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The Representation of African Americans in Post-Civil War American Literature

Výskyt afroameričanů v americké literatuře psané po občanské válce

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Abstract

The major point of this Bachelor thesis is to point out the situation of African-Americans in Post-Civil War age according to their Representation in the literature written during the Reconstruction era. On the basis of three novels written by black or white authors, the issues concerning the former slaves are described into details here. There are used many examples and quotations from the novels *A Fool's Errand* written by Albion W. Tourgée in 1879, *The House behind the Cedars* by Charles W. Chesnutt in 1900 and *Iola Leroy* written by a black woman called Frances E. W. Harper in 1892. Focusing on the situation of characters in the novels, the work depicts the real situation of colored people in United States, after they were formally given their civil rights and were released to freedom. This main subject of the work also includes a few lower topics as family relations of the blacks, coexistence of two races at one place, "passing" black people with fair skin as whites, mixing of the two races and its consequences, the low chances of the blacks on getting accepted to the white community, the struggle for proving that colored people are capable of doing same work as the whites and also dealing with low education and the with racist organizations.

Anotace

Hlavním bodem této bakalářské práce je poukázat na situaci afroameričanů v době po občanské válce vzhledem k jejich výskytu v literatuře psané v období rekonstrukce. Jsou zde popsány problémy týkající se černochoů a to na základě tří románů napsaných černými nebo bílými autory. Je zde uvedeno mnoho příkladů a citací z novel *A Fool's Errand* napsanou Albionem W. Tourgém v roce 1879, *The House behind the Cedars* od Charlese W. Chesnutta z roku 1900 a *Iola Leroy* napsanou černou ženou jménem Frances E. W. Harper v roce 1892. Se zaměřením na situaci postav v knihách, tato práce popisuje skutečnou situaci černochoů ve Spojených Státech po tom, co jim byla formálně udělena občanská práva a byli propuštěni na svobodu. Toto hlavní téma práce také zahrnuje několik nižších témat jako například rodinné vztahy černochoů, soužití dvou ras na jednom místě, černochoy, kteří se vydávají za bílé, míchání dvou ras a jeho následky, malé šance černých ohledně asimilování do komunity bílých, snaha prokázat, že černí lidé jsou schopni dělat stejné věci jako bílí a také vypořádání se s nízkou vzdělaností a s rasistickými organizacemi.

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1. Introduction

This work tries to analyse the issues of Afro-American people in Post-Civil-War age.

Three books from either black or white authors used to serve as examples for the overview of situation of colored people during the war and subsequently during the reconstruction period.

Main aim of the thesis dwells in getting closer to the feelings and thoughts of long enslaved colored people, who were suddenly given a “freedom”. It also contains a little about the history of American Civil War and the progressively changing behaviour of white people towards the blacks. There are brief descriptions of concrete novels, their authors and their purposes to write the book or similarities of their lives with some of the characters in their novels.

The thesis is then divided into four chapters when each of the first three is analysing the particular novel and the fourth is conclusion and comparison of the novels and stating the whole view of problems of Afro-Americans in the Post-Civil War age.

In *The House behind the Cedars* the major subject was the situation of siblings with mixed blood and with fair skin who were trying to “pass” as whites. The work also pursues next issues as for example the attitude of white people to blacks and the law which was forbidding marriage between whites and blacks. Next question which needed to be answered was a different behaviour of the main characters and their stance towards slavery, but also their interaction with each other.

The analysis of the second novel *A Fool's Errand* is aimed at different themes such as the actual fighting of people of the pro-slavery opinion against not only colored people, but also against people who tried to help the blacks in their uneasy situation and did activities to support them. Main hero of this novel was the person who really tried to help black people and the topics solved in that chapter are displayed on his example. He lived through the

situations which really give us the view of the mood on the South of the United States back there. The chapter dwells with the characters and thinking of people of both sides (North and South), with family relationships, with pride of both colored and white men and with establishing racist organizations, where the most known is the Ku Klux Klan which was well described in the novel.

In the last novel *Iola Leroy* the work follows the track of main protagonist Iola and all her relatives in order to watch the phenomenon of slavery. This particular novel has three lines of time, so we can closely look at the situation before, during and after the Civil War and we can compare the standards of living for the blacks in each of these phases. Of the three novels *Iola Leroy* actually really shows an example of dealing with problems of black people by displaying a meeting where the educated people who were in favour of the colored people among with a few colored people solved their issues by the plan for education of black children and by attempts to remedy their race.

The final part compares the major issues of the three novels and it sets the conclusion of the whole work.

1.1. A Brief View on a Situation after the American Civil War

American Civil War is the most famous war conflict related to the United States. Separated states of Confederation fought besides other things for not abolishing slavery, but when General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, all hopes of the Confederation were lost. Important deed concerning the slavery was the signing of Emancipation Proclamation by president of the United States Abraham Lincoln in 1863. From that time the black people in the States of the Union started to join the army and to help north to win, so the abolition of slavery could be valid in all the States the USA. Three and a half millions of colored people were officially released to freedom by Emancipation Proclamation.

Nevertheless when the Civil War ended the biggest question was: What to do with the economically destroyed South? The Reconstruction was the answer. Northern politics in the beginning thought that it will be an easy task, but then, more issues came out: Should be the leaders of Confederation judged from treason? Who will pay the economic reconstruction of the South? What to do with liberated slaves? Should we give them land, social equality, education and a ballot?

