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# **Black Novels on the 20th Century African American Northward Migration**

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## **Abstract**

In my diploma thesis called *Black Novels on the 20th Century African American Northward Migration* I am going to examine the novel in African American literature with a particular focus on the migration from the South to the North inside the United States following the First World War. At first the work will recapitulate the history of this African American migration - its causes and its effects. The motif of the North as the "promised land" and how, in most cases, migrant characters in these works experienced this form of the "American Dream" myth will be analyzed. Finally, the racism by whites of the South will be compared to the racism by whites in the North.

## **Anotace**

Ve své diplomové práci, nazvané *Díla z hlediska afroamerické Northward Migration ve 20. století* budu analyzovat knihy afroamerické literatury. Tyto knihy se soustředí především na migraci z jihu na sever v rámci Spojených států amerických, která následovala po první světové válce. Práce nejprve zrekapituluje historii afroamerické migrace - její příčiny a důsledky. Dále bude analyzován motiv severu jako "země zaslíbená" a jak postavy z děl ve většině případech nedokázaly žít svůj "americký sen". Nakonec bude práce věnovat pozornost komparaci rasismu vzhledem k černé rase na jihu a na severu USA.

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## 1. Introduction

This diploma thesis concentrates on perhaps one of the greatest historical events in the United States of the twentieth century. The aim of my thesis is to analyze in detail the causes and effects of African American migration as well as the motif of the North as the "promised land" in novels by African Americans and why, in most cases, the migrant characters did not find a better life in the North. Two years ago when I was visiting California I encountered a black man who told me a story of how his family migrated from the South to the North. It was unbelievable what his family had had to go through and the conditions they had lived in. I knew that there had been a migration of blacks but I had no idea how hard it had been for all those people and how they had suffered. Once I got back to the Czech Republic I shared the experiences with my friends and they knew almost nothing about it either. Therefore my diploma thesis may give its reader a true look inside the lives of the migrant characters based on real stories and experiences.

Novels I have used concentrate particularly on the migrant characters during the era of African American migration. James Baldwin's *Go Tell It On The Mountain* depicts the lives of a black migrant evangelist's family and their fight against sin as well as search for salvation in the ghettos of Harlem. William Attaway's novel *Blood On The Forge* is a brutally gripping story of three black brothers who leave their home in the rural South for the steel mills in the industrial North during the 1920s. Because of racism and economic disparities they were forced to abandon their simple life as sharecroppers in the red-clay hills of Kentucky and to follow promises of better opportunities and a better life in the industrial North. George Wylie Henderson's *Jule* chronicles a life story of a young boy who grew up in rural Alabama in the 1930s. As he grew up, he left Alabama for the city of New York to have a better life.



Apart from the introduction and conclusion my diploma thesis is composed of four chapters where I describe in detail the real life of the migrant characters, their transportation to the North as well as the new way of life that awaits them in the cities of the industrial North and their struggles in everyday life to integrate into the society with whites.

The first chapter focuses on the historical Great Migration in general - its causes and effects. It describes which northern cities were chosen by blacks and the working conditions in which they were forced to work. This chapter also concentrates on the cultural changes and the changes in the way of lives of the black people from a rural, agricultural lifestyle to a metropolitan and industrial setting. Finally, it depicts the current situation of blacks in the North and indicates that lately there is a slight reverse Migration back South.

The second chapter is an analysis of *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, a novel written by James Baldwin. It depicts each member of the Grimes family and its other members in retrospect and how the life in the North affected each individual in a different way. The youngest members of the family were born already in the North and it is interesting how their opinions and views of society differ from those who had already been born in the South and were part of the migration.

Main focus of the third chapter is on the novel written by William Attaway, *Blood On The Forge*. It gives a different view of what it was like to live in the industrial North. The novel's main protagonists are the Moss brothers Big Mat, Chinatown and Melody who lived a simple but hard sharecropping life in the red-clay hills in Kentucky and decided to pursue promises of a better life in the North. In the industrialized North, the Moss brothers become part of a system who were easily replaceable by other migrant workers. They end up working in a steel mill and each one of the brothers is affected by the mill in a different way.

The fourth and final chapter concentrates on George Wylie Henderson's novel *Jule*. Its main protagonist, Jule, flees his home in rural Alabama after getting into a fight with a white landlord. In the North he quickly gets accustomed to the city life and discovers a completely new world full of new opportunities. He is lucky to meet Mr. Simmons who takes him in and gives him a job. Jule, however, unlike other characters of the African-American migration novel, does not reject the lifestyle and the attendant value of the black working class. He departs from the common migrant by the manner in which Jule interacts with his social environment. In most instances, Jule exercises his power to distinguish between the form and the substance of city life and of its various social groups. (Henderson, 1946: X)

## 2. Historical background

### 2.1 The Great Migration

The Great Migration was perhaps the greatest and the most under-reported historical event of the twentieth century. It was the mass relocation of six million African Americans from the South to the North from 1915 to 1970. In some ways the Migration was the "overground railroad". A lot of people had to leave under cover of darkness, at the last minute or not being able to tell people what they were planning on doing. Chicago's black population grew from two percent of the total in 1910 to almost fifty percent of the entire city's population today.

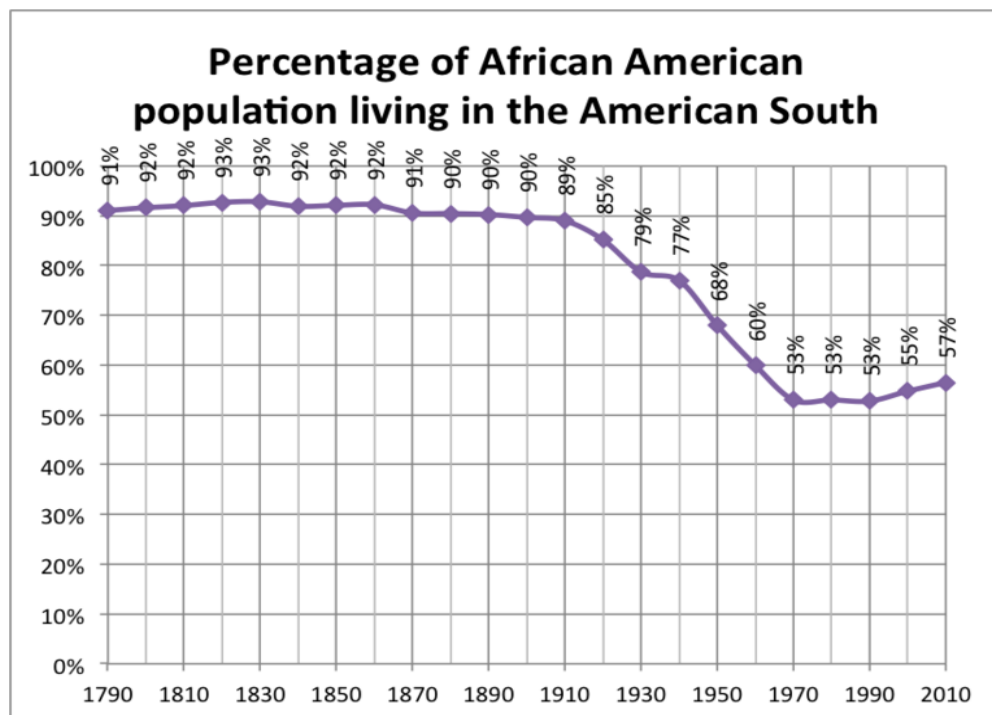


Fig. 1. Graph showing the percentage of the African-American population living in the American South, 1790 - 2010.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Percentage\\_of\\_African\\_American\\_population\\_living\\_in\\_the\\_American\\_South.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Percentage_of_African_American_population_living_in_the_American_South.png)

No one knows exactly who the first to leave was. It was most likely in the middle of the First World War. Because a huge number of men in the North had to leave for the war, the North faced a labor shortage. The timing was perfect because the North needed workers and the southern blacks wanted to escape oppression.

One of the earliest references came on February 5, 1916, and was seen as an isolated, random event. It merited only a paragraph in the *Chicago Defender*, the agitator and unwitting chronicler of the movement, and was likely preceded by unremarked-upon departures months before. Railroads in Pennsylvania had begun undercover scouting of cheap black labor as early as 1915. But few people noticed when, in the deep of winter, with a war raging Europe and talk of America joining in, several hundred black families began quietly departing Selma, Alabama, in February 1916.<sup>2</sup>

Some historians divide the Migration into two waves. The first one took about twenty years and during those twenty years roughly 1.6 million blacks migrated up North. The second wave began after the Great Depression in 1930 and took thirty years. This wave brought more than five million black immigrants not only to the cities in the North but also to California and other western states. The largest influx of blacks into Chicago occurred after World War II.

Americans share with each other the history that every human being on the American continent, including the Native Americans, lived here because someone came long ago. It only depends upon how recent that immigration had occurred. Some of the black people took this great leap of faith into the unknown. These people left the only place they had known for a place they had never seen in hopes that life might be better. This is exactly what these six million people did within the borders of their own country. What is astounding is that they had to come so far in order to be able to find the rights and privileges which they should have been born to, but which were not recognized in the South.

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<sup>2</sup> WILKERSON, I. (2010), P. 36

This Migration was not a haphazard unfurling of lost souls who just ended up anywhere. It was like any other immigration experience of any other group of people who have ever landed on the shores of the United States. In other words if one went to Minnesota, one would run into a lot of people from Norway and Sweden. If a migrant went to the Lower East Side of Manhattan, historically, s/he would find many people from Italy as well as in the North end of Boston.

## **2.2 Demographics**

There were three main streams of the Migration. First one was on the East Coast of Florida, the Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia to the metropolises of Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New York and Boston, the last stop unless they were going to completely leave the country (which some did of course during slavery in the mid-19th century).

The second stream was from Mississippi, Arkansas parts of Louisiana and also parts of Alabama and Tennessee to Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland and other cities in the Midwest. The final stream, the stream that has been written about the least, was the Migration from Louisiana and Texas to California and the West Coast on the whole. The Migration went on for fifty-five years, essentially with the twentieth century redistribution of the South and the North. Before the Migration began, ninety percent of all African Americans lived in the South. By the time it was over, nearly half were living outside the South. They were located everywhere by the end of the Migration, which occurred in 1970.

