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This use of the vernacular form supports our claim as it is regarded as "a linguistic legacy of slavery and years of isolation" (Diringer & Oszewski A17). This tendency on the part of Parks "has been vilified by some African Americans for being incomprehensible" (Elam and Rayner 275, cited in Johung 40). Yet, this has helped her to "make up a world uniquely hers" (Fraden 39). This strangeness in the use of language by Parks takes us back to the time when blacks were obliged to learn English and forget about their African cultural heritage. As a result, they managed to learn the distorted vernacular form not the refined one used by whites.

To wrap up, Parks's play *Topdog/Underdog* is a play that is filled throughout with both humanistic and racial issues as has been pointed out. Though the play is about two brothers who are in a physical and psychological strife to prosper in life, the struggle is further intensified, as we have seen, by the black color of their skin. Race for Parks, as it is for any other African American writer, is irresistible. The title of the play, its action, scheme of characterization, stage directions, and even the vernacular language used all have, in one way or another, racial associations. Parks has tried to evade addressing race-related topics, broadening them in a way that makes them applicable to humans unexceptionally. However, it seems that race has lain hidden in Parks's subconscious—the way it has in any other African American writer's subconscious—ready to pop up with no notifications.

Even the title *Topdog/Underdog* can be dealt with in a way that strongly sustains our claim as it is racially significant. Superficially, Lincoln can be regarded as the topdog as he is better than Booth, and he defeats Booth in the 3-card monte by the end of the play. Booth can surface as the underdog. What gives credit to this interpretation of the title is that Lincoln is the breadwinner, and he is always supportive of his brother. However, when delving deeper under the surface, it becomes more logical to regard both Lincoln and Booth as underdogs on one hand, and whites taken collectively as topdogs on the other. This view is fostered when we take into consideration the unbearable circumstances under which both brothers have been living. Moreover, Lincoln's repeated killings in the arcade should be considered to strengthen this view as a young man repeatedly humiliated cannot be taken to stand for the topdog. The claim that whites can stand for the topdogs is logical as they are in full control of the situation.

The language used by Parks in *Topdog/Underdog* is also supportive of our claim. Parks uses the vernacular form that is widely used in street talk by African Americans. This form is characterized by grammatical and spelling incorrectness as well as strange neologisms whose meanings can be grasped only with the help of their context. We can see just a few examples that appear in the quotation dealing with Booth's stealing, to say nothing of the innumerable ones that appear throughout the text:

Look around and sees=look around and see

Its yrs=it's yours

Theys stole=they are stolen

Just cause I ain't good as you at cards don't mean I cant do nothing=

Just because I am not so/as good as you at cards doesn't mean I can't do anything (in other contexts ain't means either isn't or aren't)

themselves. They should recognize that money is the root of all evil, if not well exploited and channeled. In this excerpt, even Booth uses the lexical item 'shit' and repeats it several times. This word is a slang word used in street talk to refer, in most cases, to something bad or disgusting. Additionally, his meanness is concretized as he has kept his money in good and bad times though he has been dependent upon his brother. Parks despises those people who tend to exploit others for their personal benefits. Furthermore, his self-centeredness is criticized. Throughout the play, Booth has been attempting to master the 3-card monte in order to take people's money. He knows well that this is nothing but cheating and gambling. Yet, he approves it once it is for his benefit. When he is defeated in the game by his brother and his money is taken from him, he does not accept the act and considers it an act of stealing. Preaching a moral lesson, Parks would like to say that people should do (to others) as they would like to be done by. If such sublime principles are considered, people will lead an idyllic and gratifying life.

However, Parks's moral vision in the concluding part can embrace race between its lines. Specifically, Parks's moral lesson in this part can be taken to refer to the type of relationship that should be established between blacks and whites. Whites should regard blacks their compatriots, and should not accept for them what they do not accept for themselves. They should know that racism is highly devastating for the whole nation. What validates the claim that racism is there till the play concludes is the act of killing. Booth's words vividly draw a picture of Booth the actor who killed Abraham Lincoln in reality. The actor, or rather the assassin, thought that the president deserved to be killed for the economic damage he caused to plantation owners. Similarly, Booth, in our play, kills his brother Lincoln for monetary reasons. The only difference is that in the play the killer and the killed are blacks and brothers.

even in, to use Frascella's words, "the play's bleak finale" (72). When Lincoln defeats his brother Booth and takes his money, which symbolizes his continuity in life, Booth does not hesitate to take his brother's life. When Lincoln "brings the knife down to cut the stocking" in which the money is wrapped, "Booth grabs Lincoln from behind" and "shoots" him (Parks 109).

