Introduction

The first Negroes arrived in America aboard a Dutch ship at JAMES TOWN, Va., in 1619; it is not clear whether these Africans were freeman, INDENTURED SERVANTS or slaves but it is known that the institution of slavery grew slowly in the colonies (1031-32).

As it is found in the Family Encyclopedia of American History (FEAH), at various times in the history of the United States of America, the Negroid race has been referred to as African, Negro, Coloured, Afro-American, Black American, recently as African American, and in general, Blacks. Most of the Blacks in America are those who trace their parentage to members of the Negroid race in Africa. In this thesis, Blacks are referred to as African American or Black American throughout. The Black American population includes people from Canada, West Indies, Caribbean, Latin America and more from Africa. The vast majority of Blacks are descendants of people who were forcibly moved to North America and South America to work as slaves and servants. Slavery grew slowly with the rise of the Southern plantation system in the late 17th century.

Plantation slavery, which existed in America for two and a half centuries, denied the humanity of a significant part of the population reduced to the status of "property." Because the slaves were black and the proprietors white, the system created an unnatural chasm between the races — "white" meant power and "black," subservience. The effects of the system are still prevalent today (Hill ix).
Plantation slavery existed in America for two and a half centuries and the blacks’ human status reduced the blacks becoming chattels or the property of the whites. Due to the blacks being slaves and the Whites being proprietors, the system created a very wide difference between the races that was unlikely to change. At that time, it was natural that ‘whites’ meant power and ‘blacks’ meant bondage.

Due to the unjust and cruel exercise of authority of whites over blacks, they were denied all kinds of benefits like education, health care, etc. In South America, at that time, it was illegal to teach a black to read or write. Slaves, in Jefferson Davis’s words, are those “several millions of human beings of an inferior race” who were “peaceful and contended laborers in their spheres” (FAEH 1032). African Americans grew up in the white society and the white world deprived them of their manhood, their intelligence, humanity and spiritual quality. Despite their hard labour, the blacks were denied the opportunity of owning property and to establish their identity. And exploitation was rampant. It was highly pathetic to see that the black women were subject to humiliation, physical violence and rape. They were carried away by force by the whites without their consent. Rape of a female slave was not considered a crime except that it represented illegal force on another’s property. The white people’s unnatural way of life had victimized, exploited and destroyed the life of the blacks. In spite of numerous conflicts, beliefs, assumptions and underlying attitudes, however, the slavery system was prevalent in America until the beginning of the twentieth century. The widespread anti-white attitudes continued thereafter. To quote the Encyclopedia:
Even a bloody CIVIL WAR, fought principally over this issue [...] and many religious groups, [...] opposed slavery on moral grounds [...] failed to resolve fully the conflict, and its legacy still plagues the nation – in the form of persistent racial friction in both North and South (1031-32).

In America, the African Americans had a long and militant tradition of struggle for freedom beginning from the “slave revolt” through the early “convention movement” and the “Abolitionist movement.” The slave revolt showed violent resistance to authority expressing protest against chattel slavery. The advocacy of the abolition of slavery was a reforming enterprise undertaken with zeal. It was like the “Crusade movement,” which was a religious military expedition in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries undertaken by Christian countries to take back the Holy Land from the Muslims.

In fact, as far as slavery was concerned the black educator Booker T. Washington, in the 1895 “Atlanta Compromise,” cautioned blacks to have patience and to work hard toward attaining economic equality before striving for civil rights. His ideas fitted well with the views of many “conservative whites” but many black leaders opposed it. They feared that the over emphasis on industrial training would confine, lessen, and keep the blacks’ activities under close control permanently to the ranks of second-class citizenship. Among the leaders who opposed the plan proposed by Washington was William E.B. Du Bois who was the leading spokesperson for full and immediate rights for Blacks. During the period, a variety of organisations sought to advance the rights of blacks. Best known among them was National Association
for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, and one of its founders was Du Bois. In order to achieve political and civil equality, Du Bois stressed the importance of educating Negro teachers, professional men, ministers and spokespersons, who would earn their special privileges by dedicating themselves to “inspire the masses.”

The exact origins of Black Nationalist movements are lost in the largely unwritten history of blacks in early America, but it is clear that such movements began as protest against the brutal and dehumanizing conditions of slavery. In 1966, Huey P. Newton and Booby G. Seale founded a militant organisation called Black Panther Party in California. This Black Panther Party used a group of political revolutionaries and writers which included Huey P. Newton, Booby G. Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Marvin X, Ethna Wyatt, Sonia Sanchez and others. Sanchez was its Minister of Culture. They published small magazines, established factories for making arms, military equipment and ammunition. They had small arsenals for storing them. To a large extent, the Black Nationalist movements were trying to push their men into action against the whites. The Panther leaders called upon blacks to arm themselves for a struggle against their oppressors.

From the literary scene, inspired by LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), Seale, Newton and Cleaver of the Black Panthers, the black men became active in a militant cultural-political organization called the Black House. It became the San Francisco head quarters of the Black Panther Party. The Black House managed its daily expenses by the weekly poetry readings and theatre performances of the theatre group called the Black Troupe. The Black House prospered from the money from
Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and *Ramparts* magazine articles and contributions from the black middle-class (bourgeois). It was dedicated to both the cultural and the political activities at the height of the Black Arts Movement of the sixties. But, it was dissolved over severe disagreement between two groups, activists and artists. One group, that is, the activists, saw art only as a weapon and supported coalition with the primary, hereditary, and radical whites to gain political ends. The other group, the artists, defined their task as Cultural Nationalism and chose not to have any coalition with whites. Because of the rift between the Panther leaders, the Black House was closed in later 1966.

