CHAPTER – IV
In the institution of slavery, black people, regardless of sex
Or age, were slaves. In the institution of patriarchy, black
Women, regardless of age, are slaves.

-Gloria Wade-Gayles

Zora Neale Hurston was one of the most significant unread authors in
America, who lies today in an unmarked grave in a segregated cemetery in Fort
Pierce, Florida, a resting place generally symbolic of the black writer’s fate in
America. But later Walker saw in Zora Neale Hurston a sister artist who “followed
her own road, believed in her gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate
herself from the ‘common people.’” This attitude, which has attracted Walker to show
a special reference and she became her follower. So she imitated in writings and can
find common bond in most of her writings. It is clearly observed similar theme in
Moses, Man of the Mountain by Zora and Meridian by Walker as both dealt with
black leadership through the protagonists, Moses and Meridian.

Moses, Man of the Mountain is based on the familiar story of the Exodus; Zora
Neale Hurston blends the Moses of the Old Testament with the Moses of the black
folklore, and song to create a compelling allegory of power, redemption, and faith.
Narrated in a mixture of biblical rhetoric, black dialect, and colloquial English,
Hurston traces Moses' life from the day he is launched into the Nile River in a reed
basket, to his development as a great magician, to his transformation into the heroic
rebel leader, the Great Emancipator. From his dramatic confrontations with Pharaoh
to his fragile negotiations with the wary Hebrews, this very human story is told with
great humour, passion, and psychological insight shows the hallmarks of Hurston as a
writer and champion of black culture.

The other novel is Meridian, Set in the 1960s and 1970s. Meridian centers on
the protagonist, Meridian Hill a student at the fictitious Saxon college, who becomes
active in the Civil Rights Movement. She becomes romantically involved with
another activist, Truman Held, and though he impregnates her, they have a turbulent
on-and-off relationship. Later Truman involves with a white woman, Lynne
Rabinowitz, who is also active in the Civil Rights struggle, though perhaps for the
wrong reasons. As time goes by, Truman attempts, unsuccessfully, to achieve
personal and financial success while Meridian continues to stay involved in the movement and fight for issues she believes deeply in.

Though stories and approaches are different, theme is almost similar in both novels that the protagonists take much risk to deliver their community people who suffer the alienation and suppression. Both are clear in their commitment, so they sacrifice their lives and try to redeem their people through different approaches. Both of them commit to deliver black people from their agony because of suppression.

Zora Neale Hurston startled many of her aficionados when she set down her version of the Moses story in novel form in 1939. Written in contemporary black dialect, the tale took liberties with the biblical narrative; for example, Moses is not Hebrew, but Egyptian and therefore black. On the other hand, from the evidence of their language and customs, the children of Israel seem to be stand-ins for African Americans, and the backsliding of these “chosen people” appears to echo traits Hurston sometimes bemoaned in the phrase she used to title a chapter in her autobiography: “My people! My people!” The book comments eloquently on the history of slavery that the Israelites and African Americans had in common, but also encompasses group dynamics, the problem of racial leadership, sibling rivalry, father-son relations, people’s connection to God, and the sacral quality of life.

The biblical tale recounts the story of a Hebrew baby whose parents, Jochebed and Amram, seek to circumvent Pharaoh’s death decree for new born Hebrew sons by hiding him in an ark among Nile bulrushes, stationing his sister Miriam nearby as a sentry. She watches as the bathing princess discovers the baby and takes him to the palace; Jochebed then secures a position as his wet nurse. Raised as a prince of Egypt, he grows to sympathize with the Hebrew slaves and finally kills an Egyptian overseer who abuses them. This forces him to flee to Midian, where he settles down with Jethro’s tribe, marrying his host’s daughter, Zipporah. Years later, God calls him to go back to Egypt and demand the freedom of his people, which he secures by the aid of his brother Aaron and plagues sent by God.