After shooting his brother, Booth reveals what is inside him: "Think you can take my shit? My shit. That shit was mines. I kept it. Saved it... Through thick and through thin...You stole my *inheritance*, man. That aint right. That aint right and you know it" (Parks 110). In this part, Parks raises two important points. First, she warns humans against falling victims to materialistic desires most devastating of which is money idolization. It is clear that Booth kills his brother intentionally on-stage for the sake of money, an action intended by Parks. Whereas we are told formerly by Booth while speaking to his brother that he kills his beloved Grace because she treats him degradingly. Worthy to be commented on here is that Grace's killing takes place off-stage, an act also intended by Parks. When harmed emotionally, the act of killing is off-stage, but when his money is taken from him, the act takes place on-stage. Dietrick puts it: "In these last moments of the play, money takes on the full complement of its complex associations" (68). Money causes Booth to let the audience see him kill his brother. Inferably, money for Booth is much more important than emotions. That is the reason why he kills Grace off-stage and kills his brother on-stage. Important to note here is that the act of killing on-stage with "a gun lends a pat melodramatic inevitability" to the play (Harvey 43). We cannot resist shedding our tears when we see a young man killed by his own brother for money.

Second, Parks, taking the role of a moralist, laments the deterioration of relationships among human beings, in general, and relatives, in particular. Instead of struggling and killing one another, they should have mercy among

conducting their life accordingly henceforward. When Lincoln's act of discarding his original dress and wearing a white one instead is rationalized in view of what used to happen to his ancestors, it can be regarded as an act intended to uproot Lincoln's black identity completely and give him a false one that fits neither into the white community nor the black one.

Lincoln himself knows that he dresses in a way that amuses whites and reminds them of their superiority. In spite of being aware of the cultural and historical connotations of the dress, he wears it to earn a living and to help himself survive. What he feels is reflected in the following quoted lines:

People are funny about they Lincoln shit. Its historical. People like they historical shit in a certain way. They like it to unfold the way the folded it up. Neatly like a book... Every day I put on that shit, I leave my own shit at the door and I put on that shit and I go out there and I make it work. I make it easy but its hard. That shit is hard. But it works. Cause I work it (Parks 52).

Trying to avoid the reference to slavery and racism, Parks uses the word people. However, when we rationalize how the dress is historical, in what aspects it makes people pleased and why people want to uncover the story repeatedly, we will be quite sure that the word 'people' refers to white people. It is whites who get pleased when remembering their supremacy over blacks and seeing them treated degradingly. They want the entire removal of blacks' identity and this is concretized, as referred to earlier, in Lincoln's undressing of his and putting on of theirs. Just as a lot of blacks formerly accepted whites' subjugation and tyrannous treatment and tended to be submissive to continue living, Lincoln tends to undergo patiently the humiliating and emotionally excruciating role of an impersonator in the arcade for the same reasons.

Parks concludes the play in a way that supports her humanistic vision. Nevertheless, when we ruminate deeply, we will find out that race is irresistible

as it can be argued that the white people who participate in the act or enjoy watching it are still racists. If they were not, they would reject the act and refuse to participate in or even watch it saying that the 16th American president deserves to be celebrated and memorialized instead of being assassinated once and again. They are racists who are still much impacted by their racism-governed beliefs that blacks are inferior and deserve to be treated as bondservants. For them, president Lincoln bears full responsibility for setting these slaves free, an act they hated most and for which the president deserved what occurred to him in reality and what recurrently happens to him in the arcade. This is the philosophy that has been indoctrinated to whites for successive generations. Given that, we can tell that the play is replete, whether intentionally or unintentionally, with racism.

The arcade goers, either to kill Lincoln or see him being killed, know for sure that Lincoln is an impersonator but in reality he is a black young man. For them, he is no more than an insignificant creature that deserves to be relentlessly and blissfully shot. This reminds us of 'lynching', the most atrocious aspect of racism. White people used to tie a lot of blacks to a tree and get them killed for no obvious accusations. As a result of these atrocities, thousands of black people lost their lives then. That 'brutality' was considered a "manifestation of white supremacy" (Hine et al 318). In re-killing the black youth, the white people are repeating what their fathers used to do. If it has become impossible for whites to follow their ancestors' route in reality, they can do this in the arcade.