The group of artists who chose not to have any coalition with the Whites became “disenchanted” from politics. They favoured the development of black art and they believed that there was “creative freedom,” almost unlimited freedom in the black theatre for the black arts. The exposition that was expressed in the black art was the inner surge and energy of the artist, which was also the emotion of the people. They felt that drama was the best medium for black artists to express themselves. As Clayton Riley, a native New York writer, educator, freelance journalist, and critic of *The New York Times*, points out:

> Black Theater has [...] worked to show Black people what they look like, and how much it is possible to love themselves for being what they are, for looking as they do (315).

The Black Theatre operated within the black community. It had been creating a “black stage reality,” in which the artistic creations and the “realistic portrayal of the Negro” was fully realised.” The black writers gained independence through it,
which was “black” overall. Randolph Edmonds (1900-1983) and Richard Campbell (1903-1995) were the pioneers, who originated to open up a new line of thought and activity, for organising theatre companies for training theatre people. Following their contributions, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963) and Alain Locke (1886-1954) had turned the theatre to take a more active role in the political and cultural lives of the African Americans and started two separate schools of theatre – ‘Protest’ and ‘Art’. Du Bois started the School of the ‘Protest’ theatre, which became the Black Arts School in 1965. This school emphasised that African Americans would respond according to the nature the whites treat them. Locke founded the Art-Theater School which specialized in showing African Americans as they were, regardless of political concerns.

Many black writers defined black theatre as the one that can rise above the fact of simply saying that it was designed to encounter whites. But, Riley points out that the black playwrights must assign to the black theatre a realistic place in their lives. They must recognise what the black theatre can and cannot accomplish, fulfil, or achieve. He says, “Black Theater is a theater of warfare.” He also writes:

Black theater as a clarion […] is no more than a continuing instigation, a provocation, an agitator – the playground signifier […]. Recognizing theater for what it really is, an artifact, structured to take people away from basics, from fundamentals, into a special kind of chapel atmosphere for rituals and procedures (329).

In fact, the Black Theatre was meant by many to be a ground for the evolution of the blacks to make them see their real position of how they were denied even their
fundamental rights. As Riley defines, it was a chapel where the black people were exposed to the sufferings undergone by their own kith and kin. They were asked to take steps to see that these things were reformed and to put an end. K. William Kgositsile writes:

Our theater will be a definitive act, a decisive song. There will be portions of actual life unveiled. All the things we could have been. All the things we are. All the things we will be. There will be instruction. There will be construction. There will also be destruction. Really grinding. [...] It will be portions of life because art is not life. Art is contained in life (146-47).

Black theatre is a cause of danger that evokes feelings and desires with anger. In the struggle, one real situation is a belief that black plays can rise above the fact of being essentially limited, incomplete, and designed to be encountered.

Among the young black artists who have taken the Black Theatre into the black community LeRoi Jones, Robert Macbeth and Ed Bullins were the most important. Their efforts have placed emphasis on works involving the black experience. Inspired by Jones, Bullins and others like Cleaver, Seale, and Emory Douglas created the Black House. Bullins invested much of his life in the Black Theatre including Black House and Black Panthers. Bullins was appointed Minister of Culture for Panthers. The most prolific black playwright Jones, Langston Hughes, Randolph Edmonds, and Bullins have contributed significantly to the creation of the Black Theatre in America. All are aware that the assumptions and expectations of white culture dominate the black stage. However, Bullins assumed that the first task
of the Black dramatist was to counter the cultural domination. He believed that a national culture would exist only when the artists of a nation create a world of their imagination and only when the artists succeed in giving the people of the nation an extended artistic reference.

Bullins and others like Jones and Sanchez took sides with the artists who defined their task as Cultural Nationalism and favoured the development of black art wholly separated from the white influence. Bullins belongs to the group of artists who defined their task as cultural nationalism and "eschewed" any coalition with whites. He soon became "disenchanted" from this group because of the differences in ideology. He journeyed from the Maryland – Pennsylvania region of the East coast all the way to California, the West coast, where he struggled to make a statement with the Black House, but in vain. Because of the gap where a break had occurred, the Black House was closed. He was left with no place to perform his plays in the early 1960s. Bullins took no great pleasure in politics and determined to make his writing the "central activity, the mainstay, the wellspring, the principle, the doctrine or the guiding opinion," which he still maintains. He writes in The Theme is Blackness "Art and Politics Should Be Identical – be serious!" (15). He does not make an effort to deceive distinctly the black-white racial positions. As an alternative, he drives the politics behind the play into a complex relation with the kinds of experience. The best of his works seem to confirm the general conclusion that Art and Politics may come from different imaginative levels of personality.