One of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century that comes through is that they were seeking what anyone else, who ever left the only place they ever knew for another place they had never seen would want, and that was basically to be free. Once they arrived in these cities after all they had been through in the Jim Crow South, they found that they had competition which was not anticipated and Northern workers found them threatening because blacks were accustomed to basically working for almost nothing in the South, especially if they were

sharecropping. These people were accustomed to lots of hard backbreaking work for little pay. Wherever they went they would potentially depress the wages. A great amount of effort was made to stop the Great Migration. After each wave, northern people thought that it was done after the First World War. However, black people kept coming. Then the Second World War came and the black immigrants continued since again there was a shortage of workers with a war in the Pacific and in Europe. Thereafter, the fifties and more waves still kept flooding the North until 1970. The reason they finally stopped leaving the South was because the South began to change for the better after the Civil Rights movement and black people were no longer needing to come to the North to live a better life. Even children were often returning back.

People converged on these big cities in the North - Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles and there were waves of mostly European immigrants. They were arriving at the same time. Only of one thing made them different, and that was the color of their skin.

The Great Migration only occurred because opportunities opened up in the North. When the North came calling for more workers during World War I, the South responded by instituting all kinds of efforts to keep them from leaving. People would be arrested from the railroad platforms. Ticket counters would be closed down so that black people could not buy tickets. Ultimately they figured ways of requiring exorbitant, unbelievable amounts of money for northerners, who wanted to recruit black labor in the South. For example, in Macon, Georgia it cost twenty five thousand dollars to get a license to be a recruiter of black labor in the South. Even now it is exorbitant, it would have been astronomical back in 1917, so it had a great dampening effect. Once the job opportunities were opening up and the word spread, people began to find other ways to get out. They would buy tickets in the next town over where they would not be recognized, in other words they were willing to act in a cunning way to get a railroad ticket to travel North.

They fled as if under a spell or a higher fever. "They left as though they were fleeing some course," wrote the scholar Emmett J. Scott. "They were willing to make almost any sacrifice to obtain a railroad ticket, and they left with the intention of staying."<sup>3</sup>

Those who decided to leave would travel mostly in the middle of the night. Men dressed as women and vice versa in order to escape the South.

## **2.3 Causes**

Besides increase in work opportunities stated above, there was also push factor - people in the South were being killed, beaten and always intimidated, which pushed them away from the South. Lynching was very cruel and violent. Nearly 3,500 blacks were lynched until it stopped in 1968. The situation for black people was very rough. Not only the people around them, even the political system was against them.

"If it is necessary, every Negro in the state will be lynched," James K. Vardaman, the white supremacy candidate in the 1903 Mississippi governor's race, declared. He saw no reason for blacks to go to school. "The only effect of Negro education," he said, "is to spoil a good field hand and make an insolent cook."<sup>4</sup>

## **2.4 Blacks versus whites**

There were approximately six million people who left the South. Because of the overreaching condition of hardship for black life in the South. It actually hurt both blacks and whites. For instance, it was illegal in Birmingham, Alabama for a black person and a white person to play checkers together as part of the "Jim Crow" laws of segregation. There were black taxicabs and white taxicabs. There were separate ambulances for whites and for blacks. There was a black window at the bank in Atlanta, even black elevators and white ones. These examples show

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<sup>3</sup> WILKERSON, I. (2010), P. 8

<sup>4</sup> WILKERSON, I. (2010), P. 39

how arcane and insane some of these laws were. In South Carolina it was illegal in certain places for black and white people to go up the same staircase. One of the worst laws was that there were actually black and white Bibles in courtrooms. The intent of these laws was to make it difficult for blacks and whites to get to know one another and form possible future friendships and relationships.

Black people were called many names by whites over the span of the Great Migration. The names were mostly racist. Isabel Wilkerson wrote in her book:

The word "colored" is used during the portion of the book in which that term was a primary identifier for black people, that is, during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, as evidenced by the colored high schools the people attended and the signage that directed them to segregated facilities. As the narrative moves into the 1960s, it shifts to the use of the term "black," after it gained popularity during the civil rights era, and then to both "black" and "African American" in the current era.<sup>5</sup>

It was basically a caste system, which means that everybody was in a rigid place and must hold fast that place or else risk ostracism on the case for whites and death at worst for the case of blacks.

Black people would travel with a green book carrying with them that would be little pamphlets which would have the list of hotels with big quotation marks. These hotels were available for them. Traveling was hazardous for so many people in so many ways and the green book was the only way they might be able to assure themselves of having at least some place to stay.

The black migrants from the segregated South were highly motivated because they could not fail. What would happen if they failed: they would have to go back home to the South, which for them was unacceptable.

There was violence in the North as well as in the South. There were only rarely cross burnings in the North but fires would be set to the homes of blacks, a few houses were bombed in the North or guns fired into the homes.

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<sup>5</sup> WILKERSON, I. (2010), P. 13



## **2.5 Working conditions**

Before World War I when Chicago industries needed higher level workers, they looked to European immigrants. They believed that blacks were incapable of doing quality industrial work. Industrial managers often believed that each race had its own peculiar capabilities so that the black race did not have any capabilities which were appropriate to industrial work. The only time they would hire blacks was when some strike breakers were needed but immediately after the strike they would be fired.

The black labor was paid ten to eleven cents for a box of fruit picked. This particular box was going out on the open market for four dollars. The South had not been very amenable to unions in any case. During that era there were a lot of arrests of black men, in particular for vagrancy if they were not seen working. The unions ended segregation at many jobs. This helped the black working class to apply for more skilled jobs and even supervisory positions previously reserved only for whites.

## **2.6 Cultural changes**

The Great Migration had a great effect on music overall. For example, Motown would simply not have existed. The Jackson Five, the entire Jackson family came from Alabama, as did many other people, Prince for instance. There is no way to know what would have happened with Jazz, would Jazz even exist. The three main pillars of Jazz, Miles Davis, the Loneliest Monk and John Coltrane, all these or their parents migrated.

Blacks also brought with them different inclinations about diet, to some extend different attitudes towards interpersonal relations. Rural people are more formal (especially before white people) than urban people and more likely to hang out on their porches. This caused some controversies. The *Chicago Defender*, an African American newspaper, printed lists of does and don'ts, do not act like this,

do not act like that. In many cases black migrants changed the northern city because they made it younger.

The life for blacks was different and they had to become accustomed to a lot of new situations. Black southerners in general lived in homes that did not have indoor plumbing or even electricity. They had to get accustomed to Chicago street car system, to very different kinds of work and the schools were very different as well. Replacing the rooster with the alarm clock and the street car taking the place of walking were the major changes in the lives of many people.

There was always racism in Chicago but the smaller number of blacks resulted in less obvious signs of racism. They might have been welcomed as workers but when it came down to sharing recreational space, friction could often not be resolved. By 1919 racial tensions escalated into incidences of actual violence. There was political competition, competition over housing as well as jobs. In the South racism was different, people knew the law, they were told the truth. In Chicago they would not be told the truth. By the 1950's the expanding black community created serious overcrowding.

In 1962, the first black families moved into the Robert Taylor homes. Their new public housing project of the South Side was designed to relieve overcrowding in the black community. By 1978 the Robert Taylor homes were overwhelmed with gangs and drug dealers.

As migrants moved into the northern cities, they often encountered residential discrimination. In many areas, white residents were not happy with blacks moving into their neighborhoods and prevented migrants from purchasing or renting apartments or homes. If a bigger group of blacks moved into a white neighborhoods, the original residents would quickly leave out of fear of potential rise in crime, violence and gangs. These features were attributed to areas with a large number of black residences.

## 2.7 Chicago Defender

The *Chicago Defender*, a black newspaper, also played a major role in spreading the word about Chicago's prosperity. Robert Sengstacke Abbott founded the newspaper which reflected his deep concern for injustices towards African Americans in the North and the South.

Abbott used the *Chicago Defender* to tell the people they could come to a Chicago relative, experiencing less racial discrimination and better employment opportunities. Robert S. Abbott was the first one to recognize the marketing power of African American entertainers. The paper really began to do well in the early teens. He also started special pages for entertainers. What he got in return was traveling black entertainers, carrying the newspaper through the South and even black baseball teams.

Southern whites often confiscated or banned the paper. Generally, white Americans in the South did not want the African Americans in the South to read. If a black person was caught reading the *Chicago Defender* in the South, something very serious could happen to him, even as much as losing their life. By 1919 the Defender spread to over 1500 locations throughout the South. Many towns outlawed the paper so it often had to be smuggled in.

In the late forties and early fifties, Chicago and other localities needed no further promotion. Five million blacks migrated from the South to the northern cities. Chicago's black population grew so fast that many referred to the South Side as the black capital of the United States.

By the time it was over, no northern or western city would be the same. In Chicago alone, the black population rocketed from 44,103 (just under three percent of the population) at the start of the Migration to more than one million at the end of it. By the turn of the twenty-first century, blacks made up a third of the city's residents, with more blacks living in Chicago than in the entire state of Mississippi.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> WILKERSON, I. (2010), P. 11

However, migrants often expected more than Chicago could deliver. If the new arrivals did not have family or friends to help them make the transition, the city offered little assistance.

## **2.8 New Great Migration**

The end of the Migration can be pinpointed to the late sixties. By the mid sixties the international harvester and the stockyards were closing down, steel factories started moving to Japan, West Germany and the Soviet Union. The opportunities had just disappeared. In a little over half a century, African Americans transformed from a rural, agrarian race to an urban culture.

The Migration was a success on the whole. Most migrants are still in Chicago and other cities and doing much better but few turned back. Over the last decade the African-American Migration leveled off and even a few of the original migrants returned to the South.

Today a slight reverse Migration back South is under way. However, no matter how many Chicagoans pack up and leave the migrants and their ancestors have forever changed the city of Chicago and many more.

### **3. *Go Tell It On The Mountain* by James Baldwin**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

*Go Tell It On The Mountain* is a semi-autobiographical novel written by James Baldwin and published in 1953. As his first novel, it took him ten years to write. Using his family's biography as its basic framework, it focuses mainly on his father's as well as his own life. As a black author and homosexual, he addressed issues of race and sexuality at a time when neither of these was acceptable as mainstream topics in novels by American society in the 1950s. The novel was written under the influence of the language of the King James Bible and the Bible is an incessant element in the lives of all the characters.

Baldwin, like his protagonist John Grimes, grew up in Harlem and never got to know his biological father. He was raised by his strict religious stepfather, David Baldwin, who served as the model Gabriel Grimes in the novel. As a Baptist preacher, David was very strict in James's upbringing. James, like John, went through a religious conversion at the age of fourteen. At this age James became a Pentecostal preacher.

James Baldwin was born in Harlem in 1924. He had never actually met his biological father. James spent a lot of time taking care of his younger siblings. In his novel he calls his stepfather simply his father. He always treated James, compared to other siblings, very harshly. His father died in 1943.

### 3.2 Florence

In *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, the Great Migration has already been in motion. Many characters leave their home, even their whole families from the South and try their luck in the so-called "promised land". The first character mentioned in the plot to move up North is the father of Gabriel and Florence. The reader is shown only a brief glimpse of him, for his name is not even mentioned.