By taking off his clothes and getting dressed in white ones, Lincoln the impersonator helps us remember the moments when African slaves reached the American shores. They were painfully exposed to a 'seasoning process' to get them fit into the new life in America. In this in-human process, blacks were given European names, obliged to learn English and even ordered to dress in the way that appeals to whites. These acts were intended to force them forget everything about their African identity and willingly accept themselves as slaves and start

Several lexical items are used in this stage direction to intensify Lincoln's agony. The word 'recliner' which is used as a bed refers to Lincoln's abject poverty. So poor is he that he cannot get himself a bed to lie or sleep on. A comfortably slept night which is a basic necessity of any human being is impossible for him. His physical as well as psychological restlessness is made clear in waking and going back to sleep again. Lincoln's anguish is intensified by the use of 'horrific', 'bleary eyed', 'hungover' and 'full Lincoln regalia'. Out of exhaustion and lack of sleep, his eyes have become blurred or reddened. Being in Lincoln's dress has worn him out and caused him to be terrified as if he has been in a terrifying nightmare. The lexical items 'full Lincoln regalia' are significant as they stand for the emblems and symbols associated with presidency, and indirectly with constitutionalized slavery and racism. Consequently, getting dressed in president Lincoln's costume makes the remembrance of blacks' long ordeal in slavery and racism irresistible.

That is the reason why he does not feel at ease while having the dress on.

The word 'hungover' can be taken to mean that Lincoln has taken some alcoholic drinks to cope with his miserable state, but in vain. In so doing, Lincoln stands for the black people who resorted to drinking and drug addiction as a means of oblivion. It has been recorded that "the inhuman and demoralizing conditions of ghetto life caused some black people- especially the young- to turn to drugs as a means of escape" (Farrell& Johnson 70). These people mistakenly thought that this habit can gradually help them adjust themselves to the new environment with its unbearable conditions. The moral lesson that can be grasped here is that African Americans, instead of falling easy victims to such vices, should have searched for more practical solutions to their problems. Fighting such vices, killing frustration and working hard are the sole alternatives available for them to achieve prosperity.

Another point worthy of mentioning here is the repeated killing of Lincoln. Metaphorically, the repeatability of president Lincoln's assassination is indicative

dress on. Out of anger and resentment, he puts it off hard as if he were pulling something hard using his claws and that is why the dress gets torn.

Lincoln's psychological distress is further elaborated when he explicitly states his dislike saying: "Hate falling asleep in this damn shit" (Parks 54). His greatest desire is to get out of the costume as soon as he finishes the arcade as the dress, symbolically, reminds him of the suffering his ancestors endured and whose impact can still be clearly seen upon the life he and his brother have been leading. When he falls asleep dressed in Lincoln's costume, the night could hardly close as he does not manage to sleep peacefully or comfortably and he keeps waking up repeatedly. Painful as putting the dress on and off is, it is tolerable when compared to what happens in the arcade. His psychic conflict when seeing himself shot and killed once and again is made obvious when he turns the idea of putting the dress off and killing his boss over and over in his mind. He elucidates: "I'd yank off the beard, throw it on the ground and stomp it, then go strangle the fucking boss. That'd be good. My hands around his neck and his bug eyes bugging out" (Parks 54). In desiring to kill his boss, he subconsciously wants to let his long suppressed anger and crossness come out avenging both himself and his forefathers before him. Yet, this feeling is restrained and suppressed again once he remembers the wheel of poverty that has been continuously crushing him and his brother hard.

Lincoln's psychological anguish is illustrated elsewhere in the play in a similarly telling manner. The painfulness can be easily discerned on both the humanistic and the racial levels. The stage direction, employed at the start of scene three, supports the afore-discussed one. It runs as follows:

The recliner is reclined to its maximum horizontal position and Lincoln lies there asleep. He wakes with a start. He is horrific, bleary eyed and hungover, in his full Lincoln regalia. He takes a deep breath, realizes where he is and reclines again, going back to sleep (Parks 38).

finds an out of the way place to stow the cup. He claws at his Lincoln getup, removing it and tearing it in the process...) (Parks 54).