Ed Bullins was born in 1935 and raised in the ghetto area of Philadelphia, a chief city in Pennsylvania, USA. He is one of America's leading and most prolific
black playwrights. He is a talented and creative writer. He is a major force in Black theatre, who dominated the New York black theatre scene between 1968 and 1982 with his presentations of "urban street life." He is also an educator, theatrical director, activist, editor, essayist, poet, novelist, journalist, filmmaker, playwright and a teacher. Actually, his mother, Bertha Marie Queen Bullins was a civil servant and gave him a "middle-class orientation." Raised by his mother, who seems to have encouraged his schooling as well as the reflective and critical aspects of his nature, the adolescent Bullins fought his way through school and practical life. He attended a white elementary school where he was an excellent student. When he was studying in a junior high school, he was transferred to an inner-city school and there he joined a street gang (which would have provided him the chance and made him to experience the nature of the "street corner-boys") and in a street fight, he was stabbed in the heart and "momentarily" died. It is obvious that he is an "old street fighter," that he is one of those "corner-boys." After dropping out of high school, he joined the U.S. navy (1952-1955) where he won the lightweight boxing championship and "started self-educating himself through reading." During and after his navy service he read much and while in California he earned his General Education Diploma – GED. At this time, he started writing seriously, mainly fiction, essays and poetry. He went from one extreme to the other, that is, from his studies to writing. Apart from GED, he earned his B.A. (1989) degree in liberal studies (English and playwriting) from Antioch University, and earned his M.F.A. (1994) in playwriting from San Francisco State University. In 1995, he was appointed professor of theatre at Northeastern University, and till date, he is working in the University.
When Bullins wanted to write a play, he thought it would be a “big complicated mess and to know this and that about playwriting,” he started reading plays including absurd plays. After becoming familiar with who was writing what, and getting drunk one night, he wrote *How Do You Do* (1968). Since he had written one play, two weeks later, he wrote *Dialect Determinisim (or The Rally)* (1973). Then it was time to get his plays produced. He became “downhearted at his writings not being produced” until he saw productions of Jones’s *Dutchman* (1964) and *The Slave* (1964). This reminded him of his own work to be produced and published. He took his plays around to different places, and people said the plays were “obscene.” So he thought of doing them himself. While he along with Buck Hartman who was then the director of San Francisco Drama Circle was rehearsing the plays for the stage, they were told that it would be bad for business since Jones’ *The Toilet* and *Dutchman* were on in town. So the whole deal was “squelched.” Finally, he went to the Fire House theatres and produced his plays. He performed his early plays “in bars, in community places, and wherever Black Americans might be reached.” When he “went to see *The Toilet* and *Dutchman* and a whole new world opened up” to him.

Bullins said to Marvin X in an interview:

I hadn’t really found myself until I saw what the other young playwrights were doing. Then I was able to give up working on my novels, essays and short stories and go back to my plays. The Black Theatre has been the great influence on my life. My work is my life and my life is my work (xv).
As many other playwrights, Bullins too claimed, it was Jones' influence that shaped him as a dramatist. Of Jones, Bullins insists, "he created me." Jones influenced Bullins directly as a playwright. Many other playwrights, particularly "Samuel Beckett and Eugene O'Neill," have also influenced him, who has been influenced by Jones in his early plays. He has said, "Beckett taught me a great deal about dramaturgy, dramatic action and conflict in the theater." His early plays indicate the influence of Beckett. His first play, "How Do You Do, is a parody of a Beckett play," and Bullins' The Gentleman Caller (1970) uses an absurdist style (DiGaetani 40-41).

When Bullins started thinking about drama he started reading it, and it was the Europeans who interested him. He read about the absurd theatre people and a few of the British people's works. He learned a few things from Eugene O'Neill who seemed to have the biggest voice out of many of the Americans. Though, Bullins does not connect his works with any of them. He says, "I'm from where I'm from." About the elements of naturalism and absurdism in his works he says, "I show the truth of black reality, some black life, if it that's naturalism, or if you want to call it realism. [...] Some of the tragedy and some of the nightmare quality in black people's reality, if that's absurd." One who reads Bullins' plays can find in it the blend of all genres like naturalism, realism, absurdism, et cetera. About the structure in his plays, he says, "his structure is improvisational" which shows that he has the ability to create plays without much preparation for its structure and genres. He has also written in several literary genres, for example; plays, novel, television and movie scripts. Though he has been working in all literary forms, he says, "the play form is my form" (DiGaetani
As a dramatist of absurd theatre, Bullins belong to the avant-garde. In the arts, those artists who belong to avant-garde were in the "forefront of new developments." Actually, the term was introduced after the French Revolution, when it was used to describe any socialist political movement. Avant-garde drama originated with the group of dramatists in the 1950s, including Samuel Beckett. Their works expressed the belief that "in a godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore, all communication breaks down." "Logical construction and argument gives way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence, as in Beckett's play Breath (1970)." The work of French dramatist Eugene Ionesco along with that of other writers such as Jean Genet and Samuel Beckett, is known as the Theatre of the Absurd, in which "human existence is seen as meaningless and communication breaks down into irrational speech or silence." The Theatre of Absurd is a branch of the theatre, which "juxtaposes the fantastic and the bizarre with the irrationality, and tragedy of human existence." In many of his plays, Bullins adopts the tenets of the absurdism, which define life as shocking, unacceptable, outrageous, unpleasant, not guided by reason, not logical and without any meaning. Further, the comparison of Bullins with European absurdists is important, because he has been greatly influenced by them and whom he continually studied for forms and style. Although he read the early African American dramatists, "he declined to copy the forms, style and themes of his contemporaries because he prided himself on being original." Bullins achieved this originality in many cases by trying out those European forms for the African American plays. Comparing Bullins with the European dramatists and the Absurdists gives us a way to compare his writings with
the German playwright, Bertolt Brecht. He diverges from Brecht's theatre because he considers Brecht's theatre as a "totally didactic theatre." Brecht felt that "theatre has to connect not with the wealthy, typical theatergoer, but with poor people, and to help them be aware of what keeps them poor." He felt that theatre must be "a form or political maneuvering [creating] political awareness" (DiGaetani 43). He also felt that the theatre was useless unless it helps solve the political and social problems like racism or the exploitation of poor people. But Bullins feels "sometimes theater can only be art, and can't do anything except be theater, and art."

In 1965, in San Francisco which was then the major place for black community theatres, Bullins began writing plays regularly and seriously to reach the Black Americans. It was there that Bullins the playwright started to evolve. He began with a theatre called Black Arts/West, which was the version of Jones' Black Arts Theatre in Harlem. Later he worked for seven years in Harlem at the New Lafayette Theatre. The theatres Bullins worked in were generally in the black community and for the black community. Then he had his own theatre called BMT — stands for Bullins Memorial Theatre, and he "named it after his oldest son, who died in the seventies in an auto accident, who had worked with him at the New Lafayette" (DeGaetani 43).