And not only her father; every day she heard that another man or woman had said farewell to this iron earth and sky, and started on the journey north.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Florence's and Gabriel's mother Rachel has a different point of view regarding people moving and living in the North. She personally did not wish to go north as it is stated in biblical language:

But her mother had no wish to go North where, she said, wickedness dwelt and Death rode mighty through the streets.<sup>8</sup>

She belongs to the first generation of blacks, meaning she was born and raised in the South and she also passed away there. As a young woman she used to be a slave on a plantation and at the same time grew up on that plantation as one of the field workers because she was very strong and tall. She described how the North freed them from slavery, again using biblical language:

When she was a woman grown, well past thirty as she reckoned it, with one husband buried - but the master had given her another - armies, plundering and burning, had come from the North to set them free. This was in answer to the prayers of the faithful, who had never ceased, both day and night, to cry out for deliverance.<sup>9</sup>

Now, as an old woman she is very sick and bedridden. Her daughter Florence has to take care of her day by day. However, Florence does not long for this kind of life. She expects more of her life than that. She sees herself living in the city of

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<sup>7</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 63

<sup>8</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 63

<sup>9</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 60

New York where she works on her own career. In the South she would not gain any of that. Everything at home was focused on Gabriel.

There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's - to which, since Gabriel was a manchild, all else must be sacrificed. Florence was a girl, and would by and by be married, and have children of her own, and all the duties of a woman. But Gabriel was a man; he would go out one day into the world to do a man's work.<sup>10</sup>

Florence hates her brother and is sick of this senseless life where no future awaits her only because she is female. As a result of that she starts thinking about moving to the North. Many other black people had already done so. She did not find a single reason to stay in the South. For her, the South was a place where black women were subdued in the black families and where they were sexually abused by white men. Florence herself experienced the sexism of her close friend Deborah. Deborah was raped by white men in the fields.

Their neighbor Deborah, who was sixteen, three years older than Florence, had been taken away into fields the night before by many white men, where they did things to her and make her cry and bleed.<sup>11</sup>

After this accident, Florence and Deborah hated all men. No man would approach her in honor because she was a living reproach, to herself and to all black women and to all black men. Therefore Florence refused to become the wife of a black Southerner.

And Florence, who was beautiful but did not look with favor on any of the black men who lusted after her, not wishing to exchange her mother's cabin for one of theirs and to raise their children and so go down, toil-blasted, into as it were a common grave.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 63

<sup>11</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 60

<sup>12</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 64

In nineteen hundred when she was twenty-six a white man, her master offered her to become his concubine, which was the last straw.

She had been working as cook and serving-girl for a large white family in town, and it was on the day her master proposed that she become his concubine that she knew her life among these wretched had come to its destined end. She left her employment that same day and with part of the money that with cunning, cruelty and sacrifice she had saved over a period of years, bought a railroad ticket to New York.<sup>13</sup>

By the term master, the reader might expect employer. Baldwin used this term to indicate that the South that Florence wanted to flee from was much the same South in which her mother had been a slave. This is a very important shift when we think about the causes for leaving the South. Most women except her own sister-in-law Elizabeth moved North to follow a man but not in Florence's case. This gives the woman a certain control of her own fate. As a matter of fact, it is more crucial in the novel of a black author. Some black male writers concentrate on lynching when writing about the South at that time. Baldwin tried to portray lynching as a crime against black people. However, the lynching is not one of the major themes in *Go Tell It On The Mountain*. It is only mentioned in Gabriel's part to show readers the climate of the South, in connection with the black soldier.

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<sup>13</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 65



And blood, in all the cities though which he passed, ran down. There seemed no door, anywhere, behind which blood did not call out, unceasingly, for blood; no woman, whether singing before defiant trumpets or rejoicing before the Lord, who had not seen her father, her brother, her lover, or her son cut down without mercy; who had not seen her sister become part of the white man's great whorehouse, who had not, all too narrowly, escaped that house herself; no man, preaching, or cursing, strumming his guitar in the lone, blue evening, or blowing in fury and ecstasy his golden horn at night, who had not been made to bend his head and drink white men's muddy water; no man whose manhood had not been at the root, sickened, whose loins had not been dishonored, whose seed had not been scattered into oblivion... Yes, their parts were all cut off, they were dishonored... a bastard people, far from God, singing and crying in the wilderness!<sup>14</sup>

This image of the South resembles closely biblical chaos as the critic Griffin puts it:

Gabriel sees it as a curse upon his people. The horror of the South terrorizes, makes whores of both worldly and holy women; black men are forced to engage in sexual activity with white men and they are castrated and maimed. Again their blood flows through Southern streets. Baldwin's South, like Holiday's and Lawrence's, is the site of racial shame and horror. Through this passage, we know that the red clay of Georgia is colored by blood.<sup>15</sup>

This passage is written in a language which is derived from the Book of Numbers of the Old Testament where Moses leads the Hebrews out of Egypt into the Wilderness. Here they begin to question God and to rebel. This exodus is somewhat similar to the exodus of African-Americans. The first generation dies without always reaching the Promised Land, but God fulfills this promise to the new generation. Baldwin's passage, like the book from which it is drawn, asserts the rebellion-redemption, death-promise dialectic. The fact that death is linked to a lynching suggests that the bodies of the lynched are the sacrificed bodies that

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<sup>14</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 119

<sup>15</sup> GRIFFIN, F. J. (1995), P. 39

ensure the redemptive possibilities of the South. Though the earth is soaked with the blood of the black people, it may hold redemptive possibilities for them as well. In fact, it may be a sacred ground, where their blood is sacrificed. (Griffin, 39).

After buying her ticket, the last thing to do was for Florence to tell her mother and Gabriel about her leaving. She knew that they would not be happy about her decision to leave and that they, especially her mother would hate her. However, she was ready and there was not much time left. Gabriel could not endure the idea of being left alone with his sick mother, with nothing whatsoever to put between himself and his guilty love. Her last words to Gabriel were:

"If you ever see me again," she said, "I won't be wearing rags like yours."<sup>16</sup>

### **3.3 Esther**

The next character to leave the South is Esther. She was made pregnant by Gabriel and sent away basically to die. Esther lives a free and easy life and it kind of reminds the readers of Gabriel as a young man long before his conversion to Christianity. She is also a very attractive black woman who enjoys drinking whiskey and the company of other men. These factors draw Gabriel to her. Their affair only lasts for a short period of time and Gabriel decides to break it off because at the same time he is married to Deborah. Later he finds out that Esther is expecting the baby and he tries to distance himself from her. Esther comes up with an idea to move North and leave everything behind.

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<sup>16</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 69

"I . . . just want to go somewhere," she said, "go somewhere, and have my baby, and think all this out of my mind. I want to go somewhere and get my mind straight. That's what I want you to do - and that's pretty cheap. I guess it takes a holy man to make a girl a real whore."<sup>17</sup>

She uses his weaknesses against him to get the money from him. She knows that he, the holy preacher, would never let people know of his carnal sins. Later on she gives birth to Royal, their son. As years pass, Esther dies and her mother and stepfather travelled North to claim her dead body and her living son, Royal. Two years later Royal dies in Chicago as well. This shows that not only success and prosperity but also death and despair awaits black people in the "promised land".

### **3.4 Elizabeth and Richard**

Another character to move North was Elizabeth. Her life was not easy until she met Richard. He was the one who took her out of her aunt's house, the one that she had loved more than God. Her aunt took her away from Elizabeth's father after her mother had died. Elizabeth hated her aunt for that.

She met Richard in 1919. At that time he was working as a grocery clerk. He hated the South: It was Richard who had take her out of that house, and out of the South, and into the city of destruction.<sup>18</sup>

Elizabeth was one of many black women who had moved to New York City and left her home and everything else because of a man. She also wanted to live a better life and she thought of New York as a better opportunity.

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<sup>17</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 116

<sup>18</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 136

Her pretext for coming to New York was to take advantage of the greater opportunities the North offered colored people; to study in a Northern school, and to find a better job than any she was likely to be offered in the South.<sup>19</sup>

She and Richard both worked in the same hotel. After some time spent living and working in New York, she realized that the North did not differ so much from the South.

There was not, after all, a great difference between the world of the North and that of the South which she had fled; there was only this difference: the North promised more. And this similarity: what it promised it did not give, and what it gave, at length and grudgingly with one hand, it took back with the other.<sup>20</sup>

Even in New York they faced segregation. One day they wanted to go to the museum and Elizabeth was not sure if they let black people in: "Sure, they let niggers in," Richard said. "Ain't we got to be educated, too - to live with the motherf---s?"<sup>21</sup> At the museum they were the only black people even when they were allowed to go in. No other blacks visited the museum.

Elizabeth expected from the North a better and a happy life, a life that she wanted to spend with Richard. Unfortunately it was the North that ruined her marriage and her life. It was the North that took Richard's life, that took him away from her.

One night they stayed together longer than usual. At the end of the night Richard walked Elizabeth to the door and then took his subway as usual. However, this night would change his and her life forever. As he was waiting at the subway station, two colored men came running to the station where he was. They happened to be standing next to him when a white man appeared, and at the same instant another white man came running down the subway steps.

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<sup>19</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 140

<sup>20</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 141

<sup>21</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 143

Richard soon realized that whatever the trouble was, he was now part of it. Those white men would make no distinction between him and the rest of the colored men they were after. Richard and the rest of the boys were all colored and about the same age. They stood together on the platform. Richard was trying to explain the white men he was innocent but he was not believed.

At the police station where they were all to be identified by the white man, he looked at them and said that it was them. Richard was trying to explain again that he was not there but he always got the same response: "You black bastards," the man said, looking at him, "you're all the same."<sup>22</sup>

Richard was sent to Jail which he knew could be his end because there were no black and white prisons. When Elizabeth came to visit him he had been beaten, he could barely talk and he could hardly walk: His body, she later discovered, bore almost no bruises, but was full of strange, painful swellings, and there was a welt above one eye.<sup>23</sup> Even the police which was not supposed to segregate or treat him any different, did bully him: "Well then," said of them, hitting him suddenly across the head, "maybe you will die, you black son-of-a-bitch." And the beating began.<sup>24</sup>

Elizabeth quickly changed her idea about the city of New York and about the North in general that it did not differ after all.

She looked out into the quiet, sunny streets, and for the first time in her life, she hated it all - the white city, the white world. She could not, that day, think of one decent white person in the whole world. She sat there, and she hoped that one day God, with tortures inconceivable, would grind them utterly into humility, and make them know that black boys and black girls, whom they treated with such condescension, such disdain, and such good humor, had hearts like human beings, too, more human hearts than theirs.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 148

<sup>23</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 147

<sup>24</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 149

<sup>25</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 150

After some time Richard was released for lack of evidence. However, he was not the same man anymore. The night he got home from the prison, he cut his wrist with his razor and was found dead the next morning and Elizabeth's dream was gone forever.