This stage direction is triply significant. First, living in a room that is "tiny, windowless, with only one door (only one way in or out)" is an "emblem of the limits and boundaries" demarcating African Americans' life (Chaudhuri 289). More specifically, living under such severe circumstances in a small room where even the very basic necessities are not available takes us directly to the 'Middle Passage', the very long and painful journey across the Atlantic whereby African slaves were transported to America. Just as Lincoln is confined in the room without a toilet to urinate and he does it in a cup, slaves on board used to do it in a similar way. They "had to struggle among themselves to get to the tubs" and the slaves "who were too ill to reach the tubs excreted where they lay and diseases spread by human waste, such as dysentery, thrived (Hine et al 37). Moreover, just as Booth does not have enough space where he can sleep comfortably, African slaves were 'squeezed' together and crammed tightly as if they were sardines (Hine et al 31). The suffering during the passage was so unbearable that a lot of slaves preferred jumping into the ocean and drowning themselves to continuing the suffering.

Second, the continuity of blacks' suffering is intensified. Living in a one-room apartment with neither water nor a toilet can help us imagine how painful and frustrating the circumstances under which Afro-Americans have been living are. The verb 'stow' which means to put for future use refers to the idea that the way Lincoln urinates is not temporary. It describes the type of life he has been leading and that is way he has kept the cup for future use. Third, the dress here can stand for the turbulent sea of racial practices that blacks found themselves drowning in after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The verb 'claws' is significantly employed as it clarifies Lincoln's psychological restlessness which is made explicit through the physical irritability he inevitably finds himself in while putting the

Lincoln: ... They said thuh the fella before me – he took off the getup one day, hung it up real nice, and never came back. And as they offered me thuh job, saying of course I would have to wear a little makeup and accept less than what they would offer a – another guy –

Booth: Go on, say it. "White." Theyd pay you less than theyd pay a white guy (Parks 29).

The words of Lincoln and Booth are expressive as they make explicit two important points. First, whites still firmly cling to the view that blacks are not equal to them and this reminds us of what Abraham Lincoln declared in the Emancipation Proclamation. Second, African Americans, owing to the excruciating humiliation they have been exposed to, have accepted to conduct their life that way. In other words, they have come to think of themselves as inferior to whites. Lincoln's acceptance to get paid less than a white man gets is a clear-cut indication of this. He has accepted the job under the racist company's terms to be finally fired and discarded like a tool that has been fully used up.

Despite accepting the job, Lincoln is aware of the humiliation he repeatedly undergoes in re-enacting president Lincoln's assassination. The first thing that hastily comes to his mind is the history of African Americans in the USA. Inferiority, suffering and wretchedness haunt him till he gets the dress off. That is the reason why he cannot endure wearing the clothes when the arcade is over. One day, he became worn out and fell asleep without getting the garment off. Parks uses a very telling stage direction in which race is implicitly unavoidable:

Lincoln: No fucking running water.

(He stumbles around the room looking for something which he finally finds: a plastic cup, which he uses as a urinal. He finishes peeing and

her affection any time. Parks's view concerning materialism is true. Yet, another dimension is not referred to here. It is particularly racism that has long been crippling blacks in America for several generations. When Booth could not afford money legally as he does not have a lucrative job, he hurries to get it illegally either through stealing or gambling to swindle it from people.

Metaphorically, Parks's view is that materialism has caused all people – black or white/ rich or poor – to be oppressed and oppressors simultaneously. The rich are oppressed since they are trapped and enslaved by an endless circle of sensual desires, and in trying to get them achieved they oppress other people. As for the poor, they are oppressed by a society that categorizes people on materialistic terms, and they sometimes find themselves obliged to lie, shoplift and kill and, in so doing, they are oppressing the society at large. In *Topdog/Underdog*, both the society and the individuals are held to blame. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that blacks are overburdened with the color of their skin which makes it difficult for them to get along.

While reading the play, I cannot resist recalling the painful history of African Americans in the USA to my mind. The characters employed take us back to the time of slavery when black children were taken from their families and abused. Moreover, being with no respectable jobs, Lincoln and his brother remind us of the menial jobs that were given to blacks by racist whites. In trying to get assimilated within the American mainstream, the two brothers remind us of the attempts of some Afro-Americans to melt within the American crucible to be finally rejected and thrown aside, an act that has filled them with indignation and hatred against whites.