Black people (especially on the South) were not in an easy situation, although they were happy to have their freedom. They were not educated, they were not acknowledged with politics, they were hated by their white neighbours. The reason why the whites did not like them was very simple: They did not want to suddenly be friends with someone who used to be their slave or with someone who is voting against their favourite political party.

The fact is that the blacks had got law to vote, but they actually did not know who they should vote for, so some of them just sold the vote to someone who wanted to change the election in his favour. That was too bad for the blacks, because in some States the voting was very close and it were the votes of the colored people what turned the result in one

side's benefit. However, in 1890s political leaders and governors of some States tried to set a new law which would somehow forbid black people to vote. They could not simply forbid it because the fifteenth amendment of the Constitution did not allow it, so they thought up the other way of changing a vote system, where the blacks were rapidly disadvantaged and this idea was accepted in several states of the South. That led to emigration of the colored people mostly to the northern States, where they were not so restricted.

Apart from the black people there was also one type of people typical for Post-Civil War period. They were called „carpetbaggers“ who were mostly war veterans who came from the North to South because of a vision of new economic opportunities and „scalawags“ who were white republicans of the South and who were even more hated than carpetbaggers.

In 1866 the Ku Klux Klan was established in the State of Tennessee. It was an organization which bothered colored people and also white republicans. Ku Klux Klan fast spread out into all Southern States. Its members were hiding behind masks and long robes and sometimes they tended to violence and vandalism. It was not an exception when they killed someone of the blacks or even white, if it was someone who did not comply with their political intentions. In 1871 was announced a new law concerning Ku Klux Klan and it declared typical activities of the Klan as illegal.

That was pretty much everything important about the situation of Post-Civil War age and the following chapters of the thesis will try to look on the examples of issues related to abovementioned most known facts. ¹

¹ Tindall, George B., Shi, David E., Dějiny Spojených Států Amerických, p. 346-375.

1.2. Post-Civil War authors and literature

Colored people became a favourite topic in literature during the Post-Civil War era. In addition some of educated black people also started to write; it was not immediately after the war, but decades later. Black people were a bit scared to publish a book at first and even if they were not, the publishers would not publish their book right after their release on the slavery because of lasting racist mood in some parts of the USA.

Albion W. Tourgée (1838-1905) was not only writer, but also a Radical Republican and soldier in the Civil War (he fought at the First Battle of Bull Run) and a civil rights activist. His most important literary works were *A Fool's Errand* and its sequel *Bricks without Straw* and both of them became best-sellers. He was one of the abovementioned „carpetbaggers“ as he moved from the North to the South. This author was also a Republican-installed superior court judge (1868-1874) who confronted the increasingly violent Ku Klux Klan, which was very powerful in his district and repeatedly threatened his life.

He sympathized with the blacks and reflected his thoughts and feelings on the main character of *A Fool's Errand*, as it can be seen on using the surname „Servosse“ of French origin for the protagonist.²

Next author **Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932)** had a mixed blood in his veins and was a political activist as well as Tourgée. The Post-Civil War South was the major subject of his novels and short stories. Chesnutt aims on racial and social identity and mixed-race slaves in the complex society of the South. He became active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, writing articles supporting education as well as legal challenges to discriminatory laws.

Chesnutt was only one-eighth black, but still he considered himself as a mixed person. He identifies himself with the main character of *The House behind the Cedars* in a few things.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albion_Tourgée

John Walden was also one-eighth black, had white father and was a „free person of color“ as well as his mother.³

Only female author of the three **Frances E. W. Harper (1825-1911)** was also mixed race writer. Apart that she was also an abolitionist and her novel *Iola Leroy* was her only novel, which she wrote at the age of 67. Her main works consisted of poems and short stories. In 1853 she joined the American Anti-Slavery Society and became a travelling lecturer for the group. In 1854 Harper delivered her first anti-slavery speech on “Education and the Elevation of Colored Race”. She often read her poetry at the public meeting, including the extremely popular *Bury Me in a Free Land*.

Harper was orphaned when she was three years old. Her uncle Rev. William Watkins, who raised her with his wife, was a civil rights activist and became the major influence on her life and work. Iola Leroy, the main character of the novel by the same name, was definitely a person, whom the author had transferred many of her own qualities. Her will for helping the black race and her reasonable thinking is undeniable. Although Iola Leroy was her only novel, Harper managed to put so much of her thoughts and feelings and she simply explained her way of thinking about issues of black minority through made up story with a not so realistic happy end.⁴

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Chesnutt

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frances_Harper

2. *The House behind the Cedars* (1900)

Many difficult yet interesting thematic issues are expressed about the situation of black people in the novel *The House behind the Cedars*, the first of eight published novels by Charles W. Chesnutt. The main issue is whether a black woman and a white man (coming from a good family) could marry without jeopardizing their social position in the post-Civil War age. One reason why they could not was that it was against the law in certain countries. Other issue which the author meant to depict was an endeavour of black people who looked lighter than the others to “pass” for white and in this very novel it was the situation for two siblings called John and Rena.

2.1. Slavery

A number of blacks (e.g. two main characters of the novel, John and Rowena Warwick) had never been slaves and did not live in poverty because their antecedents were successful or someone of the white people may have taken care of them. They could remain silent about their African origin and their black ancestors. Of course there were also many poor people among the whites, so it depended on where they were born, whether they had a rich family or not, whether they were intelligent enough to build a good position for themselves and plenty of other variables that were important in this issue of social class.