### 3.5 Gabriel

Gabriel is the last character (number seven) in the novel's plot to move up North. In his early life he was a sinner for so long concerning problems with drinking and women. He later converted and became a teacher. After moving North, he became the head deacon in the church called the *Temple of the Fire Baptized* which was situated in Harlem where Gabriel and his family also lived. In his life, Gabriel greatly experienced the effects of racism. His mother had been a slave in the South, and had been freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War. Gabriel and Florence had some more siblings but it is briefly explained in the novel that the siblings were taken from her mother for various reasons. It does not tell exactly what the reasons were but it is obvious that it was because of their skin color and former slave status.

Gabriel does not trust whites and finds them wicked. He explains to John what racism is and how badly white people treat blacks. Because John has not experienced racism in his life yet. He actually witnessed the opposite, for example at school:

It was not only colored people who praised John, since they could not, John felt, in any case really know; but white people also said it, in fact had said it first and said it still. It was when John was five years old and in the first grade that he was first noticed.<sup>26</sup>

or

Yet in school some of them had been nice to him, and it was hard to think of them burning in Hell forever, they who were so gracious and beautiful now. Once, one winter when he had been

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<sup>26</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 18

very sick with a heavy cold that would not leave him, one of his teachers had bought him a bottle of cod liver oil, especially prepared with heavy syrup so that it did not taste so bad: this was surely a Christian act.<sup>27</sup>

He only read about racism and about slavery in the South.

He, John, was a nigger, and he would find out, as soon as he got a little older, how evil white people could be. John had read about the things white people did to colored people; how, in the South, where his parents came from, white people cheated them of their wages, and burned them, and shot them - and did worse things, said his father, which the tongue could not endure to utter. He had read about colored men being burned in the electric chair for things they had not done; how in riots they were beaten with clubs; how they were tortured in prisons; how they were the last to be hired and the first to be fired. Niggers did not live on these streets where John now walked; it was forbidden; and yet he walked here, and no one raised a hand against him.<sup>28</sup>

He is the third generation character in this novel, meaning that he was already born in the North and did not experience slavery in the South or the post-Civil War true racism of the South.

Another bad experience Gabriel had with the white people was when his son Roy got stabbed. Roy was John's younger brother and a very problematic child. When Gabriel found out Roy was stabbed, he immediately accused whites for doing it.

"You see?" came now from his father. "It was white folks, some of them white folks you like so much that tried to cut your brother's throat."<sup>29</sup>

Gabriel always had a feeling that he did not belong to "white society" and he went on having that feeling even after moving North. It is described in the plot as he was walking home from work one day:

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<sup>27</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 32

<sup>28</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 33

<sup>29</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 41

Now, someone spat on the sidewalk at Gabriel's feet, and he walked on, his face not changing, and he heard it reprovably whispered behind him that he was a good nigger, surely up to no trouble. He hoped that he would not be spoken to, that he would not have to smile into any of these so well-known white faces.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.6 Racism

*Go Tell It On The Mountain* is set in 1935, in the present seventy-three years after signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, seventy years after the end of the Civil War. The novel shifts back into the past of the characters to reflect the experience the early life of the main characters. The first generation includes characters that were born in the South and passed away in the South as well. Beside Rachel, Florence's and Gabriel's mother referred to earlier, other characters that were born in the South but moved North for many various reasons, mostly to live a better life which was not found in the South. These people were part of the Great Migration. It concerns most of the characters in this novel. The last wave comprises of the characters that were born in the North already and did not experience racism at full strength. For instance John only read about slavery and his experience with white people is rather positive. Florence uses all kinds of bleaching creams to make her skin look lighter. She even tries to distance herself from other African Americans to avoid racism. Richard truly experienced the racism the hardest way for it even cost him his own life. It is evident in the flashback of his trip to the museum with Elizabeth. However, the worst was when he was falsely charged with a robbery only because of the color of his skin. Both situations are described in detail in previous chapter.

It is obvious that the racism follows all the characters to the North where they suffer a various set of physical, psychosocial and social circumstances.

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<sup>30</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 123



### 3.7 Violence

Violence in *Go Tell it On The Mountain* is shown in many forms, that is physically, mentally and above all spiritually. It can be a violence in the form of the lynching and castration of black men by white mobs, it can be violence in the form of rape of black women by white men and last but not least it is the black community's patriarchal norms. For Florence it is the black patriarchy that actually contributed to her decision to leave the South.

In Baldwin's first novel the readers are witnesses of his critique of patriarchy which not only affects women but also men. Florence, Elizabeth and John are the examples of victims of patriarchy within their own households. Florence is also one of the major characters of African American literature to be part of the Great Migration because of the sexual harassment. "And this became Florence's deep ambition: to walk out one morning through the cabin, never to return."<sup>31</sup>

For Florence to be free meant several things, not only to be free from the South but also free to enter the new and unknown world and become free from the hatred of members of her family.

All the women characters in the novel are courageous which makes them different, makes them superior to the men who are mostly sinful. Florence, Deborah and Esther are characters keeping faith with humanity. There is a passage where Florence says something for all the women in the novel. It is when she looks at Frank's, her husband's face:

It sometimes came to her that all women had been cursed from the cradle; all, in one fashion or another, being given the same cruel destiny, born to suffer the weight of men.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 63

<sup>32</sup> BALDWIN, J. (1963), P. 72

### 3.8 Bible

The novel was written with the influence of the King James Bible. There are many references made to the Bible in the novel, for instance to the story of Moses leading Jews out of Egypt. Baldwin tries to implement moral indications to the novel characters from those of the Bible. John symbolizes John the Baptist. Elizabeth symbolizes the mother of John the Baptist. Gabriel is the Archangel who announces the birth of Christ to Mary (the 'Annunciation') and also announced the birth of John the Baptist to Elizabeth. In the Old Testament, Gabriel also interpreted the vision of the prophet Daniel. Deborah symbolizes the biblical military leader and she was also a judge and prophet of the Old Testament who led the Israelites to a victory over the Canaanites. Esther stands for the Jewish Queen Esther of the Persian palace who interceded on behalf of her cousin Mordecai and thereby saved her people, the Israelites and finally Elisha, a prophet of the Old Testament who performed miracles.<sup>33</sup>

The title of the book has its hidden meaning which could be connected to the Bible: "Go tell it" could refer to a cry of all Christians and "on the Mountain" could symbolize Mount Zion, a hill which Moses and John speak to the Jewish exile from.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.umass.edu/complit/ogscl/jana/janabaldwinbible.htm>

## **4. *Blood On the Forge* by William Attaway**

### **4.1 Introduction**

*Blood on the Forge*, a novel written by William Attaway, is set during the African-American Great Migration. It was first published in 1941 and is considered as one of the first novels about the black American working class: its protagonists were African-Americans and belonged to the working class. Attaway also wrote another novel, focusing on white working-class characters, called *Let Me Breathe Thunder* which was published in 1939.

William Attaway was born on November 19, 1911, in Mississippi. He and his family took part in the Great Migration and at the age of six he moved to Chicago, Illinois in order to escape the segregated South and find a better life and better opportunities in the industrial North just like every other African-American.

In his novel Attaway depicts in detail the life of the migrants working in the steel mills during the day and the nightlife full of whores, strikers, scabs and dogfighters. The readers witness a detailed description of conditions in which the migrants had to live and how they were treated.

## 4.2 Southern life

The Story opens in the red-clay hills of Kentucky in 1919. Three Moss brothers, Melody, Big Mat and Chinatown live in a plantation shack along with Hattie, Big Mat's wife. They were all born into the brutal system of sharecropping. To be black and a sharecropper at the same time was possibly the worst combination. This meant spending the entire life bound to the soil, to be victimized by a white master. No matter how hard one worked it still was not enough.

Nineteen-nineteen-early spring: the last time, there among the red-clay hills, he was to reach down his guitar. It was a hunger craving yanking at his vitals. That wasn't unusual; sharecropping and being hungry went together.<sup>34</sup>

Mat was the oldest brother, a big, tall and strong man who never smiled, maybe because there was not anything to be happy about. Melody always carried his guitar with him, perhaps that is why his Mother changed his name to Melody.

He never had a craving in him that he couldn't slick away on his guitar. You have to be native to the red-clay hills of Kentucky to understand that.<sup>35</sup>

Chinatown unlike Mat smiled a lot not because he was contented but to show off his shiny gold tooth. He did not replace it because there was anything wrong with his teeth, he just replaced the front one with the gold one. The tooth was his pride, it made him unique and was his claim to fame:

"It ain't needin' for none of us to be hungry, an' you with a hunk of gold in your mouth."... She knew he would rather die than part with that shiny tooth but she was out to plague him...it worth a full belly."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 15

<sup>35</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 15

<sup>36</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 19

The Moss brothers work for Mr. Johnson, a white landowner. They would spend the entire day working on a field for almost no money. However, this is the only way for them to stay alive and not die of hunger. They are all aware of the situation they are in:

"We jest niggers, makin' the white man crop for him. Leave him make his own crop, then we don't end up owin' him money every season."<sup>37</sup>

While working on the field they are watched by a plantation riding boss, a man riding a horse making sure that everybody is working and not being lazy otherwise taking a risk of being whipped:

"His ridin' boss carry a whip to hit folks for nothin' and throw them off the land when they too old to make good crop."<sup>38</sup>

This season particularly was supposed to be a bad season. Mat was trying to explain to Mr. Johnson that wind and rain coming every season take the good dirt down to the bottoms. Therefore the plow does not go deeper than six inches. Mr. Johnson did not care about anything Mat was saying: "Looka here, I contract with you for a crop. It ain't my business how you make it."<sup>39</sup>

This shows how hard it was for black people to make a living in the agricultural South. Even though they did all they could, it just was not enough and all the white owners cared about was the result. Mr. Johnson was aware of some black people already leaving their masters and moving North. He also knew that without the black labor Mr. Johnson would be lost because no white man would do the same job as the blacks did. Therefore he warns Mat about someone who is trying to convince black people to go North:

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<sup>37</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 20

<sup>38</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 46

<sup>39</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 31

"Oh Mat, my ridin' boss tells me there some jacklegs around, lyin' to the niggers about how much work they is up North. Jest you remember how I treat you and don't be took in by no lies."<sup>40</sup>

Big Mat always hated the riding boss and deep down he wanted him dead. Mat was big and strong and he knew that if he ever had to face him he would easily kill him with his bare hands. However, with all the guns the white men carried he was powerless. The riding boss always treated blacks like dirt. One day Mat gets into a fight with the plantation riding boss and leaves him in a half-dead condition. Meanwhile Chinatown and Melody are visited by a stranger, a white man in a black hat, astride a black nag. It was one of the jacklegs, a labor contractor, riding in the South trying to find black labor and send them up North. He was looking particularly for the Moss brothers. As he approached them he starting speaking:

"I'm from up North," he said. This was the first real jackleg they had ever seen. "They need men up there-good men-all they can get. If Big Mat speaks for this family tell him they can use him and all the other able menfolks in his house."<sup>41</sup>

He then continued that they would earn as much money and even more in a month than they would do so in the South within a year. To show them what he was talking about he pulled out a roll of bills and gave them a ten-dollar bill.