To the contrary of what Parks claims, I come across an explicit reference to racism in the play. Lincoln tells his brother that a man before him rejected the job he has accepted as it does not pay off well. It can be discerned that the man who rejected the job was white as Booth's reply clarifies:

their relationship either to other blacks—relatives or non-relatives— or whites is shaped accordingly. In addition to the emotional emptiness coloring the relationship between the two brothers, Parks further incarnates the hostility of the society in the love-affair between Booth and Grace. In their relationship, Parks highlights the dominance of materialism and its ensuing destructiveness upon both individuals and the society at large. Emotions and feelings have become like a commodity that can be afforded with money. Conducting his life that way, Booth thinks that he can win Grace through becoming rich and showering her with presents. He says to Lincoln:

I got a date with Grace tomorrow. Shes in love with me again... Aint no man can love her the way I can. She sees you in that getup its gonna reflect bad on me... I got her this ring today, Diamond. Well, diamond-esque, but it looks just as good as the real thing. Asked her what size she wore. She say 7 so I go boost size 6 and a half..."
(Parks 10)

Parks's severe criticism of materialism in society is very obvious in Booth's words. It seems that his relationship with Grace, the character we never see in the play, has undergone ups and downs. The word 'again' is telling. It seems that every now and then affection between Booth and Grace fades away and is restored with a stolen present. Here, Parks censures two aspects. First, Parks severely objects to the type of emotionality that is money-governed. That is the reason why the relationship between Booth and Grace is doomed to collapse soon. Had it been established on mutual love, it might have been crowned with fruition. The second point that Parks harshly criticizes is the dominance of appearances in society. This is vividly concretized in the way Booth acts in the play. Valuing "appearance over essence" (Dietrick 49-50), Booth does not like his beloved see his brother dressed in the arcade garment as this can cause her to leave him. Booth thinks that once he is dressed in expensive clothes and manages to steal presents for Grace, he can win

relationship between two brothers that resonates with all of the other great fraternal conflicts in history and literature" (Foster 29). The never-ceasing fraternal conflict is caused in one way or another by sensual desires, most important of which is money-seeking.

In the above excerpt, it can also be argued that race exists but Parks belongs to the category of black writers who do not approve the explicit exposition of the weaknesses and shameful social misconducts that spread widely among black people in order to avoid evoking the resentment of their people on one hand, and not to support whites' view that blacks are inferior on the other. So an intrinsic part of blacks' life was gambling that people did not question whether it was a vice or virtue. The greedy rich whites intentionally helped spread this type of vice among blacks exploiting their ignorance and naivety. African Americans were so enslaved by poverty that they believed gambling to be their sole, easiest and fastest way of escaping from destitution and coming into the comfortable and glamorous world of success and welfare. They were even further aided by the iniquitous white gambling masters who established gambling casinos everywhere in streets. Trying to shun considering the issue race-related, Parks does not tell us whether gamblers are black or white and, in so doing, she manages to add universality to what she addresses. Nevertheless, gambling is considered an inseparable part of blacks' life and connotes nothing but African Americans' frustration and wretchedness. Although Parks has tried hard to universalize her views and avoid discussing blacks' and whites' relationships, it seems that race is permeable and irresistible.

Trying to avoid the explicit reference to racial issues, Parks does not delineate a scheme of characterization in which both blacks and whites come directly into contact. The only two characters we see in the play are black. However, the two black brothers do not live in a vacuum as they are considered part and parcel of the larger community where they were brought up and have been living. Being race-governed, the society is hostile and frustrating to blacks and

on him. Furthermore, he has ambitions to achieve with Lincoln's help. He has been dreaming of gambling and swindling money from people in streets – a dream impossible to fulfill without the assistance of Lincoln who is an expert in gambling. The following words are telling and can help us fully understand the character of Booth:

Oh, come on, man, we could make money you and me. Throwing down the cards. 3-Card and Link: look out! We could clean up you and me. You would throw the cards and I'd be your Stickman. The one in the crowd who looks like just an innocent passerby, who looks like just another player, like just another customer, but who gets intimate connections with you...I'd be the one who brings in the crowd. I'd be the one who makes them want to put they money down... (Parks 19-20).

Criticizing those who idolize money, Parks lets what is inside Booth come out. For him, money is second to none. He only loves his brother because of the existence of a common interest between them. His major concern is to get united with Lincoln not because of the sublime brotherhood bond tying brothers but owing to the achievement of his purely self-centered materialistic gains. Dietrick sees that money governs Booth's relation to his brother and this is made clear in his "desperate attempts to convince Lincoln to go into "business" with him as a three-card monte hustler – a life Lincoln once lived and now desperately tries to resist" (48). Booth intends to be with his brother not to do something legal and beneficial for them both as well as for people in general. He strongly urges Lincoln to stop the arcade and hustle with him in streets, cheating people and taking their money. When his dreams do not come true and their common interest is not there, he never hesitates to sacrifice his relationship with his brother and in order not to lose 500 dollars, he kills his brother. In the conflict between Lincoln and Booth, Parks manages to offer the "audience a rich and realistic psychological study of the

department store. That store takes in more money in one day than we will in our whole life. I stole and I stole generously. I got one for me and I got one for you. Shoes belts shirts ties socks in the shoes and everything. Got that screen too.