The opportunities for them were much better than for blacks. Blacks did not have many opportunities for work, so they could not climb up the social ladder and most of them were not accepted by whites. Formally they were free and got some citizenship rights as the white people, but most still could not vote and in fact they were still kind of slaves. At least the majority of white people treated them as if they still were slaves.

There was one side character in the story, whose words express perfectly the example of people who did not like „niggers“ at all. Doctor Green spoke with George Tryon in his office. He spoke about his office boy named Dave and talked generally about all black people:

„The niggers are getting mighty trifling since they’ve been freed. Before the war, that boy would have been around there and back before you could say Jack Robinson; now, the lazy rascal takes his time just like a white man“. ⁵

In the last words the person practically said that it is absolutely usual for white people to be lazy, but it is not acceptable when his black office boy is lazy. For this man and many others, blacks were still unofficially slaves regardless of some changed law. It might be true that being a doctor’s office worker and forgetting to pass him a message about a very ill lady could lead to her death, but it is really not a matter of skin color, but rather skills and intelligence. Doctor Green had his unchangeable opinion on black people. In the novel some people were not touched by the change of the law, the people, who kept their hatred for blacks and would hate them under any circumstances.

Another side character in this story, Frank Fowler, was a former slave along with his family. Although he was entirely black, Chesnutt describes him as a very kind-hearted person, who helps Rena’s mother for no salary and who is able to loyally love a woman. He also has much better features than most of other-colored men in the novel such as the white man named George Tryon or the mulatto named Jeff Wain. George Tryon met Rena’s student Plato and tried to persuade him to arrange meeting for him and Rena :

“I think, Plato, that I see an easier way out of the difficulty. Your teacher, I imagine, merely wants some one to see her safely home. Don’t you think, if you should go part of the way, that I might take your place for the rest, while you did my errand? “⁶

Tryon tried to pay for an opportunity to walk Rena home and he made up the story that he needed a letter to be delivered by Plato. That would not be so immoral, but there had been

⁵ CHESNUTT, Charles. The House behind the Cedars, p. 73.

⁶ CHESNUTT, Charles. The House behind the Cedars, p. 179.

two letters written between Tryon and Rena before this event. In the last letter Rena answered that it would be best for everyone if she and Tryon would not see each other and that he should forget her and the whole relationship.

The former mother-in-law of Jeff Wain told Rena who Wain really was and what he was capable of:

“Oh yes – Aunt Nancy. She’s a good enough woman, but we don’t think much of her son Jeff. He married my Amanda after the war – she used to belong to me, and ought to have known better. He abused her most shamefully, and had to be threatened with the law. She left him a year or so ago and went away; I haven’t seen her lately.”⁷

Then Rena tried to interrupt the contact between herself and Wain, because she did not want to end like Amanda. Chesnutt pointed to good qualities of people, no matter what color their skin is.

2.2. Changing Identities

Some light-skinned black people tried to live their lives differently by changing their identities and getting involved among „the white folks“. John „Warwick“ successfully changed his identity and passed as white. After some years, he arranged the same for his sister Rena. They managed to change their lives to a much higher standard than they would ever get as blacks. They stuck to the plan including acting and speaking like white people and not to tell anyone about their true origin and they did very well for some time.

Some black people had been lucky enough to have light skin, so they could pass for white and start a new and much better life. These people had to forget their true families and origin in order to have a normal life whereas white people, the majority of the population still had the same advantages in a career, marriage etc.

⁷ CHESNUTT, Charles. The House behind the Cedars, p. 164.

The hiding of identity meant a lot more than just changing your name and making up a fake story about one's family. That person has to change almost everything about him; he had to give up his former life and learn how to live by the rules of the majority group, which hates black people. He has to be very careful about not telling the secret and not even hint to someone, or else he would be revealed. In the both before and Post-Civil War times it was not something absolutely unthinkable for light-skinned blacks, who had the opportunity. On the other hand, it is nothing unusual nowadays as well.

Rena and John in the story made someone else (white people) of themselves and mainly they managed to be in such a position that the white people could not find out that they were black, and they were brilliantly careful about what they said and did. After one of the first social events among white people John had a little speech with Rena:

“Well, Rena,” said Warwick, when they found themselves alone, “you have arrived. Your *début* into society is a little more spectacular than I should have wished, but we must rise to the occasion and make the most of it. You are winning the first fruits of your opportunity. You are the most envied woman in Clarence at this particular moment, and, unless I am mistaken, will be the most admired at the ball to-night.”⁸

Rena became one of the most favourite women in the town in South Carolina where she moved with her brother. She had to learn how to be careful about what she said and she also had to learn how to act in a higher society than she was used to. John convinced whites in a train trip in North Carolina of his status easily:

It was learned that he was a South Carolina lawyer, and not a carpet-bagger. Such credentials were unimpeachable, and the passengers found him a very agreeable travelling companion.⁹

John Warwick had to think his story through very well, so every person would believe that he had nothing in common with blacks. He made up his lie so brilliantly that no one suspected him of being a man of darker skin. Black people may improve their lives by

⁸ CHESNUTT, Charles. *The House behind the Cedars*, p. 38.