This is how the North enticed and persuaded black people in the South to leave their homes and go up North to live a better live and earn more money. No wonder this culminated in millions of blacks moving North. The North would also arrange trains to transport blacks into the northern cities. All the trains would leave at night so they would not be seen and would be sealed until they were out of the state. However, only men could board the trains so Hattie had to stay at home but she had been promised that somebody would send for her later. The trains would be called boxcars as they were literally boxes on the wheels.

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<sup>40</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 32

<sup>41</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 51

As soon as the jackleg left the brothers were looking at the ten-dollar note thinking about all that money that awaits them. This opportunity was very convenient as Big Mat could not go back to work because he killed one of his riding bosses. The night came and they were ready to board the train.

### **4.3 Transportation to the North**

In most cases African-Americans moved individually or in a small group just like the Moss brothers. However, it was not supported by the government but northern companies often offered free transportation and low-cost housing to black people in order to encourage them to relocate.

Trains were used to relocate the blacks simply but conditions in so called boxcars were awful, since all the boxcars were overcrowded with migrants and there was no light because they were sealed shut. Sometimes it took a couple of days before the train reached the final destination which was usually unknown to the blacks. Moss brothers boarded the train bound for West Virginia.

Squatted on the straw-spread floor of a boxcar, bunching up like hogs headed for market, riding in the dark for what might have been years, knowing time only as dippers of warm water gulped whenever they were awake, helpless and drooping because they were headed into unknown and there was no sun, they forgot even that they had eyes in their heads and crawled around in the boxcar, as though it were solid thing of blackness...Big Mat had ended in a corner. He couched there...warm urine began to flow into the corner where he sat. He did not move. He was in misery, but his misery was a part of everything else. The air, fetid with man smell and nervous sweat, the pounding of the wheels shaking the car and its prisoners like a gourd full of peas.<sup>42</sup>

Attaway described the atmosphere on the train and the conditions in which the black migrants had to live for many hours and many days in most cases. Even when the brothers boarded the same train, they were lost from each other for a

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<sup>42</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 59

long time because there were so many men. The sound of the wheels was so loud that they could barely hear each other. The sounds did not stop, they could hear it ceaselessly all day and all night long.

The wheels swallowed up the cry and clicked it out, louder and louder, faster and faster. It made his head spin to try and keep up with the fast-talking wheels. He had to shift to another word in order to keep sane. Soon the wheels had him racing along with the new word...the noise of the car was deafening.<sup>43</sup>

It was very hard for the brothers to leave the hills where they were born and raised. Riding with the train in the dark, not knowing where they were headed was also not easy. They went through all of that in hope that they would live a better life than they had in the South. When they finally reached their destination and some men unsealed the big door they were blinded by the light of the day which they had not seen for a long time. They could still hear the sound of the wheels in their head even when the train was already stopped. After leaving the train they were sent to the mill in Allegheny County.

#### **4.4 New life in the North**

After arriving to the West Virginia the Moss brothers were sent to the mill in Allegheny County on the Monongahela River. Attaway depicts the harsh working conditions at the steel mills and the blatant racism of the majority of white workers. Blacks were not the only migrants that came to the northern cities. The men were Irish, Poles, Slovaks, Croats, as known as Hunkies. However, not all of them showed racism towards the black workers. A few of them were tolerant and understood that they were there for the same reason regardless of race or color. Yet those men were few in number. In the mills and other places where black people worked, the classic strategy of "divide and conquer" could be witnessed.

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<sup>43</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 60



All the workers lived in long wooden bunkhouses. There were those who had worked there for a long time, known as crap shooters. On the other hand the new arrivals such as the Moss brothers were called the green men.

At the beginning all the green men were warned about the danger of working in the mills and that there were many who get killed because they were not careful. Hunkies particularly had to be very careful as they did not understand the instructions in English. Most of them died due to the heat. When Melody, one of the Moss brothers first saw the mills and heard about the danger:

"We have been tricked away from our poor, good-as-bad-ground-and-bad-white-men-will-let-'em-be hills. What men in their right minds would leave off tending green growing things to tend iron monsters?"<sup>44</sup>

The brothers and many others sure did not expect the North to look like that. The thoughts that went through all the brothers described the atmosphere and what it looked like in the mills:

"A man don't git to know what the place where he's born looks like until he goes someplace else. Then he begins to see with his mind things that his eyes had never been able to see. To us niggers who are seeing the red-clay hills with our minds this Allegheny County is an ugly, smoking hell out of a backwoods preacher's sermon."<sup>45</sup>

"What's the good in strainin' our eyes out these windows? We can't see where nothin' grows around here but rusty iron towers and brick stacks, walled up like somebody's liable to try and steal them. Where are the trees? They are so far away on the tops of the low mountains that they look like the fringe on a black wear-me-to-a-wake dress held upside down against the sky."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 65

<sup>45</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 66

<sup>46</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 67

After these thoughts the brothers looked at each other and one of them said:

"Boy, this here North don't seem like nothin' to me," complained Chinatown. "All this smoke and stuff in the air! How a man gonna breathe?"<sup>47</sup>

They started to regret the decision they had made and that was to listen to that jackleg and to leave the hills.

It took some time before they became accustomed to the different way of life. In the beginning they were not used to anything that was going on in the North. They had to leave their folk way behind in order to survive in the new environment. One of the first days as two of the brothers were walking on the street, they came across a white woman with a child. In both of them was the fear brought from Kentucky and they were worried that the girl might scream because back in the South their friend had been lynched because a girl screamed.

It took about three weeks before they could do their job properly. Melody and Chinatown quickly got accustomed to the way of life of other workers. They both were spending most of their money for corn whiskey, hookers and dice. Once Chinatown had over a thousand dollars pass through his hands - that is more money than he ever thought had existed. On the other hand Big Mat, the oldest of the Moss brothers tried to save as much money as he could so that one day he would buy a house and bring Hattie up. He did not drink any corn whiskey and did not buy hookers or played any hazardous game just like everybody else did. However, the longer he lived in the North and worked in the mills the more he realized that his plan was just a dream that would never come true.

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<sup>47</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 68

The first day in the mill was very chaotic and stressful. Nobody spoke to them. When the brothers finally saw the mills for the first time, these were Melody's first thoughts:

The shaping mills were far down the river, but he could hear the awful screams when the saws bit into the hot metal. The blast was a million bees in a drum. The open hearth was full of agony. The daylight was orange yellow with the droning flames of the Bessemer.<sup>48</sup>

Big Mat stopped and looked up at the towers of a mill in their path, the dirty orange of the hearths, the violet gas flames ghosting the air above a bunch of tall chimneys.<sup>49</sup>

A lot of blacks came to the North to earn more money and tried to send money to their families in the South. That was also Mat's case. He was trying to save as much money as he could to start a new live with Hattie. But after some time spent in the mills he realized that this dream would never be fulfilled. One day he received a letter from her saying that she had lost her baby. That day was the first time he tasted the corn whiskey and from that day he slowly started to live a life just like everybody else in the mill. Mat always wanted to become a preacher and he considered the loss of Hattie's baby as a sign of God's punishment for him. Big Mat was always holding back his emotions and was the most hard-working of all the brothers. After some time working in the mill he got promoted and earned a lot of respect from others, especially the Hunkies. They even gave him a nickname "Black Irish". He started spending money for hookers and dogfights. Once he joined his brothers and they all went to buy some hookers. Big Mat got closer with one of the girls named Anna and rented a shack for himself and the girl. She was that type of a girl that uses a man for his money. Anna knew he had saved a lot of money and he could buy her a lot of fancy dresses that would make

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<sup>48</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 81

<sup>49</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 115

her like the Americanos. The corn whisky and Anna had a bad influence on Mat. He even had to spend some time in prison because he beat a man because of his suspicion that he had had an affair with Anna. This happened to a lot of men who came to the North. First they tried to send for their wives but eventually they were all forgotten. "Lots o' guys round here jest starts out on a new way. It ain't nothin' to upset a man."<sup>50</sup>

By working in the mill the workers were in danger of losing their lives every day. The danger was real. There were many ways the workers could die: furnace gas, electric shock, fall into the pit, slide of piled iron on the narrow-gauge railways. One day one of the brothers got hurt as well. There was a big explosion at the blast furnace one day at the mills when Chinatown was on his shift. Only he and his boss survived, however, Chinatown's eyes got burnt and he became blind.

"It might have been better if the list of dead had run to fifteen." Chinatown's eyes were gone. It was as if Chinatown were gone. For the man who had had those grinning, slant eyes it was one and the same.<sup>51</sup>

The worst thing about all of this is that workers knew what danger they were in and if they died, they would just be replaced by someone else and that was it. After many years spent in the mill the brothers got used to the daily clang of the ambulances. But watching the new green men coming to the mill sometimes scared them and made them realize how near death they were when they first got there.

"Watchin' these guys scares me...makes me see how near death I was when I first came round here."...but steel had to be made. No matter how many men were hurt, the furnaces must be kept going. A furnace that lost its fire was like a dead thing. It had to be torn down to the ground and built anew. That cost money. So the new men, like the new men before them, worked, and some of them died. But the flow of steel did not stop."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 195

<sup>51</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 204

<sup>52</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 225

## 4.5 Unions

The explosion had helped the cause of the union. The Hunkies were joining in large numbers. Workers were joining the union in order to protest against the system.

"What the hunkies want with the union then?" "They lyin' to 'em. Say they kin git rid of the long shift. Eight-hour day what they want. Want more money, too, and a union for all the time."

There were not any blacks joining the union so when Melody came to a bigger group of men the talk suddenly died. The problem was that nobody really knew where the black men stood with loyalty to the union: Every telephone pole, every fence carried a placard. In big black letters the steel workers were urged to come to the union headquarters and sign up.<sup>53</sup>

During these times it was dangerous to walk through the town. Even the attitude of the foreign workers was changing. However, Big Mat already earned a lot of respect by the Hunkies and he was known among the others before they even got to know him.

