To make our country free.”**

“No, baby, no, you may not go,
For I fear **those guns will fire.**
But **you may go to church instead
And sing in the children’s choir.”**

**She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,
And bathed rose petal sweet,
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,
And white shoes on her feet.**

The mother smiled to know her child
Was in **the sacred place,**
But that smile was the last smile
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,
Her eyes grew wet and wild.
She raced through the streets of Birmingham
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,
Then lifted out a shoe.
**“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,
But, baby, where are you?”**

(Randall 1968)

1977: Poem for Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer

June Jordan

You used to say, "June?
Honey when you come down here you
supposed to stay with me. Where
else?"

Meanin home
against the beer the shotguns and the
point of view of **whitemen don'**
never see Black anybodies without
some violent itch start up.

The ones who
said, "**No Nigga's Votin in This Town . . .**
lessen it be feet first to the booth"
Then jailed you
beat you brutal
bloody/battered/beat
you blue beyond the feeling
of the terrible

And failed to stop you.
Only God could but He
wouldn't stop
you
fortress from self-
pity

Humble as a woman anywhere
I remember finding you inside the laundromat
in Ruleville
lion spine relaxed/hell
what's the point to courage
when you washin clothes?

But **that took courage**
just to sit there/target
to the killers lookin
for your singin face
perspirey through the rinse
and spin

and later
you **stood mighty** in the door on James Street
loud callin:

“BULLETS OR NO BULLETS!
THE FOOD IS COOKED
AN’ GETTIN COLD!”

We ate
A family tremulous but fortified
by turnips/okra/handpicked
like the lilies

filled to the very living
full
one solid gospel
(*sanctified*)

one gospel
(*peace*)

**one full Black lily
luminescent
in a homemade field**

of love

(Jordan 2005)

Power

Audre Lorde

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his **shattered black
face** off the edge of my sleep
blood from his **punctured cheeks and shoulders**
is the only liquid for miles
and my stomach
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
**trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses**
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
and a voice said "Die you little motherfucker" and
there are tapes to prove it. At his trial
this policeman said in his own defense
**"I didn't notice the size nor nothing else
only the color"**. And
there are tapes to prove that, too.

Today that 37 year old white man
with 13 years of police forcing
was set free
by eleven white men who said they were satisfied
justice had been done
and one Black Woman who said
"They convinced me" meaning
they **had dragged her 4'10" black Woman's frame
over the hot coals
of four centuries of white male approval
until she let go
the first real power she ever had**
and lined her own womb with cement

to make a graveyard for our children.

I have not been able to touch the destruction
within me.

But unless I learn to use
the difference between poetry and rhetoric
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
and one day I will take my teenaged plug
and connect it to the nearest socket
raping an **85 year old white woman**
who is somebody's mother

and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
a greek chorus will be singing in 3/4 time
“Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are.”

(Lorde 1997)

American Income

Afaa Michael Weaver

The survey says all groups can make more money if they lose weight except black men...men of other colors and women of all colors have more gold, but black men are the summary of weight, **a lead thick thing on the scales**, meters spinning until they ring off the end of the numbering of accumulation, how things **grow heavy**, fish on the ends of lines that become whales, then prehistoric sea life beyond all memories, **the billion days of human hands working, doing all the labor one can imagine**, hands now the population of cactus leaves **on a papyrus moon waiting for the fire, the notes from all their singing gone** up into the salt breath of tears of children that dry, rise up to be the crystalline canopy of promises, the infinite gone fishing days with the apologies for not being able to love anymore, **gone down inside earth somewhere where women make no demands**, have fewer dreams of forever, **these feet that marched and ran and got cut off, these hearts torn out of chests by nameless thieves**, this thrashing until the chaff is gone out and black men know the gold of being the dead center of things, where pain is the gateway to Jerusalems, Bodhi trees, places for meditation and howling, keeping the weeping heads of gods in their eyes.

(Poetry Magazine 2007)

Ghetto Woman

Annie Ruth

Your family is ghetto people.

You know how I can tell

**Your grandma was a drunkard
and your cousins live in cells.**

You'll turn out to be just like 'em

Ain't no sense of foolin' yourself

for **you're bound to be ghetto people
for you there's nothing else.**

Ain't no sense of going to college
and keepin' them imaginary goals
cause for all the ghetto people
the story has been told.

**You either have ten babies
or live a life of crime**

Yes, you ghetto people's lives
not even worth a dime.

But if you don't **marry a bum
who beat you black and blue
you'll probably end up in a box**
with people crying over you.

'Cause your family is ghetto people
you know **you're all the same**
come on ghetto woman
and answer to your name.

Yes, I'm ghetto woman
and my family made mistakes
my grandma was a drunkard
and my cousins the police have chased.

**Yes, I'm going to college
and I'll always keep my goals**

You just watch carefully
and see my story told.

I was a ghetto woman
and proud from whence I came
For being poor and living in slums

I'll never be ashamed.

And even though I am a rich woman
the ghetto is in my heart
For in it I learned a sense of pride,
dignity, and my most essential part.

I earned that people can't be judged
by their family's actions, or
the places which they call home.
For it's a person's heart and soul
to make a judgment on.

(Tribute to Black Women 2006)