⁹ CHESNUTT, Charles. *The House behind the Cedars*, p.28.

changing identities by losing their former lives and relations with their families. In both cases, these individuals had a very difficult life and they always missed something, whether it was their true family, friends and origin or the chance to make a socially admired, carefree life.

2.3. Men and Women

The plot centres on unfulfilled love between a black woman and a white man. George Tryon had no idea that Rowena Warwick was really Rena Walden with black ancestors. He was really happy with her and could not imagine a better woman. If he had not found it out, they could have lived a long and „happy“ life only with one big secret, which may have caused trouble to Rena every day. She lived through a very intense inner fight with questions like: „Would he still marry me if he knew? “¹⁰ When her doubts were right, she could not stand the idea of spending her whole life with a man who did not know her past or where she came from. However, she might also jeopardize her brother’s much improved social and financial position. He had tried so hard to get her and himself where they were and she wanted to risk their future with one question, which would satisfy her conscience. Could her brother forgive her potential ruining of his new life? Probably they should not tell anyone about their origins so that others would never discover their secret. The social position of African-Americans was not good at all and it was illegal for a white gentleman to marry a black woman.

On the other hand, George Tryon was very scared when he found out that girl of his dreams had one inexcusable “flaw”. Yet, no one chooses one’s parents or eye color. However Tryon changed his opinion on spending time with this black woman, but he wanted to see her only in other circumstances, in another town. He wanted them both to move to another town and he wanted to keep her origin as a secret because in another town the two would be the

¹⁰ CHESNUTT, Charles. The House behind the Cedars, p.50

only people who would know the truth. Even if these two had loved each other, they had had a social block to have normal life together. Rena thought that if Tryon would truly love her, he would not leave her just for the reason that she is black, so she decided to not pass any longer but to stay with her own people and started to work as a teacher. Tryon wanted to leave her at first, but then he found out that Rena is practically his neighbour. His passion for Rena was in a moment greater than ever before and he became obsessed with her. It was not the passion for love, but it had rather sexual character. He had followed her until she died, and although he managed to send her letters and afterwards he met her for a short moment and told her a lie about what he felt, in order to have sex with her, it was already too late for him.

People should know who are they marrying, but in this horrible social position and still strong racism in the south, it would have been best for the young woman if she had kept her secret. What matters is whether two people love each other and whether they want to marry each other. Real love includes the ability to do anything to make the other person happy. It is important to know the personality and character of that person.

The matter of origin and ancestors is not above these factors, so people should not care about it so much as they did in the 19th century. However back then it was a different age and people did not think about black people as we do today. Maybe the end and result of the Civil War made their hatred against blacks even greater.

2.4. Behaviour of Races

Chesnutt mixed morals of the characters so that nothing would overwhelmingly mark black or white people as „the bad ones“. Better and worse people of every group are described in the novel in an anti-racist language. The behaviour of one race to another should have been changed by the end of the war, but it changed only officially. Racism did not end from one day to the next day.

The author displayed these kinds of black people in the novel: 1) Frank Fowler, who is very polite and nice to everyone although he had been a slave before. He is also loyal and tried to save the life of Rena. 2) Jeff Wain, a rich mulatto who pretended to be proper, but he turns out to be violent and tried to seduce and rape Rena. 3) The Waldens siblings, who were trying to use the opportunity to pass as white, although they were very kind people and they did certainly not mean to do harm to anyone.

Chesnutt shows that black people could just have as high a moral behaviour as white people.

In the novel it is very interesting for Rena how white people could be so polite to her. At the chivalry tournament, when ladies started to talk, one of the knights bowed to her and afterwards told her that she was really beautiful. She was absolutely not used to behaviour like this and had to be very careful not to reveal her true origin. At the annual ball, she was chosen „The Queen of Love and Beauty“ and everyone treated her like she was really a queen or at least some very high ranked white woman.

That could never happen in her life if she had not tried to run away with her brother, changed her identity, left her mother and learned the manners of white nobles.

3. *A Fool's Errand* (1879)

Apart from *The House behind the Cedars*, a different point of view about the post-slavery period and an effort to make white and black people live peacefully, side by side in one place is depicted. The issues in Tourgée's historical novel *A Fool's Errand* have a more political character and he dexterously inserted a story about situation of one small county in North Carolina and one man struggling with a situation of African-Americans into a consideration about the behaviour of people whose conditions changed rapidly after the Civil War. A little similarity with the preceding book include a love story between two people of different manners and origin, although in this one it is only a minor subplot and the people are not of different races.

3.1. The Character of Southerners

„Southern people“ in the Post Civil-War era, were viewed differently than today. Tourgée perfectly described both views in this novel – Southern people in the eyes of Northerners were just greedy land-owners. In their character, they were aggressive and hostile to everyone who wanted to comment on business of owning slaves. Furthermore, they were traitors to the USA when they created a separate notion and engaged on a war against the USA. As slave masters, they worked slaves on their plantations without remuneration and they treated them very badly. Therefore „wise men“ tried to rescue these poor creatures and alter the greedy Southerners through the abolition of slavery, but that plan was not at all accepted without a fight in the South. The fact that Northerners had won the war and accomplished their plan to abolish slavery was completely satisfying for them and they did not care much about what would happen thereafter in the states where slavery was helpful to a big part of the population. They tried to prevent possible difficulties by the act of reconstruction and they expected everything would be in order.