Big Mat had been known as Black Irish. That title had meant something to steel men. They had known of Big Mat before they had met him. And after the meeting they looked with respect. The Slavs had accepted the judgment of the Irish.<sup>54</sup>

It was late July and Melody and Mat were walking home after their shift was over when they found their boss Bo, who was also black, lying on the street almost beaten to death by a group of the Slavs because they thought he was spying on the union meeting. The brothers knew from the South what to do when there was a black man in trouble: Big Mat and Melody were closer than Bo to the South. They

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<sup>53</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 210

<sup>54</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 216

did not question. The first thing to do with a black man in trouble was to hide him.<sup>55</sup>

Because there were problems with the white men protesting and joining the union, more black labor was coming from the South to replace them at the mills. This happened every time there was a strike, the same reason why the Moss brothers were brought to the mills but nobody was told that. The brothers, just like everybody else were told fairytales about how great it was to live in the North and how much money they would earn.

And the Negroes were grouped sullenly around the leaders of the moment. They were here for four dollars a day and a chance to fight with white men. They did not care what the issue.<sup>56</sup>

#### **4.6 Time of a strike**

It was almost certain that men were going to strike against the steel company. Even when the union organizers were fined and arrested by the police, it did not stop them from threatening a strike. The union organizers tried to induce the black men to join the strike, however, the steel company had bought the black leaders. Two Negro politicians were bought to speak out using strong words to convince black workers to stay on the side of the steel company rather than the union.

"These politicians both said the same thing. A victory for the mill owners would be a victory for the Negro worker. The black worker, they said, had never advanced through unions. He had only advanced fighting alongside of the owners. Do not forget, that the men who now ask for your help in a strike are the men who have spit at you on the streets because of your color."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 220

<sup>56</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 225

<sup>57</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 227

Whenever there was a strike, the steel mills hired these black speakers to make sure they stayed on their side. Even Melody and Big Mat were impressed by their talk.

During the strike, everybody stayed off the streets. Everybody tried to avoid the fighting. The mill owners hired armed deputies to make sure the strike would be put down at any cost. Because of the unrest there was little money and too much trouble around town and people were leaving to better places.

Big Mat had a reputation around the time and in the mill. Most of the men knew him before they had met him. Once he was stopped by the sheriff and because he was strong and big and had a reputation among the workers he was deputized. Being a deputy would earn him extra dollars a day and less hours spent at work. The role of a deputy was to stop all the potential riots and anybody who would put up resistance. For Big Mat to be a deputy meant a new feeling of power. He remembered the riding boss in the South watching over him and whipping him whenever he did something wrong. This time Mat felt exactly like the riding boss, he felt the power he had over the white men. All of the hatred he was holding in himself towards whites was coming back and added flame to his feeling.

"He had been called "nigger" since childhood..."nigger, nigger never die ..." was the chant. The name that they gave to him had become a badge signifying poverty and filth. He had not been allowed to walk like a man."<sup>58</sup>

They had taken his money and his women. They had made him run for his life. They would have run him with dogs through the swamps. They would have lynched him. He would have been a twisting torch. And he had escaped the South. Now here in the North he was hated by his fellow workers. The women covered their faces at sight of him; the men spat; the children threw rocks. Always within him was that instinctive knowledge that he

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<sup>58</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 245

was being turned to white men's uses. But now he was a boss. He was the law. He was a boss, a boss over whites.<sup>59</sup>

All his life he was used by whites so this was his opportunity to repay whites everything they had put him through. He had been empty for a long time but he began to heal the emptiness with a new medicine, a medicine which represented his great power. This time he would be the law - the boss...

Once the riots broke out Big Mat and other deputies were called up. Because Mat was the strongest and the biggest, he always went first. As they approached a house full of Slavs, Big Mat burst inside and got into a fight with a young Slav. At the same time, he was attacked from behind by another Slav with a pickax handle and he was hit in the head. This was the end of Big Mat, the end of the riding boss.

His vision faded. He was confused. It seemed to him that he had been through all of this once before. Yes, once he had beaten down a riding boss. Had that riding boss been as he was not?<sup>60</sup>

His death did not mean anything. He was just another black who could be easily replaced. The Sheriff summed up the entire situation:

"Sure is a shame that big nigger had to go and git himself killed...just accidental in the line o' duty, that's all. There'll be somebody to take his place, an' that there's one reason why the union ain't gonna win."<sup>61</sup>

This attitude towards blacks was the same almost anywhere in the North. There were only some exceptions, for instance when Big Mat earned respect by the Irish and he was called "Black Irish".

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<sup>59</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 246

<sup>60</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 288

<sup>61</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 288



The strike was over and there were more men than the mills needed which meant lower wages. For Melody and Chinatown it was time to move on and leave the mills, Anna, Chinatown's eyes, Big Mat's grave, a place where they had been through so much and brought them almost nothing positive.

#### **4.7 The Impact of the North**

The North changed each of the Moss brothers in a different way, not only them but also a great amount of others who left the agricultural South. As mentioned before they had to leave their folk culture and became accustomed to the new way of life in the industrial environment.

Melody was a musician and whenever he was in trouble he turned to his guitar to forget about all the problems. Once in the mill, he had to change his style. However he had trouble getting accustomed to the new style that eventually he stopped trying. One day he even smashed his right hand at work, his "picking" hand.

Chinatown also got into an accident which changed his way of life and even his personality. In the South the golden tooth made him unique. In the North he was afraid to show off his tooth because he was worried that somebody would knock his golden tooth out. Still if he looked in the mirror and it reflected his shining tooth back at him, he felt like somebody. After an explosion at the mill he became blind and his life would never be the same anymore: He had been a man who lived through outward symbols. Now those symbols were gone and he was lost.<sup>62</sup>

Big Mat tried to fight back at first. He only focused on his work, did not spend any money on women or alcohol. Eventually the way of life at the mills got into him as well. He was caught in emptiness. The trouble he had with Anna broke his

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<sup>62</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 206

confidence as well as Chinatown's accident. Sometimes, all he wanted was to be back in the hills and forget all his trouble in the mills.

The song of the mills was muted, and all that he saw had another air. The sky sometimes took on the colors of planting time. He did not see the smoke and slag of the mills. There was that coming-summer smell that the hot gases could not kill...he would be far away from the river, up in the black hills.<sup>63</sup>

Even when workers started to join the union, he was not thinking about the labor trouble. Back in the South he had already been working from dawn to dark so it did not matter to him if the shift would get shortened or the wage would go up.

For a man who had so lately worked from dawn to dark in the fields twelve hours and the long shift were not killing. For a man who had ended each year in debt any wage at all was a wonderful thing.<sup>64</sup>

After becoming a deputy, he regained confidence and felt new power over others. He felt like the riding boss in the South. In the end, however, Mat came out the worst. He was killed, not in the mills but by an old Slav during a strike.

## 4.8 Racism

Moving up North they thought they would not encounter racism any more or at least not as much as they did in the segregated South. In the North they experienced racism mostly from the Hunkies. Their boss named Bo explained to them why the black workers were hated:

Bo asked, "You been havin' trouble?" "Everybody treat us like poison," said Chinatown. "Everythin' be smooth in a coupla

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<sup>63</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 214

<sup>64</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 222

weeks...always hate new niggers round here...Well, company bring them in when there strike talk. Keep the old men in line."<sup>65</sup>

Another bad experience with the Hunkies was when Chinatown and Melody got lost in an Eastern European neighborhood and the Slavs started throwing rocks and spitting at them. This was a different hatred from what they had experienced back in Kentucky.

#### **4.9 False hopes**

The Moss brothers, just like many other blacks, came to the North to live a better life. After they left their home in the hills and their family, the Moss brothers found in the North misery, sorrow, pain and death. They ended up working in a mill doing twelve-hour shifts, giving them the rest of their free time to get some rest, often even less than that. In many cases they had to drink almost a pint of corn whisky to give them heart for another shift. The amount of money they earned was bigger but they saved none of it because all of it was spent on hookers, corn whiskey and dice.

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<sup>65</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 74

The brothers got lost in the time many times wondering what it would be like if they never left their home:

Somehow it seemed to the men from the red hills that the idea of flesh-and-blood striking was a crazy thing. The fire and flow of metal seemed an eternal act which had grown beyond men's control. It was not to be compared with crops that one man nursed to growth and ate at his own table. The nearness of a farmer to his farm was easily understood. But no man was close to steel. It was shipped across endless tracks to all the world. On the consignment slips were Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, rails for South America, tin for Africa, tool steel for Europe, This hard metal held up the new world. Some were shortsighted and thought they understood. Steel is born in the flames and sent out to live and grow old. It comes back to the flames and has a new birth. But no one man could calculate its beginning or end. It was old as the earth. It would end when the earth ended. It seemed deathless.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> ATTAWAY, W. (1987), P. 226

## 5. *Jule* by George Wylie Henderson

### 5.1 Introduction

*Jule* is a strongly autobiographical novel written by George W. Henderson (1904 - 1965) set during the Great Migration. The novel was first published in 1946 in New York. Like the greatest novelist at that time, Zora Neale Hurston, Henderson was born in Alabama. As a young student, Henderson attended a rural school in the South. He joined the Great Migration as a young man and moved to New York. There he started his career as a printer for the *New York Daily News*. In New York he also started writing, identifying himself with writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

The story can be divided into two parts: First part is set in rural Alabama and the author uses the intensity of local vernacular to locate the character in his environment and folk tradition. The second part of the novel is situated in Harlem, New York. Henderson therefore moves away from the black folk tradition of the South. In the North the character becomes quickly a victim to the city's dreadful ways.

## 5.2 Living in the South

Just like almost every other migrant character, Jule grew up in the rural South. The main protagonist lived a peaceful farm life in Alabama in the 1930s. He was raised only by his mother, Ollie Miss, who raised him "to be somebody". "Jule, you is a bright boy. Yo' ma wants you to be somebody. She wants you to know yo' ABC's an' how to write yo' name!"<sup>67</sup> Jule's mom worked the plot of land around the cabin where he was born. The land belonged to Jule's uncle Alex. He let his sister work the land.

"You kin work this patch of ground as long as you want to. It ain't much. But what you makes will be your'n. You kin milk th' cows an' that'll be pay enough fo' th' land."<sup>68</sup>

This is the way most rural blacks made their living, just like *Blood on the Forge* by Attaway where the Moss brothers were living a sharecropping life.

Raised into the folk life of his community, Jule learned how to till the fields, how to hunt, a folk system of calculation and the communal values such as learning to be compassionate. People lived in a natural environment and it may be considered a southern black folk idyll.

At the age of eight Jule started to attend Sunday school where he was taught to read the Bible as it was regarded as the most important book. When Jule was twelve, he learned how to hunt possums and coons. Most of the time he ate corn pone. It tasted greasy and sweet and was cooked on a skillet. At the age of sixteen he was considered an adult. During the day he was helping where he could, helping his mother working on the field, cleaning and hunting.