Though Bullins worked on novel, poetry etc., he moved into the theatre for a number of reasons. In New American Dramatists: 1960-1980, Ruby Cohn reiterates the words of Bullins:
I [Bullins] turned to writing plays because I found that the people I was interested in writing about or writing to – my people – didn’t read much fiction, essays, or poetry (103).

In view of the fact that his people did not read fiction, he moved from theory to practice; wrote plays and produced them. To reach the black audience who were uninterested and unconcerned in reading, Bullins moved into theatre. He explained:

now in the theatre, we can go right into the Black community and have a literature for the people … for the great masses of Black people. [...] theatre is becoming more acceptable to Black people on the whole (Bigsby 403-04).

He was trying to write novels and felt somehow that his people did not read novels. He believed, when his black people were present in the theatre then he would get them. So he moved away from prose forms into theatre. In the theatre, he can go right into the Black community and have a literature for the great mass of Black people. In addition, “Action” attracts him to writing plays. He says, “Action. It’s live and it’s action. I can feel the audience when I’m in the theater, and that’s exciting” (DiGaetani 45).

When Bullins edited the anthology, New Plays From the Black Theatre (1969), he selected the plays which were typical of the black plays. For this anthology, he selected plays being done in Black theatres in the Black community for Black people by Black writers and Black playwrights [...]. They include a wide range of plays, from revolutionary plays like Jones’ and Sister Sonia's
to historical plays like Fuller’s and Davidson’s, to plays on the Black Experience and life style such as my own play (Marvin X vii).

Bullins’ life and writings are strongly influenced by almost all the major themes of the Black Arts Movement which include beauty, love, power, revolution etc. Regarding his private life Bullins appears “introverted and excessively timid.” As it is quoted in Riley’s Bullins: ‘It’s Not the Play I wrote.’ Bullins has said:

I just don’t discuss personal aspects of my life. The theatergoers access to me shouldn’t be a personal thing. If they see me in my plays, okay.

If they see my people in my work, all right. But that’s as far as I go.

My private life, my life with my family is my own.

His life remains “reticent.” He is not inclined to put himself forward in the social situation. He seems to be aware of the possible dangers and problems of structuring his perceptions and insights in a definite intellectual format. He seems to be an angry writer who evinces consistently an art of argument. It is “polemic” that his writing contains forceful arguments in one side of his life, but in person, he seems to have been calm and soft-spoken, even when expressing controversial sentiments which gives one the impression that Bullins might be “cagey,” though, a reader could look at him through his plays.

It is inevitable to note here that other activities like scripts and anthology brought him to the fore. In 1968, he was active in bringing together a representative collection of works in Volume 12, (4) of the The Drama Review – a “Black Theatre Issue” from the Black Arts Movement. It became “the manifesto for the new black theatre.” The playwrights of The Drama Review (TDR) were “concerned with
creating theater relevant to the lives of the black people” like the theatre of Bullins which engaged the daily reality of the black experience of America. The articles of the black playwrights in the TDR defined the changes reflected in their plays. However, as one group began to praise Bullins for providing the Black playwrights with a tool with which they could understand and be a part of the growing activity of the Black Theatre, others were looking hard to find the weaknesses in the edition. Still others found fault with the plays chosen in the edition and complained of the poor quality. The issue’s editor, Bullins, separated the plays of the TDR collection into two categories: ‘Black Revolutionary Theatre’ and ‘Theatre of Black Experience’. Bullins prefers to call the ‘Black Revolutionary Theatre’ as the ‘Theatre of Reality’ under which heading he places plays depicting revolutionary racial conflicts, often “literal-racial warfare.” The plays belonging to the ‘Theatre of Black Experience’ are the realistic portrayals of ordinary black life. These plays portray situations familiar to the world of the “black audience and inquire into the meaning of the black experience.” In these plays, the setting is usually urban and the plays not only portray the urban setting with concrete details but also by the characters’ speech and behaviour. In addition to the Drama Review, he was also the editor of two highly influential anthologies New Plays from the Black Theatre and Black Theatre. The experience he gained during his term of having been editor of these two Anthologies helped him to dictate terms and to shape the Black Theatre of the period. He was seriously committed to the forging of a black Aesthetic. While working to consolidate the Black Theatre, he opposed those who tried to register his works as attached to political movements. As an appeal to the prejudices of the African
Americans, Bullins felt that a writer should be ultimately self-serving in order to gain political power. He continued to be suspicious of those who would substitute his writing that contain forceful arguments against blacks. He felt, instead of having deeper understanding and awareness toward Blacks with insight, they simply find faults. Those who viewed his work that it was attached to political movements containing arguments against the Black Americans demanded that Black theatre should just re-stage the social dramas of America as simple morality plays. But, Bullins was not so and he tried to go beyond that, portraying the real life of blacks, presenting the black stage reality. Beyond these, Bullins was also author of number of articles and reviews which have been published in the Black Word, Black Theatre, Journal of Black Poetry, Liberator, New York Times, Performance and in many periodicals. Bullins’ works have emerged as universal works and are being read, and his plays are produced internationally.

Bullins did not begin to write plays until the mid-1960s, when many militant black writers emerged. The plays which he wrote in the second half of the 1960s projected specifically the sense of a brutalized world of Blacks. The tone of the plays is one of desperation and frustration. Bullins started his career by writing, brutal “agit-prop” plays, on the people he knew best. He called “agit-prop” plays under the title “plays of black experience.” These “agit-prop” plays are propaganda especially agitating performances offering analysis of social experience, developing a conscious parable of Black past, and proposing a model of the Black future.