The southern white perspective on slavery was almost the opposite. Most of them believed that black people were created by God in order to serve whites. They claimed that they did not treat their slaves as badly and cruelly as the northern people thought (of course there were some exceptions) and the slaves themselves did not have such bad conditions in most of the plantations and households. The Unionists tried to deny possession of slaves, which meant that Northerners tried to make the government give blacks rights in the Constitution. However, their lives would be much harder and of course they had to defend slavery, so the civil-war was unavoidable. It was absolutely unthinkable for them to let their slaves go and to coexist with them as if they were people deserving the same rights. When they did not succeed in the war and slavery was lawfully abolished with the 13th Amendment, they refused to live side by side with “Niggers”. They could naturally not converse and work with people who used to be their slaves. The most horrible fact that abolition brought with itself in their opinion was giving the ballot to these illiterate, unlearned black people, who were ignorant of the whole politics in their and any other county. Therefore the former masters forced their former slaves to vote for the same people they liked. Some white people tried to care for blacks and lead them to be independent. That could not be taken kindly by former Southern slave owners and they started to rebel against the equality of blacks by founding the secret organization called Ku Klux Klan, which filled the task of keeping black people on their level of living among the whites and to protect their business by scaring any black, who seemed to be capable of being a competitor to them.

3.2. Coexistence of Two Races

Comfort Servosse, whose French name plays with the author's name Albion Tourgée, fought on the south as a soldier on side of the union and afterwards he had to transfer to the south because of his health problems. He could be considered as very unskilled and unaware of situation which was present in the county of Rockford and its vicinity. He was one of the few men who decided to try to push through their opinions on the South and therefore the author gave him a nickname „Fool“ – because everything he did was not clever according to circumstances he could not know before. He made new friends among the white people as well as among the blacks. He decided to mentor the black and help them find their place in life after slavery. The white people whose origins were southern were not prepared that someone could help their former slaves. They took it very badly, some of them menacing Comfort via anonymous letters and when he did not worry about their threats, they tried to ambush him and they wanted him dead because he was too dangerous for them with regard to his ideas about blacks. He literally hazarded with his life only because he defended recently acquired civil laws of blacks. The Fool did not see a problem with coexistence between African-Americans and their former masters in one place and did not care much about these threats. He was new in this county and he could not feel the hatred that the Southerners did. They could not just accept the blacks among themselves as if they were regular friends or even people of the same class. They were proud of who they were and they would be greatly ashamed by taking these sub-humans as equals. People who sympathized with the blacks of this novel would hold a different opinion. They stood for their civil rights and tried to give them the same chance as white people.

This is an excerpt of a letter that was sent to Comfort as a warning from a “friend”, after some time he had been living in Warrington:

„You are encouraging the colored people to do those two things which are more sacred than any other to the Southern mind; to wit, to buy and hold land and to ride their own horses.

You can not understand why they should feel so, because you were never submitted to the same influences. “¹¹

It perfectly depicts the feeling of Southerners and it is a small explanation that a person who came from the North can not simply understand the thinking of these Southern men, who were angry about his deeds.

3.3. Different View on Slavery

Neither the Union, nor the Confederation could agree with the other side on the question of slavery. Different mental processes led to one of the main reasons of the Civil War. No side had admitted that they were wrong in their opinions, both were convinced that their truth was the right one and both side believed that they fight for the proper idea.

Northerners fought for the rights of the people who were not much different apart from the whites. They had only different skin color and they had a few different physical distinctions, but in substance, they were people just as the whites. They could not know how the land owners of the South would react. They could not even imagine how people who used slaves for their livelihood could feel about their opinion of equality.

Southerners defended their own life conditions. For them it was as if someone wanted to take a certain group of people a right to work or a right to talk with friends. It was a part of their lives and they could not stand the idea that this part should be suddenly taken away. They did not see their slaves as people of the same class, because they were accustomed that they were the superior race. It was not something they made up, but it was a part of being a Southerner, which was carried through generations.

Northern and Southern opinion on slavery diverged:

Northern idea of slavery: Slavery is wrong morally, politically, and economically. It is tolerated only for the sake of peace and quiet. The Negro is a man, and has equal inherent

¹¹ TOURGÉE, Albion. A Fool's Errand. p. 108, 109.

rights with the white race. Southern idea of slavery: The Negro is fit only for slavery. It is sanctioned by the Bible and it must be right; or, if not exactly right, is unavoidable, now that the race is among us. We can not live with them in any other condition.¹²

The feelings of these two sides led not only to war but to a status of irreconcilable differences after the conflict ended.

3.4. Family Relations

Servosse's wife and daughter were displayed as a mixture of both Northern and Southern „subculture“. His wife Metta evoked more of her northern origin, but she also learned something of the southern manners as they moved. On the other hand, Lily, his daughter, was raised and brought to womanhood after they had relocated their home. She was raised by a family of the North, but her surroundings were purely southern, so she got something of both sides and she was not purely one or another.

When Melville Gurney, a southern young man, fell in love with Comfort's daughter, he wanted to marry her although he knew that she was of a different origin and although his parents stood against it. His parents did not want to become relatives of people, who not only come from the North, but also stood on opposite political sides. Lily's parents took this issue not so seriously to discourage the young lovers to be happy together. Although Melville's father was convinced that he would never change his opinion, he met Lily one day and thought the whole relationship was over; he changed his mind and allowed them to be together, but it was already too late, because Comfort was just moving with his family back to the North.