Lincoln: You all right, man.

Booth: Just cause I aint good as you at cards dont mean I cant do nothing. (Parks 27-28)

Broadly speaking, Parks censures the rich and the poor whether they are black or white. The rich are to blame because their minds are absented and they are enslaved by materialism. The poor envy the rich and this is very obvious in Booth's words. To heal the deeply-rooted rancor inside the poor, the rich should have given them an aiding hand to lessen the impact of poverty upon them. Had they done so, the gap separating them both might have been bridged and the grudge inside the poor might have been removed. Moreover, the poor are not spared the blame because they should not have let poverty strike them hard and cause them to do illegal acts. In stead of stealing, gambling and busying themselves doing trivial things to get money, Lincoln and Booth should have exerted their utmost effort to succeed and elevate their social positions. They should not have let frustration fasten its grip upon them. More specifically, another heavy burden caused by the color of their skin is thrown upon their shoulders. Being African Americans, they are deprived of the opportunities available to whites. That is the reason why the humanistic approach adopted by Parks in the play cannot be, most of the time, separated from that of race I strongly claim to exist. Racial considerations always aggravate things for blacks adding more insult to their unhealed injury and causing them, out of frustration, to gamble, steal and even kill.

In Booth's words, it is perceptible that Booth loves his brother Lincoln and when he shoplifts, they share the stolen things together. However, this love is purely governed by money. He loves Lincoln as he is generous and spends money

confined to blacks. She would like to say parents whether black or white are not supposed to desert their children. What Parks does not concentrate on, although it is very true, are the race-tied circumstances that have obliged parents to do so. Had parents been white, they might not have done this.

Parks is preoccupied with the idea that people have become enslaved by money. What matters is how much one can get from an issue with little regard for feelings and emotions. Feelings and emotions are nowadays most of the time sold for those who will pay most. Most saddening is that a lot of, if not all, people tend to glorify a previously neglected figure after becoming rich, and neglect a formerly glorified one after losing his money and turning poor. For money speaks louder than anything else, people try to accumulate as much money as they could. This has left almost all people – rich or poor, black or white, relatives or non relatives– in conflict for power and money. The rich dream of becoming richer, the poor dream of getting rich and the weak dream of attaining strength through money. The conflict ensuing from trying to fulfill these dreams is most of the time very devastating. Sometimes people steal, lie and even kill to get their dreams achieved. This impact is crystallized in the way Booth acts throughout the play. He shoplifts several times and thinks that he is justified. In one situation, he manages to steal two suits, one for him and the other for Lincoln, and comes back home to surprise his brother:

Booth: Look the fuck around please.

Lincoln looks around and sees the new suit on his chair.

Lincoln: Wow

Booth: Its yrs

Lincoln: Shit

Booth: Got myself one too.

Lincoln: Boosted

Booth: Yeah, I boosted em. Theys stole from a big-ass

play, only as brothers and humans as in reality one of them stands for slavery and the other for racism.

Commenting on the scheme of characterization in the play, Abramson states that "focusing on only two characters—brothers Lincoln and Booth—... [makes] vast issues of racial and economic inequalities in America" irresistibly confronting (Abramson 78). Abramson's words make clear that the play addresses issues that are applicable to all people—black and white. Abramson's exclusion of the word black is consistent with Parks's view that the play is about being human, but the inclusion of the word racial supports our claim that racism does exist in the play, a fact that Parks firmly negates.

The play, "with its realistic setting and psychological motivations", is regarded as "a leap into the realm of characters you can sympathize with" (Solomon 2008, 58). Having two brothers, given a little money each, deserted by their parents, and thrown to struggle hard for money and power till eventually one kills the other, is sympathy-provoking. Moreover, this is indicative of Parks's view that parents should leave their children with things more important than money. They should teach them the sublimity of love and the importance of altruism. In addition, Parks wants to warn people, in general, and relatives, in particular, against the far-reaching impact of materialism in life. This impact has changed the way people think of issues that were once considered sublime. She mourns the desertification and emotional emptiness of the once sacred brotherhood. Money is primarily considered though it is sometimes the root of all evil. No space has been left for emotions even between brothers.