Bullins insists that functional black drama be written and presented for an intended black audience and that these agit-prop productions
distinguish themselves from the works of white playwrights (quoted in Hurd 12).

Early in his career, he was criticized for concentrating on black street characters. He replied that they held no romantic fascination for him; they were simply “the people he knew best.” While he wrote “agit-prop” plays in line with the requirements, he continued to pursue more projects that were independent in the Black Theatre. He then produced a series of powerful and lyrical works about the ghetto. Bullins in his *The Theme is Blackness* says that his early works had been “swept away in Black revolutionary emotionalism and resulting fratricide of the ’60’s.” Later he felt that:

> The conditions must be created for sweeping social and cultural change. It is the Black artist’s creative duty to plant, nurture and spread the seeds of change (11).

Bullins’ first plays, dating from 1965, dramatize his fiction sometimes and usually satirize Black Bourgeois’ life -- the black middle-class people’s life. In *Contemporary Authors*, Mel Gussow observes that Bullins eventually “made two major commitments. He turned from what had become ‘a middle-class orientation’ to a black self-awareness.” Bullins almost avoids portraying bourgeois life suggesting that their aesthetic intentions are most effectively actualized with unusual elements and not native ones. Since the black “bourgeoisie” (a social order dominated by bourgeois) had devoted too much of its energy toward trying to mimic the white man, Bullins avoided the issue totally. In Bullins’ theatre, the love of the black people comes with anger against the bourgeois. He seems to feel that the bourgeois people have left “blackness” as not wanted and not cared for. Therefore, the life has ceased
to be of interest. They are anachronistic and indulge themselves in a world that is simply passing them by. Bullins encounters, opposes and rejects the bourgeois finding them pretentious who give false appearance of great worth lacking the vigour of the ghetto. Bullins seeks to show that the reputation of the bourgeois people is false and is expressionless. They believe to be on the safer side from the problems of the world full of racial and social issues. For Bullins, the reason for having turned from the concern with the bourgeois to the ghetto people is that the bourgeois are not aware of their follies and so Bullins has committed himself to the task of determining the black self-awareness. He exposes the falseness of the comfortable world that the bourgeois believe to be a refuge.

The segregation, separation of one particular class of persons from another, as on grounds of race, or ghettoization, began in the 17th century. In recent years "ghetto" has been used to label any area of confinement or voluntary residence of minority populations. What almost all ghettos had in common, however, was a certain amount of imposed autonomy and was burdened by taking undue advantage of them. They ran their own political, social and economic affairs through religious and secular councils, often with the permission of the external authorities. The ghetto people were no longer capable of thinking or acting on their own because of the beliefs; they were not free to choose any sort of life. These things were decided by their background and surroundings. As Locke observes:

All classes of a people under social pressure are permeated with a common experience; they are emotionally welded as others cannot be.
With them, even ordinary living has epic depth and lyric intensity, and this, their material handicap, is their spiritual advantage (47).

The black ghetto people under social pressure were uncomfortable and unhappy, and their feelings were prevented from being expressed. They had the shared experience among themselves. They were emotionally united into an effective whole. Their enthusiasm, admiration and strength of emotion were worthy of notice, because of the nature of the difficulties involved in their life. They were not connected with physical objects but with the mind and spirit. Ghettos have been painful reminders for the blacks as they always brought before the eyes of the blacks their “second-class” citizenship. The ghetto world is a world of emotions. However, it is also a place of cultural strength and “incubators” of great talent in the arts and humanities. It is a world of remarkable and “surprising lyricism.” Bullins sets himself to enumerate the history of events that seem to be outside the natural laws of those people placed under pressure by a social system. For the most part, he was caring a lot about their status in the ghettos. He always had the wish of examining the ghetto world thoroughly. “From the ghetto” is a common theme of Bullins whose works often combine the bitterness of binding the black ghetto people with a sense of friendship. In his most telling plays, Bullins dramatizes the black ghetto and the ugliness of the black ghetto life. He has been able to deal with them “with an interest proceeding from genuine regard,” because he himself belongs to the ghetto. He lived the street life, which is the subject of so many of his plays. Riley in his introduction to *A Black Quartet* writes:
Ed Bullins created, during the sixties, a roster of dramatic figures best described as street nigger royalty. This remarkable artist elevated to the averted eyes of Negro America, all the uncool, incorrect, funky Black urban field-hand life style we had always imagined could have no practical serviceability in the design of our new truths, our reconstructed myth-dynamic (xx).

Although his plays confront the ugliness of ghetto life, his most accomplished plays present a tragi-comic picture of Black vigour and courage against overwhelming odds. His ghetto people, portrayed in his plays, are strong, brave and determined. They are built in a way that they are more active and full of energy with forceful language and thought. One can observe that Bullins bothers more about the ghetto life and accepts the fact that they belong to “the criminal class” and he tries to make themselves feel about their ugliness. To cleanse them, he writes about the ghetto life. In his plays, he deals with the blacks’ life, which causes fear, anxiety and admiration. The blacks are admired, at times, because of their strength and power, though they live a life with difficulties. Constantly in his work has been on and about blacks’ life because black ghetto people would take it with a response, which demands their attention and recognition. Bullins’ basic concern is with black people, their values, aspirations, eagerness, desire, sentiments, manners, hopes, aims, their characters and dreams. He is also concerned with the depression caused by insensible, unreasonable mental illness of the ghetto experience. Having concern for his people, he writes plays which depict the life of the black ghetto. He has taken as his subject the lives of those for whom daily existence is its own black, “negative drama.”
Constant in his work is a questioning of the meaning of the idea of black people, black community and its various definitions. Without failing to regard and consider his people, Bullins without any fear in revealing to his community, he shows to his people their deformities, ugliness, lack of proper shape that destroy their beauty as well as their strength.