The change of attitude of Mr. Gurney was very interesting indeed. He was very proud of being a Southerner and did not want to lose his honor by letting his son marry a „Yankee“. When he met the young girl, he realized that she was different from southern girls only in

¹² TOURGÉE, Albion. A Fool's Errand. p. 138.

origin. He admitted that it is a little bit selfish of him to not permit his son to be with the woman he wanted only because of some silly origin. He saw that she was well educated by her father and she would perfectly fit with his son. Her father had a different opinion on politics, but he was also a good man and politic opinion of parents was not something such terrible to stand the two lovers in their way.

Lily Servosse acted most honestly regarding the issue of northern-southern hostility, because she did not want Melville as her husband as long as his father would be against it. Melville did not care about his parents' opinion and could not understand why Lily would refuse him because of such a silly reason. Lily is displayed here to be wise, because she did not want to get her family to be displeased with other people, and also because she wanted to repay Mr. Gurney a favour he did once for her family.

The people of South and North had different points of view on relationships between themselves. In the end, this hostility was pointless and the people struggling to keep their honor on some level by being very conservative were not so clever, when we look on it from today's point of view. In post Civil War era however, they thought, that their honour is the most important possession, and when a person loses his means of living, he sticks more closely to the remaining ones.

3.5. Public and Secret Organizations

Tourgée pointed out the fact that there were organizations, not exclusively in southern states, which disagreed with giving human rights to black people. The most known today is Ku Klux Klan, which is probably also the most extreme one. Their dissatisfaction with the result of the Civil War forced them to make a secret organization to keep colored people at very low level of living and to scare them and tell them what to do. It grew until they began to cruelly massive killing them. Part of their organization displayed in the book proved that the

people in it were not thinking about human rights. None of them therefore admitted their mistake and some of them joined this organization just because their friends were in it.

Another organization mentioned in the book was „the Regulators“, which acted before Ku Klux Klan and their deeds were only threatening people, who might help colored people to have better chances, but the level of their hostility was not as big as later founded Ku Klux Klan.

Some organizations attempted to make better standards of living for black people and Comfort Servosse was the leader of them. His foolish attempts (in the eyes of the people who knew better the circumstances and situation on the South) were motivated by the organizations such as The Regulators and the Ku Klux Klan who on turn started working and acting more brutally than they would if there had not been any organizations and beneficial to blacks. If there was nobody among the black or white people, who tried to raise the conditions of blacks, white people would be satisfied that the blacks not compete against their businesses and the blacks would continue to remain at the same level of servitude as they experienced during slavery.

4. Iola Leroy (1892)

Iola Leroy, a novel about a family which is separated throughout the story, manages to get together and everything ends happily.

Much more important issues include dealing of blacks with the law, their will to fight for freedom and solving the problem of education of colored people after the war. Frances E. W. Harper sets the novel in longer period which gives a more specific view on the changing situation concerning not only for the enslaved family, but other important issues in the United States.

The author projected her own attributes to main protagonist – Iola Leroy. She wanted to tell her thoughts to the society and she decided to do it by means of a novel.

4.1. Participation of Afro-Americans in the War

The first few chapters in the novel were dedicated to the situation during the Civil War. Slaves were not allowed to read, to discuss with others about the war, yet they found a way to inform themselves about the progress of war. Some of them were taught to read by their masters, some of them taught themselves and others just secretly listened to their masters and people around and even tried to read in expression of their faces and tried to catch any information about the war or political situation to share it with other enslaved people. One of examples could be a hidden speech of these colored people, when they at the very beginning of the novel metaphorically inform each other about the situation of Union soldiers (which was the side they obviously supported in the war):

“In conveying tidings of the war, if they wished to announce a victory of

The Union army, they said the butter was fresh, or that the fish and eggs were in good condition. If defeat befell them, then the butter and other produce were rancid or stale.”¹³

The specific group of colored people in the book established a secret organization which held meetings in hidden places like the woods in the night or at someone’s dwelling. They were very careful about being caught by their masters or other white people. They paid attention to have meetings only at certain time when no one could invade their privacy. They solved mostly their opportunities of helping Union soldiers even if their skills in manipulating with weapons and their numbers were very low to help.

There were several characters in the story which had a lesser or greater will to join the Union Army. Uncle Daniel, an older slave of a person who treated him well, decided to stay at home, because he was really loyal to his master, he had a very close connection with him. The biggest reason was that his master had nursed him in the past and also simply he did not want to join the conflict, because his situation was not as bad as the situation of other slaves. Other young slaves as Robert Johnson or Tom Anderson, who were not as close to their masters and freedom was a priority for them, uncompromisingly wanted to take a chance to join the war. Other colored people from their organization hesitated about leaving their wives or taking them with themselves to the war.

Their attempts to join the war consisted in taking part in fighting and to gain freedom for them, because it was their biggest priority. When the Union Army came close to their town, they decided to go over to them and fight against Southern people and in fact against the slavery. Tom Anderson, who was one of the most acquainted person with the town and its surroundings, but not so skilful in the fighting, was so dedicated to fight against their oppressors that he put his life on the line in order to save life of the more experienced soldiers

¹³ Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. *Iola Leroy*, p. 7-8

and this great effort to help his side to win the battle was grounded in his immense hatred of slavery.