Nevertheless, this human touch is permeable and allows race to exist within its tissues. Lincoln's and Booth's parents' desertion of their children in the play reminds us of the days of slavery when parents and children were separated. Also, some African American fathers could not endure the suffering owing to racism and deserted their families for good. Parks, being humane, does not want the issue be

her emphasis on the need to dig (literally in this play) in order to recover African American history" (24). Historically, Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) is the American president who issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 whereby all African Americans were to be regarded free citizens. John Wilkes Booth (1838-1865) is the actor who killed the American president while watching a play in a theatre. Frankly, I was first faced with a dilemma as I cannot see how a play as this having its action deeply rooted in American history, generally, and African American history, specifically, can be what Parks meant it to. However, this dilemma is resolved when both the humanistic and the racial perspectives are considered.

Regarding Abraham Lincoln, he was a human and a racist together as he freed African Americans but did not believe in their equality to whites. This man firmly believed in the physical as well as mental inferiority of blacks. Regarded as such, blacks, according to Lincoln's viewpoint, should be deprived of a lot of things that whites have access to. Though Lincoln was regarded as the strongest foe of slavery, his racism was very blatant and the fact that "he opposed slavery did not mean he believed in equality" (Hine et al 219). He thought that while it was inhuman to deal with Negroes as bondservants, it was also illogical and unwise to believe in their equality to whites.

Furthermore, Booth, the killer of his brother in *Topdog/Underdog* and the assassin of the American president in reality, calls important historic events to our minds. This man's name reminds us of the humiliation and inhumanity that African Americans were exposed to in the South. Southern slave-holders considered Lincoln responsible for the economic damage that happened to them when he freed the black slaves that constituted the work force in the South at that time. These slave-owners revolted against Lincoln, but he managed to crush them and that was the reason why he was assassinated by Booth. Given that, we cannot exclude race from Parks's play and concentrate on Lincoln and Booth, the two characters in the

Booth cannot avoid killing his brother. The play concludes with Booth left alone on-stage with nobody to support him.

In *Topdog/Underdog*, Parks tries to be humanistic, and that is the reason why she draws two black characters to stand for two white historical figures thinking that this can save her discussing the issue of race, but, unfortunately, this does not. Broadly speaking, Lincoln and Booth are two brothers and Parks meant them to stand for any two brothers that are in conflict with either themselves or the community at large, and this gives universality to her theme. What adds to this universality is that the killing scene, when taken archetypically, can take us long back in history to the first killing sin when the two sons of Adam and Eve quarreled and Cain slew his younger brother Abel out of jealousy and selfishness. Since then, the conflict has continued to exist among people whether related by kinship or not regardless of their color. Symbolically, Adam's first act of disobedience when he was urged by Eve to eat from the forbidden tree has marked all humans with sin. Admittedly, what causes human beings to sin is their lust for sensuality. In the case of Adam and Eve, the temptation was in the fruit. With Cain and his brother Abel, the enticement was in the sister Abel was supposed to marry. In *Topdog/Underdog*, the tempter is money. Sensuality, as made clear in the three exemplified cases, is a stimulant to sin in all ages. When it has the upper hand and spirituality is rendered inferior, suffering ensues inevitably. Through reminding us of the original sin, Parks would like to say that sensuality in its different forms is responsible for the misery and wretchedness befalling humans. Understood in that direction, the humanistic vision that Parks adopts is crystallized.

However, race subconsciously haunts Parks everywhere in the play. The names she has given her characters to achieve neutrality invite racism and slavery to the mind of a reader or a spectator who is familiar with the African American ordeal in slavery and racism. Supporting my view, Foster sees that the racial dimension is represented in "Parks's preoccupation with Lincoln's assassination and

London when it was produced there (Wolf 48). Our claim is to be validated after a very brief exposition of the plot of the under-discussion literary work.

Topdog/Underdog circles around two black brothers who are in an economic crisis (Abramson 77). They live in a small, unfurnished and waterless one-room apartment where they cannot even sleep comfortably. These two brothers were deserted by their parents when they were still young, 16 and 11 respectively. They were left with 500 dollars each as an inheritance, the younger from his mother and the older from his father. The older brother, Lincoln, spent his inheritance, while the younger, Booth, clung to his and kept it wrapped in a nylon stocking without even counting it. Lincoln works as an impersonator reenacting the assassination of the 16th American president Abraham Lincoln. In an arcade, he dresses like the real Lincoln used to, allows people to shoot him, and pretends to die repeatedly. Preoccupied with the rapid accumulation of money, Booth thinks of hustling in streets playing a 3-card monte, "A card game in which two cards are chosen from four laid out faceup and a player bets that one of the two will be matched in suit by the dealer before the other one" (The Encarta Manual of Style and Usage).