This was basically what it was like to grow up in the agricultural South as a black. Jule's best friend, Rollo, was the only white boy in the area. He rode a Shetland pony to school each morning whereas Jule had to walk or sometimes

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<sup>67</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 6

<sup>68</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 4

rode a mule. It was too expensive for them to pay for a horse and even if they could afford a horse, they would not use it only for riding, it would be used in the fields to be somehow beneficial. Rollo lived with his dad in a white house with green shutters. The house was two stories high and had a back porch as well. The differences were not only material. When Jule and Rollo first met as young children, Jule's speech was much more stylized in Southern dialect: "But s'pose figgers don't come out even? S'pose you is got somethin' left ovah? How you counts dat, Uncle Alex?"<sup>69</sup> On the other hand Rollo's speech is grammatically and syntactically standard, with some features of the rural dialect: "Follow me, I want to show you my dogs and horses. You like dogs, Jule?"<sup>70</sup> Over the years their speech patterns become more similar: Jule: "Fishin' is nice...he's a fine pony, Mr. Rollo. He's my pony!"<sup>71</sup> Rollo: "Just call me Rollo. My dad ain't around or nothing."<sup>72</sup> By the time they were sixteen, however, their speech patterns were basically the same: Jule: "You looked funny too, Rollo, tryi'n to fry them sardines an' eggs."<sup>73</sup> Rollo: "We're in Peter's Mudhole now...We're heading for good hunting."<sup>74</sup> Despite the racial difference, Rollo and his father blend harmonically into the black community. Henderson merges the white characters' speeches and their value system with the black speeches and presents their speech as a deviant form of the dominant speech in the adjacent white speech community. (Henderson, 1946: XVII)

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<sup>69</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 27

<sup>70</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 31

<sup>71</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 34

<sup>72</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 35

<sup>73</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 53

<sup>74</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 55

### 5.3 Racism

In the first part of the novel set in rural Alabama, the readers do not witness too many examples of racism. The word "nigger" is encountered only a couple of times:

There were odd coats and trousers, dresses and petticoats, hats and shoes. Things like that. Used things, second-hand things. Things given to Kate by her white folks. White folks said: "Niggers like second-hand things."<sup>75</sup>

or

Boykin Keye paid Jule each Saturday night. Paid him the wages he had earned, fifty cents a day. Boykin Keye said: "You're a good nigger. A fine nigger boy. I can use a smart nigger."

In the South it was common for whites to call blacks by the word "nigger".

Another example of racism which, however, forced Jule to leave the South was much more serious. As Jule grew older he was working for a white landlord named Boykin Keye. He typified an intruder in the African-American society in Henderson's novel. The landlord fancied a black girl named Bertha Mae who was in love with Jule. The white landlord treated Bertha as his possession. He told her not to meet Jule anymore and once he found out they had been seeing each other he took his gun and wanted to kill Jule. In self-defense, however, Jule struck him, which was considered a crime in Alabama of the 1940s. By committing this crime he could be sentenced to death. Therefore Jule escaped to the northern Promised Land. In Attaway's novel, *Blood On The Forge*, one of the brothers committed a similar crime and instead of facing his punishment he and his other two brothers left for the North to escape the segregated South.

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<sup>75</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 47



## 5.4 Leaving the South

The way Boykin Keye treated Jule was the historical reason why a great amount of other blacks left their homes in the South. Many other whites treated black as something they possessed. They only used them for labor and their service and in return blacks were paid hardly any money.

"I ain't sharing no woman with a nigger! I ain't sharing you with nobody!"<sup>76</sup>

"Nigger, you ain't going to get away with this! By God, I'm a white man! I'll blow your goddamn brains out if it's the last thing I do! You black bastard!"<sup>77</sup>

These two examples show very clearly that blacks had almost no power over their lives in the South. After the incident with Boykin Keye, Jule and others decide that it would better for him to leave. Jule went to his ma: "I got to git, Ma. I got to git somewhere fast."<sup>78</sup>

Rollo, his best friend, is an example that whites and black can live in harmony with no problems. The way he reacted to the incident shows that even when he was white he despised Boykin Keye.

"We figure it's better if Jule goes away...how come Boykin Keye can't go away? Boykin is a white man, Son. But Boykin Keye is wrong, Dad! Boykin Keye is still a white man, his father said. If Boykin Keye is white, Dad, I don't want to be white!"<sup>79</sup>

or

"But Jule is just a black boy, his father said. Jule is just a nigger. I wish he was white. I wish his face was as white as mine!"<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 84

<sup>77</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 85

<sup>78</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 86

<sup>79</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 89

<sup>80</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 91

Rollo even confronted the white landlord. This was the first time I witnessed a white man to stick up for a black man.

"Jule ain't done nothing to you...and you ain't going to do nothing to him" Rollo said. "He's going to be a dead nigger," Boykin Keye said. "Over my dead body," Rollo said. "Jule is my best friend and ain't nobody going to touch him! You or nobody else!" "He's still a dead nigger," Boykin Keye said. "Ain't no nigger going to beat me and get away with it!"<sup>81</sup>

Jule left his home and went towards the tracks. It was midnight, the best time for him to leave so that nobody would see him getting on the train. A train was the easiest way to get to the North. He slid beneath the freight car onto the rods.

## **5.5 Living in the North**

After arriving to the city of New York where he did not know anybody, he was alone with nothing to eat. He found himself walking on the pavement looking at a sign saying w. 135th st. which did not mean anything to him. This world was completely different to what he was used to. There were no fields, no horses or mules and no farms.

He tried to figure out where he was and how he got there. He saw tall buildings, high upon a hill, with steeples reaching for the sky. He stared at the buildings and the steeples and the walls about him. He thought about the walls of Babylon, the way it was in the Bible.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 92

<sup>82</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 97

People dressed differently and acted in a different way as well.

Streets were alive with people: Children going to school, their voices ringing quick and loud. Men in overalls, workingmen, going to their jobs. Women with shopping bags hanging on their arms, going to market.<sup>83</sup>

He had to figure out a way to get some food. On the street corner there was a sign in the window saying: Dishwasher. Meals and \$10.00 to start. The owner asked for his references in New York and added that with no references in New York he would not get a job anywhere in the city.

This happened to most of blacks unless they had relatives in the North or traveled to the North already with a purpose, just like the Moss brothers who immediately started working in the mill once they got there.

Eventually, Jule got lucky and he was hired to scrub pots and pans in a restaurant for meals and eight dollars a week which to him was a lot of money, compared to fifty cents a day he would earn back home. When he got his first salary, he found a room for two-fifty a week.

Jule was very hard-working since he was used to heavy work from back home. The owner of the restaurant, Mr. Simmons, noticed him and offered him to stay at his place and a better job as a waiter.

Mr. Simmons noticed that Jule was acting in an unusual way for northerners. He gave him some tips how to integrate into the society in New York. First of all he taught him how to speak with others. Jule always added "sir" after every answer.

"Yes, sir, Coke's fine." "No scotch and soda?" "No, sir." "Don't say 'No, sir' and 'Yes, sir' when it don't mean nothing...when you're looking for a tip you say "Yes, sir" and "No, sir." But

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<sup>83</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 98

when you ain't looking for nothing, you just say "Yes" and "No", like everybody else."<sup>84</sup>

or

"And don't talk so flat. You ain't in Alabama. You're in New York now. Got to talk fast and talk right, if you want to be somebody. Got to talk fast and think fast in this man's town. New York is New York..."<sup>85</sup>

How to behave was also crucial for Jule to learn.

"You got to get the hang of this town. You got to know how to meet people and do things. Know how to put on a front. You got to put on a front, pal, if you want to get somewhere."<sup>86</sup>

"Well, do it the way I do it. Don't be no chump for nobody. Buy what you want and pay for what you get. If you don't want to buy nothing, don't buy it. If you don't want to pay for nothing, don't pay it. It's you or the next guy."<sup>87</sup>

Unlike other migrant characters who came to the North without any relatives and any friends already living in the North, Jule was very lucky. Perhaps Mr. Simmons saw a great potential in him. Even when Mr. Simmons was very nice to Jule and had no comments on the color of his skin, he still thought lower of him and knew where his place in the society was.

Jule looked at the girl sitting at the bar..."She's pretty, ain't she?" "She ain't for you, bud. She's out of your class." "I jes' said she was pretty." "I know...but she ain't for you. You need a working gal, a gal that scrubs floors and sleeps in. A gal that comes out once a week, on Thursdays. You got to have support, bud! A gal like her don't mean you no good. She ain't giving nothing away. You got to give her something."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 102

<sup>85</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 103

<sup>86</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 105

<sup>87</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 108

<sup>88</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 106

Unlike other characters who suffered from the North, Jule did not find only misery and penury in the industrial North. Each month he sent some money to his mother. In the first letter he wrote:

"I'm in New York, ma. I got a job. It's nice here, ma. I wish you could see the tall buildings. Buildings are tall, ma and New York is nice. But it ain't like down home."<sup>89</sup>

Everything in the North was going his way. During the summer he worked two jobs. He even bought a new tailor-made suit that made him look nice. After some time spent in the North he even bought a car. Jule jacked it up and put wheels on it. There was nothing he could really complain about. He had everything he needed - a steady job, a girlfriend, a place to live and some money on his bank account.

## **5.6 Going Back South**

After receiving the envelope with the telegram which said that his mother was dead, he decided to go back home at once. He took the train back to Alabama. As he got arrived in his hometown he saw fields and plots of land, pine trees green along the countryside, snags chalk-white in new ground. He saw rail fences, wire fences, sagging on the roadside. (Henderson, 1946: 229) Everything to him seemed different and odd, changed. Everything looked so tiny and tight.

Jule was already adapted to the way of life in the big city of New York and once he came back after couple of years, everything looked strange to him. As he stood there looking around, he figured that there was nothing for him.

"You're right, Jule. You should go back. There's nothing here. Your ma wanted you to be somebody. You got to be somebody."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 115

As he was getting ready to go back to the train station he met Bertha Mae. She was basically the reason why he fled the South. Because of her he got into a fight with the white landlord. Once he saw her, he realized he still had feeling for her and decided to take her with him to the promised land: "Going to write me, Jule? You're going with me...I'm taking you with me."<sup>91</sup>

## **5.7 Relationship with Women**

There was something about Jule that attracted women in the North. Perhaps it was the color of his skin or the way he behaved. There was something that separated him from northern men. The first woman that fell in love with him was Anne. Anne was married to a grand seigneur, a man who was well known and she had anything she wanted. Still there was something about Jule that no other man could provide her with. However, Jule did not repay her with his love. His answer was always "it don't matter." Anne wanted him to fit in the Harlem society so she dressed him up just properly: "You ought to buy yourself a suit, Jule...a nice suit, a tailor-made suit, like the boys wear in Harlem."<sup>92</sup>

The next woman that fell love with him was Louise ("Lou") Davis, his official girlfriend, unlike Anne who could not risk losing the place in the society if people knew she had an affair with a black man.