Robert Johnson, a man with a fair skin, was also very dedicated to abolitionism and was so proud of his race that he declined a suggestion to become promoted in the army and to pass as white, which would make him such an easier life in the future. He had a little speech with one of the Union officers about his future:

“Johnson,” said a young officer, Captain Sybil, of Maine, who had become attached to Robert, “what is the use of your saying you’re a colored man, when you are as white as I am, and as brave a man as there is among us. Why not quit this company, and take your place in the army just the same as a white man? I know your chances for promotion would be better.” “Captain, you may doubt my word, but to-day I would rather be a lieutenant in my company than a captain in yours.”¹⁴

4.2. Importance of Family for Colored People

The separated story of Iola Leroy, main character who was from one quarter or less (it was not specified in the novel) black girl with light skin, was based on desperate need of finding her long lost family members. Harper appropriately depicted her feelings during forced separation from her mother and brother. She also detailed her sorrow in the time she was informed that her father was dead and that she has colored blood in her veins, although she had been living the whole life with the conviction that she is purely white. She also had defended slavery, during her studies on the North, because her opinion on it was good according to what she had on the South at the place of her home. One of her friend at the university, where she had studied, asked her about her opinion on slavery:

“No; I don’t think these Abolitionists have any right to meddle in our affairs. I believe they are prejudiced against us, and want to get our property. I read about them in the papers when I was at home. I don’t want to hear my part of the country run down. My father says the slaves would be very well contented if no one put wrong notions in their heads.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. *Iola Leroy*, p. 32-33.

¹⁵ Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. *Iola Leroy*, p. 74.

During her voluntary aid in the hospital on the side of the Northern Army, she met Robert Johnson, with whom she was related. She was determined to find her mother after the war and the abolishment of slavery and finding a brother of her mother was the first step on her journey. Although she hated slavery as much as other colored people in the Army, her priority was finding of her mother and brother. Therefore she was absolutely happy when she found out that her uncle is going to search for family members with her.

The second important storyline related to Iola's brother, Harry. He was as well as Iola separated from his family with the difference that he did not have to be a slave, because he remained on the North where he had studied. Nevertheless he had the same goal as Iola – to find his mother and sister. He joined the Union Army in hopes that he could get nearer to them and find them. His mother fortunately found him in the hospital when he was convalescing from a wound he suffered in one of the battles and soon after the war they moved to their former home and happily lived together. His mother had such a strong relationship with him that later when she moved to the South with the rest of her family and Harry had to stay in the North for a while to finish some of his business, she was physically ill because of missing Harry.

Iola's whole family suffered by their forced separation what had only one reason: slavery. Therefore they actively engaged the fight against this humiliating institution and the most important thing in the world was to meet their relatives. The fact that they were detached from others from their family built a very strong attachment to them in their hearts. They loved and admired each other much more than if they were together their whole lives. They esteemed spending their time with relatives, because at certain point all of them thought that they may never see their family again.

4.3. Three Views on Possibilities of Black People

There are three main periods in the novel. She briefly described the situation of Iola and her parents long before the Civil War. Then there is a close look on currently progressing war. In the later part of the book the fates of main characters are depicted after the War and after the formal change of the slavery according to the law, but also a close look to the behaviour of white people to the colored ones.

Iola's father fell in love with his slave, because she saved his life. He decided to take the risk and marry her, although his friends and his cousin told him he was insane. He chose not to tell his children of their real origin (their mother had fair skin, so they could not have a clue that they all have „tainted“blood). Their chances were pretty good in their potential future, but everything was thwarted when their father died of a yellow fever and his cousin arranged annulling of the marriage of their parents. Therefore they were remanded back to slavery and ineligible of the whole inheritance. The shock for Iola and Harry must have been absolutely huge and their lives changed absolutely upside down. The possibilities they had when they thought they were white were gone and Iola had to get use to be a slave and Harry was forced to stay on the North, otherwise he would also have been enslaved. Their chances rapidly changed and their lives seemed to never be the same as before.

A period during the war is displayed is not somehow long, it only displays detailed look on how Afro-American group of the novel joined the Union army and therefore fought on their side during the rest of the war. Their chances of getting their freedom were the most important matter at the time and they wanted to use the opportunity to help Northern soldiers win and take part in abolition of slavery. During the war, the mood and meaning of life changed a bit because there occurred some hope, that one day, they would be free. That hope in their minds caused their enormous enthusiasm for joining the war and for actually doing

something, which they never before could such as fighting for better lives for them, their families and their whole race.

Although the slavery was abolished and all slaves were formally free and equal to the whites, the situation was not as bright as it seemed. The blacks were formally free and had the same opportunities as the whites, but practically they were still oppressed and the change was only on paper. The white people treated them without respect and even when the law was changed, they did not want colored people among themselves. At the meeting, which was held in order to solve issues of blacks, Iola described a situation with racist subtext:

"I have seen," continued Iola, "the same spirit manifested in the North. Mamma once attempted to do missionary work in this city. One day she found an outcast colored girl, whom she wished to rescue. She took her to an asylum for fallen women and made an application for her, but was refused. Colored girls were not received there. Soon after mamma found among the colored people an outcast white girl. Mamma's sympathies, unfettered by class distinction, were aroused in her behalf, and, in company with two white ladies, she went with the girl to that same refuge. For her the door was freely opened and admittance readily granted." ¹⁶

Even after the change of the law and after release of colored people to freedom, the situation was not much different. Black people still remained a minority; they were outcasts, they were people with whom no one of the "pure blood" wanted to be friends or even to be in the same room.