Like Chekhov, Bullins probes into the faults of his people in order to “cleanse them at having seen the ugliness.” “Far from working to mythicise the black experience,” he wished to remove its false-shows exposing the daily tensions of the blacks. But he was damned and cursed by his own people for making the private issues public. The black community’s response is controversial and is more pronounced in his plays. He has often been accused of “being negative, of fostering negative images of Black people.” Jeffers writes:

Bullins is creating a tradition for black drama to follow, helping to create a fearlessness, a self-acceptance. There is no sensational spooning up of filth nor is there sentimentality; instead there is the searing eye of unsentimental analysis (34).

It is no surprise that he is a figure of controversy especially among African Americans. It is the natural outcome when one begins to turn into oneself and into one’s own people rather than to merely observe other people’s behaviour. There is less hope that an oppressive society will correct and change itself and for the complete change, some other people, probably like Bullins from the same society, should employ it.
From the very beginning, Bullins' work shows a strong satiric component. His works also suspect the attitude of his people who live in the false assumption of their virtue. Bullins' works which deal with these components are remote from the actual concerns of the black community which the black artist must address and that the black playwright, like Bullins, can bring people together ready for action. His plays deal with the art of discovering and testing truths by discussion and logical arguments of the 'being' of the blacks. He places emphasis on the necessity to modify, alter and reshape the theatre into a black people's theatre and the lives of the black people. Bullins "underscored" the obligation with respect to the natural ability that the appropriate black folk-sense would be revived. He brought to attention the creation of a "new black consciousness." He saw himself as the voice of his community and one of the shapers of its morality, virtues and politics. He seeks to develop the black man's awareness of himself. In his introduction to *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents*, (1974) he termed this process as a "dialectic of experience or being." In fact, Bullins wished to present plays of the "definition of the black consciousness" set in the context of black theatre that operated within Black communities involving the dehumanizing effects of white society on the black society. But he moves the emphasis from black-white relationships to an act of investigating the state of mental unrest of the blacks. He seeks to investigate the state of feelings of ill will, signs of bodily stress, and strains in the life-pattern of the blacks. His plays become the process of reasoning by discussion of the tension between black-white elements. His intention is "not to force change" and not to destroy or remove completely the whites from the hearts and minds of the African Americans. Bullins seeks to work on his
people's consciousness of their potentiality bypassing whiteness entirely. To create black pride, to obtain justifiable self-respect, to feel the worth of the self, to attain self-esteem, to arrive at excessive self-opinion and to feel the positive social worth. Bullins deals with the consciousness of his people to reach the goal. His feeling was that Black Americans would grow strong and would fit into the world only on seeing their own strength and weakness portrayed on the stage.

In Bullins' view, black violence is a direct result of white violence. Probably in every situation when Blacks have favoured the support of carrying of arms, it has been for the purpose of self-defence almost against the violence of white people, in America. Many Blacks thought that they must see to their own protection and begin to fight back, quite simply concluding that they could not fight white cruelty and harshness just by "praying." Blacks could not win, of course, but the wild anger toward whites is real. The African Americans unable to direct their violence against the white people become more frustrated. They are unable to do anything. The sense of powerlessness and lack of strength to fight against the white world turn the blacks against mean odds. Bullins in his play, The Gentleman Caller, writes:

It is time for Black people to come together. It is time for Black people to rise from their knees and come together in unity, brotherhood and Black spirituality to form a nation that will rise from our enslaved mass and meet the oppressor [...] and destroy him. [...] Yes, we are rising, [...] We Black people are preparing for the future. We are getting ready for the long war ahead of us. DEATH TO THE
ENEMIES OF THE BLACK PEOPLE! All praise is due to the Blackman (136).

Thus, in Bullins’ plays, violence works as a spectacle. In his plays, violence is used to “startle” as well as to point out some of the issues in the black society. In an interview, when DiGaetani commented, “One of the things I find effective about your plays is the use of violence” Bullins replied:

I often use violence as a metaphor for some race relations, [...] in our society – [...]. In addition, I’ve been interested in some of the ways that these people could touch one another to get to know one another. [...]. One of those ways is through violence, and that violence can be verbal or physical (41).

In Bullins’ plays, violence is that among the African Americans, that is, among their own brothers. One can decide, without twisting the true meaning, that the violence is the American way of settling differences and seeking one’s place in the world, but “the violence among brothers is without purpose.” In Bullins’ plays, the sense of danger of violence comes from within the characters. Violence often occurs suddenly in his plays and has a great consequence defining the existential condition of African Americans. In the conversation of the characters, the statement related to another statement which rises to violence reveals its community. Its nature “has been spontaneous, not programmed.” What violence has been portrayed in Bullins’ plays has been the violence of individual acts of frustration, not the violence of “collective policy.” Bullins in his novel, The Reluctant Rapist writes, “The world prepares the black man in a single skill: treachery to his fellows” (148).
In Bullins’ plays, if “violence is done to whites, the function of the violence usually is to indulge the imagination of the black audience rather than to threaten any whites who might be present” in the theatre (Sanders 14). Bullins’ work rejects almost the white world. ‘Whites’ sometimes occur in his plays but they are simply a natural part of the story. There is no admiration or love of neither whiteness nor any rejection or ignoring of whiteness. Bullins’ white characters which are present in the black community either by choice or by nearness in place or time signal their presence more than showing racism and oppression. Through the white characters, Bullins carefully portrays the way in which race is always an issue and a presence, always burdened by its historical and social meanings. Bullins is gentle with the whites, in his plays, suggesting that they are trapped in their illusions, self-deceptions, as are his black characters. Bullins’ use of white characters, in his plays, makes a departure from the usual practice of black dramatists. He neither attacks white people nor kindles the feelings of blacks against whites. Bullins, “instead of fearing how the white man might appraise” the black people in the “sight of the ugly and confused aspect of black life,” he sets the white man out of the way and writes telling the truth frankly, sincerely, directly and honestly of the black reality.