## **5.8 Racism**

The first time he got into problems because of his skin color was when he got into a bar. After a while the waiter wanted for him to pay because he was suspicious he had had no money to pay for the bill. Jule refused to pay as he was not ready to go. Instead of a word "nigger" Jule was called by different

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<sup>90</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 232

<sup>91</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 233

<sup>92</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 132

nicknames: "A chump," a waiter said. "Grade A chump. He don't know nothing! Young Mr. Green, right out the cotton fields!"<sup>93</sup>

The nicknames that his associates use to characterize him as an innocent, naive, social misfit in the Harlem social structure conversely reveal to the reader that Jule is ethically and morally inferior to those in the social set in which he moves. (Henderson, 1946: X)

At work he was called different nicknames by his associates, as mentioned above but sometimes guests used the word "nigger" and "boy" in his presence as well which made him feel uncomfortable:

The blond girl looked at Jule." You from down home, ain't you boy? From down my part the country, ain't you?" " You from down yonder where white folks and niggers understand each other" Where niggers...Her escort caught her wrist and told her to shut up. "I can talk to a nigger if I want to! It's a free country, ain't it? I used to play with niggers when I was little."<sup>94</sup>

In the North it felt different for Jule to be called "nigger". In the South he heard the word on daily basis. Here in the North he was not used to be called like that too often and when he was, it somehow felt much worse because he was not used to hearing it.

After some time working as a waiter, he wanted something more than that, to be somebody, just like his mother raised him to be. He decided to change his job and become a printer but he needed an apprentice card. His friend Mr. Simmons knew had a reputation in the city and knew a lot of people in the city. He told him to visit Douglas to get his card. However, Douglas did not want to give him the card because of his skin color:

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<sup>93</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 188

<sup>94</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 143

"So you wouldn't give Jule his card." "Why didn't you tell me he was a nigger?" "What difference does that make?" "We got to know who's coming into the union," Old Douglas said."<sup>95</sup>

I ain't taking no nigger apprentice, either. Not if I don't want to!"<sup>96</sup>

## 5.9 Language

What instantly draws a reader's attention is Henderson's exceptional use of language. In both parts of the plot, language strengthens its setting, mood and characterization. In rural Alabama, the language is strongly folkloric. For example, in the simplicity in grammatical and syntactical structures by the black characters' speech, the language mingles perfectly with the setting, characterization and mood in order to help to define the first part as a black folk idyll. Henderson, as a student at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, was certainly familiar with the local black speech.

Most of the Harlem characters speak the language of the folk community in Alabama, a language which in this setting fails to successfully highlight the contrast the author intends between these Harlemites' value system and Jule's. Yet in his portraiture of Louise Davis, Jule's girlfriend in Harlem, Henderson's use of language works well to convey theme and action. (Henderson, 1946: XVIII)

## 5.10 Influence of the North

Typically, the migrant character of African-American literature (mostly a male) is dragged into the city life, becomes alienated from his racial, ethnic and regional origins and is swallowed by the destructive forces of the urban environment. Henderson includes the trappings of a Harlem setting in the African-American novel by the 1940s: drinking, gambling, seductive women, money and the wild

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<sup>95</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 217

<sup>96</sup> HENDERSON, G. W. (1946), P. 218



life. In the typical African-American migration novel, the migrant character rejects the lifestyle values and accepts the value system of the materially subclass.

In Jule's case, however, he departs from the typical by his interactions in the urban social environment. In most instances, Jule exercises his power to distinguish between the form and the substance of city life and of its various social groups. In most cases Jule stands apart from most of other blacks who live in New York with whom he identifies with. He does not give a great value to material objects such as clothes and cars and does not think it necessary determines his social status. Jule rejects acquiring the behavior and values of the social class in which he moves - he does not drink nor does he smoke. His actions and ideas are guided by moral and ethical standards of the community he was raised in.

## 6. Conclusion

Eighty years ago much of African-American culture was settled around cotton fields and farms. Then for five decades, beginning in 1915, blacks undertook the largest single migration of any ethnic group in the history of the United States. The people, the customs and the culture of the migrants have had a tremendous impact in shaping some of the large cities of North, such as Chicago or New York, as what we know it today.

In most cases, the migrant characters in these works experienced the "American Dream" as a myth. In the novel *Blood On The Forge*, the Moss brothers left the segregated South in order to avoid racism, violence and labor for almost no wages. They were promised a better life and more money in the industrial North by a labor contractor. Once they were transported to the North they became virtual slaves of the system. The brothers found themselves working in a mill in dreadful conditions. What seemed as the "promised land" was in reality a nightmare. One of the brothers lost his life in the mill, the other lost his eye sight and the last one had his hand smashed.

*Go Tell It On The Mountain*, a novel written by James Baldwin, depicts the fate of Grimes Family and its family members in different terms and how most of them experienced misery in the North. For instance, both Esther and her son Royal died in Chicago just two years after they moved. This shows that not only success but also death and despair awaits black people in the "promised land". The next migrant character to move North to live a better live was Elizabeth. She moved to New York because of a man but it was the North that destroyed their marriage and took away her husband's life. John is the only character who was already born in the North and his ideas and thoughts about whites differ from others. He only read about slavery and his experience with whites were rather positive.

The thematic structure of *Jule*, the last novel, I have analyzed, resembles several other twentieth-century African-American novels. A black lives a simple rural life in a racially stratified environment. However, he is accused of violating one of the society's major taboos, striking a white man. He is forced to flee his home. In the North Jule, unlike other migrant characters, does not find only misery and death like previous characters. Jule holds on to his moral and ethical values and in his case avoids being completely destroyed by the urban environment.

I did not know about the Great Migration and what blacks had to go through in order to be where they are now. Nowadays there is another, similar migration underway. These migrants are leaving their native countries because of violence and despair in hope of finding a better life. Perhaps this diploma thesis will change the perspective of the current migration.

## 7. Czech Summary

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na jednu z největších historických událostí dvacátého století - afroamerickou migraci z jihu na sever. Cílem této práce je podrobná analýza migrace v rámci Spojených států amerických, která následovala po první světové válce, prostřednictvím knih afroamerické literatury. Primárním cílem je pak analýza motivu severu jako "země zaslíbené", dokumentovaná na životních osudech postav literárních děl dále citovaných a jak tyto postavy ve většině případů nedokázaly naplnit svůj "americký sen". Dále práce rekapituluje historii migrace - její příčiny a důsledky. Nakonec bude práce věnovat pozornost komparaci rasismu vzhledem k černé rase na jihu a na severu USA. Jen díky zasazení autentických příběhů do kontextu doby lze pochopit interakce, které se odehrávaly mezi černošským a bělošským obyvatelstvem. Tato práce nenabízí přímé odpovědi na otázky současnosti, ale prostřednictvím objektivního poznání historie může pomoci pozornému čtenáři k pochopení příčin, souvislostí a důsledků událostí, které jsou dnes evropskou realitou.

Práce kromě úvodu a závěru obsahuje čtyři kapitoly. Úvodní kapitola je věnována afroamerické migraci v obecném měřítku. Jsou zde vylíčeny příčiny, průběh a důsledky migrace. Rozděluje migraci podle časového hlediska na dvě vlny představující ve svém součtu kolem šesti miliónu černošských migrantů. Celkově je migrace rozdělena do tří hlavních proudů podle toho, do jakých částí Severní Ameriky lidé migrovali. Zmíněna jsou města, kterých se migrace nejvíce týkala a která byla migrací nejvíce ovlivněna, jako například Chicago, New York, Detroit nebo Philadelphia. Čtenář zároveň získá představu o tom, jak se s černochoy zacházelo na jihu a poté na severu, či v jakých podmínkách museli pracovat a žít. V neposlední řadě práce prezentuje kulturu, kterou s sebou migranti přinesli a zkoumá její dopad na původní obyvatelstvo severu. V závěru úvodní kapitoly je zmíněna nová, opačná migrace, která se stala fenoménem USA v posledních letech.

Druhá kapitola se zaměřuje na analýzu knihy *Go Tell It On The Mountain* od autora Jamese Baldwina. Jedná se o autobiografický román, který je silně nábožensky ovlivněn a zabývá se rasismem ve Spojených státech amerických. V centru stojí Grimesova rodina. Jednotlivé kapitoly se zaměřují postupně na každého člena rodiny. Přibližují jejich minulost a vypráví příběhy o jejich migraci. Dva členové rodiny, John a Roy, se narodili již v New Yorku a o migraci a otroctví znají pouze z vyprávění a z knih. Tato skutečnost se pak promítá i do jejich názorů, kterými se výrazně liší od ostatních členů rodiny a to především v otázce hodnocení bělochů.

Jádrem třetí kapitoly je kniha autora Williama Attawaye, *Blood On The Forge*. Dílo dává čtenářům zcela odlišný pohled na to, jaký život měla černošská komunita ve městech průmyslového severu. Hlavními protagonisty jsou tři bratři, kteří žijí jednoduchý život zemědělských pachtýřů. Poté, co se jeden z bratrů dostane do konfliktu s bělošským mužem (trestem za odpor v takových situacích bylo ve většině případů zbičování či dokonce smrt), jsou bratři nuceni nasednout na vlak a odjet na sever. Jejich motivací není jen útěk před hrožícím nebezpečím, ale také naděje na lepší život. Na severu se stanou však otroky jiného systému a jsou nuceni tvrdě pracovat v ocelárně. Kniha podrobně líčí životní osudy jednotlivých bratrů, jejichž životy jsou postupně ovládány prací a systémem.

Čtvrtá a zároveň poslední kapitola je věnována knize *Jule* autora George W. Hendersona. Hlavní protagonista jménem Jule opustí svůj domov ze stejného důvodu jako bratři z předešlé knihy. Jule se dostane do konfliktu s bělochem a jediné východisko pro něj je únik do bezpečí severu. Avšak, oproti ostatním postavám z předešlých knih, Jule se rychle přizpůsobí způsobu městského života a při tom si zachová morální a etické hodnoty, které získal během života v rodném městě. Kniha je rozdělena na dvě části, přičemž ta první se odehrává na jihu v rodném městě v Alabamě. Popisuje jižanský, prostý, život černošské komunity. Druhá část se pak soustředí na životní styl severu a překážky, které Jule musí každodenně překonávat.

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