To save money in the arcade show, the management has thought of using a dummy wax and Lincoln is consequently fired from his job. Being jobless and once an expert in the game, he returns to gambling with the 3-card monte. Meanwhile, Booth has been painstakingly trying to betroth his beloved Grace, and after some irritative clashes, he eventually kills her because she has treated him disparagingly. Lincoln has already returned to hustle with the monte game and in one day he manages to pile a large sum of money, the thing that he carefully hides from his brother. News goes to Booth that his brother hustles in streets accumulating money. Out of jealousy and envy, Booth challengingly invites Lincoln to have a 500-dollar -3-card monte. They start to gamble and soon Lincoln becomes the winner. He takes the money and starts unfolding his mother's nylon stocking. Seeing this,

reader, is that both humanism and racism are abundant in the play as proved hereafter.

Suzan-Lori Parks is a noted African American female dramatist. She is widely known and esteemed as "She won a MacArthur Fellowship in 2001", and she is the first African American female recipient of "a Pulitzer Prize [in drama] for *Topdog/Underdog*" in 2002 (Fraden 37). She also received 2 Obie Awards and several other grants, and her dramas were produced in more than 700 theatres worldwide (US Fed News, Washington D. C., Sep 17, 2007). Parks rejects the categorization of her dramatic achievements as solely about black people and considers this tendency in critiquing her plays insulting: "It's insulting, when people say my plays are about what it's about to be black – as if that's all we think about, as if our life is about that. My life is not about race. It's about being alive" (Solomon 1990, 73). To be fair enough, she is not by any means a mono-sided writer as she does not confine herself within the cage of racism and tries, in her literary productions, to explore a wide range of issues that are related to people, in general, and African Americans, in particular. Commenting on her widened scope of knowledge, she herself states: "the knowledge that is inside my plays can reach miles, hundreds of thousands of miles" (Hannaham quoting Parks 61). So wide is her scope of life that all humans are included, but race, as we claim, is still unavoidable.

She wrote dramatic masterpieces that "participate in rewriting the history of black people as well as black identity" (Lee 6) such as *Pickling* (1988), *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole World* (1992) and *Imperceptible Mutabilities of the Third Kingdom* (1989). Moreover, she wrote dramas like *Venus* (1996), *In the Blood* (1999) and *Fucking A* (2000) in which she tries to address important historical issues and situate "African American women center stage" (Schafer 181). She also managed to stage, though with a difference, the Lincoln myth in both *The America Play* (1994) and *Topdog/Underdog*, the play that got the royal treatment in

It ain't about the white man... It ain't about the legacy of slavery at all. It's about these two men who are brothers and don't get along. They love each other intensely and have come through so much together, and at each other's throats almost all the time. And that is worth talking about, too. (Bryant quoting Parks 44).

In the above lines, Suzan Lori-Parks (1963-) states that the problem of race and the consequential relationship between blacks and whites do not concern her in *Topdog/Underdog* (2001). She wants to say that what bothers her most, as a writer, is the relationship among humans, in general, and brothers, in particular, and how this relationship is painfully impacted, if not thoroughly damaged, because of the struggle to achieve materialistic gains in life. However, I have found, while reading the text, that Parks's claim is partially unreal as the play is replete with race-related issues that go side by side with the humanistic approach that Parks has adopted. Verily, it is about two brothers who are crushed by the severe wheel of poverty and are struggling hard to achieve some progress in life. Yet, being black has caused most of their suffering in the play.

The purpose of this paper is to prove that both the humanistic and the racial perspectives exist in the play, simultaneously and inseparably. Parks feels that she, being a humble part of humanity, has many responsibilities to other people collectively, whether black or white. Nevertheless, she, as a black writer, cannot resist, either consciously or subconsciously, shedding light on the mountain-like issue of racism which is considered an indivisible part of the writings of any African American writer. I admire Gregory's viewpoint that in *Topdog/Underdog* Parks "doesn't burden her narratives with a message. She prefers to let the audience draw their conclusions" (80). My conclusion, as a



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**Suzan-Lori Parks's
Topdog/Underdog:
A Humanistic or Racial Viewpoint?**

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