Central drama in Hurston’s retelling, however, involves Moses’ ethnic dilemma. His growing interest in the plight of the oppressed Hebrews pushes him closer to choosing between a privileged life as Egyptian royalty and a sacrificing life
of exile and deprivation. By killing the Egyptian overseer Moses puts an end to his own life of royalty as he is forced to flee to Midian toward a fulfilling pastoral life with Jethro’s family. Jethro’s pressure on Moses to employ his gift for leadership and hoodoo heroically forces him to choose again, this time between the pleasures of a quiet personal life and troubled racial leadership like Meridian Hill in Meridian. For the sake of her folks, she abandons her tenderly life with her mother at home, as a mother to her child, in the church and even at the school. Walker follows Hurston in writings by creating main character, Meridian in her novel Meridian. She became rebel to the president of Saxon College and stands in favour of Wild Child.

These ponderous themes are freshened by being presented in an ethnic manner, with large doses of folk-inspired humour. Cross-ethnic touches are abundant, as Hurston comically signifies upon black, Jewish, and American stereotypes, folktales, and idioms. The novel as a whole has metaphoric significance for all American ethnic minorities and the double binds they face as hyphenated American, but it also speaks to one of the most basic paradoxes of human existence, the opposed struggles for individual freedom and group solidarity and security. In Meridian the protagonist, Meridian also first leads her life differently before she hears about Civil Rights Movement but later she became strong enough to take a decision even to kill anyone for the movement.”She would kill, before she allowed anyone to murder his son again” (204)

Black Americans, from the seventeenth century until today, have constantly translated the Scriptures into their own versions of truth, frequently melding them with Afro centric traditions; the spirituals and folktales dealing with God, angels, etc. The seed for the story had been planted in one of her short stories, “Fire and Cloud”, which describes a dead Moses setting upon his own grave on mount Nebo explaining to lizard how, amidst strife and tribulations; he delivered the Hebrews from bondage. Moses, Man of the Mountain is perhaps the most intriguing and ambitious of the Hurston works for it combines fiction, folklore, religion, and comedy in a daringly provocative, unusual manner, such a mixture would inevitably cause problems and after Hurston is hard put to reconcile all these elements to produce a perfect blend. Darwin Turner calls the novel Hurston’s “Most accomplished achievement in fiction”, adding that “if she had written nothing else, Miss Hurston would deserve recognition
for this book.”(109) Turner is right in saying that Hurston deserves recognition for this book, but is effusive in calling it her “most accomplished achievement in fiction. Turner seems later realize his mistake when in terms that seems to contradict his earlier praise, he says, “The chief art of the book is abundant comedy …. But a good joke, at best does not comment significantly on life or people. Turner is not totally accurate here, either, for Moses, Man of the Mountain, through comic in places, is much more than a good joke and does comment seriously and significantly upon both life and people. The only critics who seem to have recognized the real merit of the novel are Blyden Jackson, Ann Rayson, and Robert Hemenway Jackson praises the novel for its objectivity and university.

In such art as this an artist pilots himself through the right purgatory. He loses the dross of a personal self. The steps Miss Hurston takes are all objectifications of a point of view under the proper auspices. She herself, in becoming the exponent of her Negro folk, ceases to be Zora Neale Hurston. Her Negro folk, in becoming the transparent other selves for Biblical personalities, rise above the level of their own subjectivity. A transcript of Negro life need not be parochial, but may anchor securely its substratum in the universal mind (Jackson, Blyden. 103-107)

Although Rayson acknowledges the humour in the book, she accounts for it by saying: “The characters only appear ridiculous because of the historical solemnity associated with them in most other depictions” (1-10). The humour is purposeful, of course, and though the novel does veer between parody and serious fiction, “Hurston’s introduction indicates that she is attempting a realistic portrayal of the Moses story of pagan and Christian traditions.