In general, not all violence is revolution. Few of the instances of violence may be because of the reason of showing up a revolution. Violence is used imperatively to direct the attention of authority and Revolution is a “violent defiance” of authority. Actually, Black Revolutionary plays deal with the violent revolution of blacks toward whites. It is “a fear-provoking issue” in American dream. Those plays are about the angry blacks who are preoccupied with “social injustice.” Like other Black
Revolutionary playwrights, Jones's revolutionary plays force a changed attitude in the blacks toward whites. But Bullins' intention is "not to force change." His is "no political revolt" but "political struggle." Bullins sees his works as elements in the political struggle. To him his dramas are mainly portrayals for "the restoration of pride" to those whose self-image had been degraded by centuries of oppression. Art is not a "weapon" to Bullins. W.D.E. Andrews has noted down that the revolutionary nature of Bullins' theatre tends not to be "of style and technique, but of theme and character" (179).

The Black Revolutionary Theatre of Bullins is engaged in "the process of creating a black stage reality." Black Stage Reality is devoted to two reasons: freeing the blacks from their "sticky" or oppressive situation and making a ground on which they can stand on their own. His imaginative and artistic Black Stage Reality allows Bullins to explore the black experience. In his plays, Bullins' revolution is actually "revolution of consciousness." It is meant to be an actual revolt. His works are "consciousness-raising" gestures or in other words "raising of consciousness." It is a call for black unity and support resulting from shared interests, feelings, actions and sympathies of Blacks. It is designed to inspire a transformation in the context of black experience. Sometimes his plays tend to deal with "literal revolution." The plays meant to deal with "literal revolution" are concerned with dramatizing a consolidated ghetto place, which would be the equivalent of a "separate black state." Sometimes they seem to see present action as a prelude to participation in the American body politic. The political struggle, restoration of pride, revolution of consciousness, literal revolution, "consciousness-raising" gestures, participation in politics, all are obvious
in the works of Bullins as the ultimate objectives for which the audience of his plays is to be a black one. Bullins worked for a directness of effect and generated a series of dispossession, revolt and racial identity and his plays became a debate with the self and with the community, a shaping of black experience.

Bullins writes plays for the black audiences. Since his audience is black, there is no need for Bullins to write in “larger-than-life” or in “blown-up” language for effectiveness and efficiency. There is no need for him to challenge or fight against the whites and no need to encourage blacks openly or ask them to abide by the whites. Bullins has a deep sensitivity, compassion, sympathy, kindliness, love and understanding for his characters that enable him to evince a truthful presentation of his ghetto. As Alain Locke points out:

Eventually the Negro dramatist must achieve mastery of a detached, artistic point of view, and reveal the inner stresses and dilemmas of these situations as from the psychological point of view he alone can. [...] It is the drama of free self-expression and imaginative release, and has no objective but to express beautifully and colorfully race folk life.

Bullins knows the ghetto because he has always lived there. His characters, "the special groups," are thieves, pimps, prostitutes, whores, drug pushers, junkies, dope sellers, petty crooks, winos, pool hall brothers, wanderers and so on. In addition, there are stereotypes: lesbians, women-perpetual partygoers, etc. The characters in Bullins' plays are those "special groups" who would not ordinarily come or be drawn into the black theatre. Bullins has a likeness to stage his short plays upon the streets which
broadcast especially blackness, and he calls it as “street plays” or “street theatre.” Due to this, he was able to directly communicate with the black Americans keeping contact with the crowd. The crowd was comprised of diverse classes of African Americans including the black “low-income working-class” people and “the special groups.” The values and qualities in the social scene of Bullins’ characters are:

They are drinking and sharing wine in the wine time; smoking, especially marijuana, in the dream time; talking, especially teasing talk about love, or sex, or jobs, or manhood, in the jive-time; being in the party time; playing and listening to music in the blues and jazz time; having sexual intercourse and loving in the strong delight of bodies; and especially fighting and touching body to body (Tener 541).

Bullins interprets the characters of the “special groups,” the audience and the streets in the cities as “Black Faces.” The characters and audience in the “street theatre” are the faces that keep moving, they are the faces in the mobs. These faces are the masses of African Americans who generally and naturally assemble in the streets and in the cities of America. The places where these masses gather in America are Broadway, Main Street, Market Street, Broad Street, Grand Avenue, the thoroughfares of New York, Detroit, Providence, Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Atlanta, et cetera. As a method of drawing crowd for “street theatre,” Bullins uses drums and music. The same technique he uses in Black Theatre. He finds in ‘music’ a necessary characteristic of joining blacks together to form one unit, or to make them similar to each other. He uses ‘music’ as language in his plays. He establishes his world through “language and music.” Lindsay Patterson observes,
Bullins has a "wonderful ear [music] for the language of the ghetto" (quoted in Sanders 182). Like the role of music in Bullins' plays, language too provides more than a realistic detail. Language defines the sensibilities of the Bullins' people. All agree that, in Clive Barnes's words, Bullins "writes like an angel." Bullins is most frequently praised for his language, power of observation, humour, truth and veracity. Black critics Riley and Patterson identified the "veracity" of Bullins. In black music, there is a violent anger, and "poetic lines" that tell of what will happen in the future of the life of blacks. There is in black music a state of enthusiasm, danger, risk of something bad which may cause damage, loss and injury to African Americans. And the presence of earthly feelings, emotions that include their courage, strength, determination, frustrated feelings are also present in black music. As far as the music introduced by Bullins in his plays are concerned, there seems to be a blend of blues, jazz, gospel and pop elements which form the element of Black Americans and is the blacks' "soul music." Black music is a characteristic ‘vehicle used by Bullins to convey to the audience a vision of the black life which is different. The black music becomes the context for his characters' activities providing a new dimension to their life.