4.4. Future Life of the Blacks

At the last few chapters of the novel, Iola and several people who were interested about what could be the best for their oppressed community held a meeting, where they tried to solve issues such as illiteracy. They found out that white people were not correct to them, but they still had reasons to put handcuffs on them and get them to the gallows for crimes they had not committed. Many opinions about education of mothers and children of their race were

¹⁶ Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. *Iola Leroy*, p. 175.

expressed at the meeting. They realised that it was not only injustice which made trouble to their race, but they also accepted the fact that their people did some crimes and had to be remedied or they really deserved to be punished.

Iola began to think up a plan to help mothers with educating their children and with setting their children on a right path. Although she was one of the few who were willing to actually take part in changing the whole look on a black community, she was really determined to help her people.

Her will came out from hardness of her life and from her experience. She tried to live among the white people and she also suffered from being enslaved. She was torn apart from her mother shortly after the death of her father and she had to face two big shocks in one moment. At the certain point of her life, she conveyed her wishes:

"I wish I could do something more for our people than I am doing. I taught in the South till failing health compelled me to change my employment. But, now that I am well and strong, I would like to do something of lasting service for the race."¹⁷

Iola started to teach in Sunday school for black children in order to help her race get closer the level of education of white people. She also tried to persuade some people of her community that Negroes needed to be taught to behave politely and that committing crimes is something bad. Her intention was to raise the black race to higher level of society and it should also prove that colored people are capable of the same work as white people.

¹⁷ Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. Iola Leroy, p. 197.

5. Conclusion

Although each of the three novels has a different main theme, they all perfectly go together in order to display the whole situation of the black people in the United States. Their side topics are mostly similar, because the authors were all in favour of colored people.

Two of the novels included a story of a tragic mulatto, person who is not black (because of the fair skin), neither white (because of his blood mixture). Only Tourgée in *A Fool's Errand* distinguished mainly between blacks and whites, he did not mention whether the black people of his story were of a mixed race or anything. However, *The House behind the Cedars* is nicely dealing with that issue of people who are black in their origins, but white in their appearance. Chesnutt described „passing“ as whites on the two main characters in his story. It was not an easy decision for colored people, but when someone with qualities of white people had the opportunity to make his life more wealthy and joyful, he took the chance and „passed“ as white. However, it brought many troubles to the person who did it. He had to stop seeing his family, he had to be somewhere when no one knew him and the most important, and he had to suppress the racial pride. In *Iola Leroy* occurs only people who are given the chance of „passing“, but they disagree with it and the main reason is that the characters in Harper's book are very proud (As well as the author) and did not want to give up their people. Two examples on the same thing, one opposite to the other, but both are very well justified.

The question of the slavery is being solved in all of the three novels. Tourgée shows it in the light of the Northern man, but at the later part of the book, he considered also the Southern situation and their look on enslaving of the black people. Chesnutt showed that there were also a good number of free black people, who had white relatives or big amount of wealth, so they had not to be slaves. Also his character Frank Fowler represented typical enslaved, black-skinned person, but the author tried to show that also these people could have

good heart and be nice inside, even if they were illiterate. Harper used the advantage of having her novel written in three time periods, although she did not mention any free blacks before and during the war. But her way of describing the way her characters were remanded to slavery was really approaching the reader to the reality of that time.

Family issues of colored people were more or less written about in all three novels. Tourgée did not put family on the first place, his protagonist had a wife and daughter, but except one of the last chapters everything what he had written about his family relations was only compulsory for the story to be a complex one. Apart from Tourgée, Chesnutt and Harper did really place emphasis on family as the most important part of the novel. Harper's main theme was nothing else than looking for family members and finding them step by step. She perfectly depicted a love between family members, especially after they had been torn apart from each other. Their devotion and will to be with other family members certainly came from the fact that the author did miss her biological parents (she was orphaned at the age of 3). Chesnutt's major theme was not the family, but he also described the devotion of a daughter to his mother. However there was also a son-mother relationship and although they both loved each other, it was not so intense for the son and he managed to separate from his mother and his sister in the vision of better life for him. He wanted the best for his family so he persuaded his sister to „pass“ as white with him, but she was much more attached to her mother and also very sensitive, so she was not the right choice for him. But she belonged to his family and he wanted to do the best for his family.

The last issue solved on all three novels was coexistence of white and black people in one place and attitude of one group to the other. Tourgée took this issue as one of the main in *A Fool's Errand* and he also added there a view on racist or pro-slavery organizations, where the Ku Klux Klan was the best known. Chesnutt depicted rather attitude of white people to the blacks through the person of George Tryon, who discovered that his love, who he had thought

was white, had actually a mixed blood. The author displayed his feelings and also behaviour after the discovery. A short part of the book including the interview of Dr.Green with George Tryon depicted typical racist attitude of most of the white people on the South after the Civil War. Harper solved this issue in the final part of the book, where Iola and other people held the meeting for solving future of the black race and they said many examples of colored people being oppressed by the whites.

Nevertheless, these three novels display the very authentic situation in United States (mostly in the South) in Post-Civil War era. Every of these three authors inserted something of himself or his thoughts in his book and on that account we can assume that the situation was just like they have described it.

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