Robert Hemenway, Hurston’s biographer, offers, praise and censure. At one point he lauds Moses, Man of the Mountain as one of Hurston’s “Two master pieces of the late thirties,” (215) explaining that “Hurston acts as a tradition-bearer for an African American world view, simulating the process of creation that had led to the spirituals, reaffirming the act of imagination that could make Moses African rather than Hebrew, a conjure man instead of a mere conduit for divine power. She identifies with the creativity that could make slaves a chosen people in the midst of or culture structured to deny them a sense of special status”(260). At another point, however,
Hemenway calls the novel “a noble failure” because “its author could not maintain the fusion of black creative style, biblical tone, ethnic humour and legendary reference that periodically appears.” As a result, the reader is hard put to decide what his proper response to the novel and its characters should be. The humour often seems ill placed and clashes with rather than relieves the solemnity of the occasion. “Nevertheless”, concludes Hemenway, “the book fascinates, making Moses, Man of the Mountain one of the more interesting minor works in American literary history.”

The story itself, as its title implies, is Hurston’s version of the Moses legend, retold with a few significant departures from the biblical original. Missing is the long, interpolated portion between the middle of Exodus and the last of Deuteronomy in which an anonymous character speaks at length about the laws, restitution, ritual, and Hebrew genealogy. Everything else is essentially intact: the Hebrews are in captivity; Pharaoh refuses to let them go; Moses is reluctant to become involved, but does so at the command of God and the incessant urging of Jethro, his mentor and father-in-law; under the pressures of plagues, Pharaoh agrees to let the slaves go, but reneges each time the pressure is removed; Moses eventually leads the Hebrews to the promised land, stopping enroute at Mount Sinai to receive the Ten commandments from God; the Hebrews tarry in the wilderness to read by themselves for Canaan; and so on. What Hurston has done with this legend, however, makes the novel interesting and unique. Almost irreverently, she has infused the old story with new life, giving the Hebrew slaves an authenticity they lack in the solemn biblical story. Her role as narrator here is much like that of the African American preacher who interprets “the beginning of things” to the multitudes. In Moses, Man of the Mountain, Hurston renders into language the reader can understand the story of Moses and Israelites. Her updated modern version gives the biblical story a compelling immediacy.

What Hurston has done is to make the Hebrew slaves American Negroes before the Civil War. This technique, of course, is an established tradition in oratory, sermons, and literature: Dunbar’s “Ante-bellum Sermons”, Baldwin’s Go Tell It on the Mountain, W.E. Turpin’s O canaan!, Wright’s “Fire and Cloud”, Roark Bradford’s Ole Man Adam and His Chillen, Marc Connelly’s Green Pastures and and any other literature in which American slaves are likened to the children of Israel, the South becomes Egypt, and the First migration is likened to Exodus.
To achieve the kind of distance she needed to comment objectively upon the question of slavery, Hurston transplanted American blacks to, and acclimatized them within, an Old Testament milieu. Instead of the solemnity characteristic of the Biblical Hebrews, “a bestial sensuality and intelligence, coupled with the shrewdness of the market place, surrounds Hurston’s characters” (Rayson, 5). We become suspiciously aware of this when we see the Hebrew workmen in Egypt working for the “bossman”, and when we hear Jochebed the mother who tries to protect her male baby by placing him in a basket on the Nile-speaking to the river: “Nile youse such a great big river and he is such a little bitty thing, show him some mercy please” (39). In the wilderness, the people of Israel, grown tired of manna, long for the diets they enjoyed back in Egypt: “……the nice fresh fish …..nice sweet-ta-sting little pan-fish …..of which a person could get all they could eat for five cents and the nice fresh cucumbers, and the water melons, and the leeks and the onions, the garlic for seasoning”(308) diets, in short, which were often attributed to black folk.