In his [Bullins] plays, a radio, a stereo, or a group of live musicians is always playing, jazz, blues, or rhythm-and-blues provides the background – more accurately, is the ground – for his characters' activities (Sanders 183).

Essentially inherent in the Bullins' play is black music. "Blues" for which, he often writes the lyrics. Ralph Ellison writes: the "blues is an impulse to keep the
painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism” (78). This “blues” which is a slow, sad song, originally an American Negro folksong, sometimes neither slow nor sad is presented in Bullins' plays. Jazz is a popular music especially made by the Black Americans and is typically emotional. It is one of the various styles of music with a strong rhythm, improvisation, etc., originating in American Negro folk music and this Jazz music is also played in his plays. Bullins suggests what Jones concluded in *Blues People*, that “music is black America’s primary language” (Sanders 183).

As most of his plays have music as a sturdy vehicle for conveying a vision of the lives of blacks, few of his plays which fall under Twentieth-Century Cycle of plays employ recurring characters. Bullins sets himself to write a cycle of plays, which would succeed in representing his sense of the black community in the twentieth century. Since the early 1970s, he has been engaged in writing a cycle of a proposed series of twenty plays, which is “a remarkable undertaking.” It is a collection of interrelated plays about black experience in America and about African Americans between 1900 and 1999, but he has continued to write plays outside the cycle too. The Twentieth-Century Cycle is a structure to write twenty plays. In this series, Bullins intends to depict a group of Black characters and a family. He has completed only seven of the planned twenty cycle plays. They are *In the Wine Time* (1968), *The Duplex* (1970), *In New England Winter* (1971), *The Fabulous Miss Marie* (1971), *Home Boy* (1977), *Daddy* (1977) and *Boy x Man* (1995). In these
plays, a group of characters is linked either by blood or childhood association whose development can be followed through the plays. The plays of the Twentieth-Century Cycle "lend each other strength." They are written "not in chronological order." They are linked "not by plot but by characters" moving through separate plays. This cycle of plays employs "recurring characters, themes, and motifs" (Smitherman 7). As C.W.E. Bigsby has quoted in _Modern American Drama: 1945-1990_ that Bullins himself explained of his Twentieth Century Cycle. Bullins wished to recreate reality in a new atmosphere – [give] … a fresh illumination, a fresh view of things … extend your vision … It will just tell the stories it tells, in the hope that the stories will touch the audience in an individual way, with some fresh insight into their own lives – help them to consider the weight of their experiences (285).

Through these plays, Bullins planned to give Black Americans some fresh impressions and insights into their own lives in order to help them consider the weight of their experience of having migrated. By announcing the "cycle," Bullins clearly expresses and openly portrays his attempt to create an extensive, imaginative black world. Exploring the self-awareness with fresh insight and understanding into the lives of Blacks helping them to consider the weight of their experiences is central in these cycle of plays. W.D.E. Andrews has said:

In order to show black people in as complete perspective as possible, Bullins envisioned a twenty-play cycle, the "Twentieth-Century Cycle," to deal with the blacks he knew best – those of the North and
West. He intended this cycle to depict a number of interrelated, intermarried families (183).

Bullins’ suggestion is that his projected cycle of plays is of “surpassing greatness in its scope” (Bigsby 255). His accomplishment of Twentieth-Century Cycle of plays about the black experience in America covering a long stretch of period between 1900 and 1999 causes intense surprise and great wonder. Over and above the cycle plays, he continued to write other plays also. He has written more than 100 plays, has gathered up and stored more or less 14 prestigious awards and an Honourary Doctor of Letters from Columbia College in Chicago.

These achievements of Bullins are striking to the reader because of their volume. It excites and tingles the readers’ imagination to find a writer setting forth his ideas in such volumes. But, in spite of such a tremendous out put of work, Bullins exposes a dilemma in his mind as to the message in his works. In his autobiographical play, *The Reason of Why*, Bullins explains his position:

> Each day without working is surrender to death. Sixty, I see myself, sixty with nothing upon the paper, the pages all blank, as empty as a life without smudges (Jackson 296).

There are other fascinating questions put forth by the dramatist himself “will it be worth it then? Worth it to who?” These questions lead to a great deal of analysis on the part of the reader. It opens avenues of exploration and criticism into Bullins’ dramatic world psychologically and psychoanalytically.

Out of more than a hundred plays he has written, five plays have been chosen for analysis in this thesis, the reason being that these plays fall into two thematic
categories. These five plays are divided thematically into three in the second chapter, and two in the third chapter. The three plays: *In the Wine Time*, *In New England Winter* and *Goin' a Buffalo*, that feature in chapter two, thematically fall into one group, that is, the search for roots, presenting a confused rootlessness, a longing for an imaginary exclusive land for the blacks in the U.S.A. and to create an identity for the blacks in the "alternative world" of theirs as against their living in the sordid reality, of their day to day American life. These three plays analyse the theme of rootlessness and the moulding of the life of the blacks through a presentation of their present sad condition and a picture of their future if they could follow the path of togetherness and harmony.

The next two plays, *Clara's Ole Man* and "*A Son, Come Home*" that feature in chapter three, portray the theme of lost familial relationships poignantly with the need to create an awareness for a united familial set up.