Not only do the language and diets give the novel a distinctive Negro folk flavour, but the housing situation in Goshen also strongly resembles the big house-shanty habitats characteristic of plantation days. Pharaoh, of course, lives in his place (the equivalent of the huge white mansions of the agrarian south), while the Hebrews live in hovels which strongly resembles the cabins from plantations of the antebellum south.

Interestingly, God as a character does not figure largely in this reproduction of the biblical saga. Whereas he is overwhelmingly present, handing down laws, and directions, in the Bible. He seldom appears in Hurston’s domestic version. He appears to Moses as the burning bush on Mount Horeb and to the Hebrews as the pillar of fire which goes before them wherever they go. He talks with Moses on Mount Sinai and dictates the Ten Commandments to him. Moses, however, is the center of attraction in the book. While God is God of the Mountain, Moses is the Man of the Mountain and it seems, a much more interesting characters. To the Israelites, Moses is their god. It is almost as if Hurston does not want to press the issue of whether there is a god or not. He seems to be in her novel mostly because He is in the Bible, her source book for the novel. In her autobiography, she tried to decide about god. She was only able to conclude, however, that.
Having looked at the subject from many sides, studied beliefs by word of mouth and then as they fit into great rigid forms, I find I know a great deal about form, but little or nothing about the mysteries I sought as a child. But certain things have seemed to me to be true as I heard the tongues of those who had speech, and listened at the lips of books. Feeling a weakness in the face of great forces, men seek an alliance with omnipotence to bolster up their feeling of weakness, even though the omnipotence they rely upon is a creature of their own minds. It gives them a feeling of security… (Dust Tracks on a Road, 285-87).

These are strange statements, of course, coming from the daughter of a Baptist minister. They are not so strange, how ever, coming from a believer in, and practitioner of, Voodoo. Actually, Hurston seemed to believe in Hoodoo, the religion of Moses, and the Baptist evangelism of her father’s preaching. As Evelyn Helmick Comments, “Her soul was large enough to embrace them all” (1-19).

Hurston’s God, then, leaves most of his work to Moses. And, strangely enough, Moses seems to have acquired most of his supernatural skills not from God but from other worldly sources. He has the rod that turns in to a serpent and a blooming walking stick, and he has that powerful right hand. The rod is clearly a gift from God, but that right hand well, that is another story. When he leads the chosen, Moses does so “amidst reservations, clouds of self doubt, naiveté, and the brash heroism of a confidence man”. He tells Pharaoh for instance “I’d let them children of Israel go if I were you, but don’t let me over persuade you.” When Aaron tells him that he thinks Pharaoh is ready to do his bidding. Moses responds: “I hope not. I want to show that man a thing or two!” After he had led the Hebrews to the Red Sea only to be swiftly pursued by Pharaoh and his army Moses “laughed to himself as he thought, Pharaoh thinks he’s pursuing me, but it’s the other way around. I been on his trail for thirty years, and now I got the old coon at last… let me fuddle him all up for a night and then I will raise my hand. First and last, I’m showing him my ugly laugh” (234).
Not only does Hurston delve into Moses’ childhood, an omission in the biblical version but she also demystifies him and presents him as the most powerful god in the black folk culture, indeed “the finest hoodoo man in the world.” To the traditional Christian concept of Moses. “Moses was an old man with a beard. He was the great law giver. He had some trouble with Pharaoh about some plagues and led the children of Israel out of Egypt and on to the Promised Land” (7). Hurston adds:

Asia and all the Near East are sown with legends of this character. --Then Africa has her mouth on Moses. All across the continent there are the legends of the greatness of Moses, but not because of his beard nor because he brought the laws down from Sinai. No, He is revered because he had the power to go up the mountain and to bring them down. Many men could climb mountains. Anyone could bring down laws that had been handed to them. But who can talk with God face to face? Who has the power to command God to go to a peak of a mountain and there demand of Him laws with which to govern a nation? What other man has ever seen with his eyes even the back part of God’s glory? Who else has ever commanded the wind and the hail? The light and darkness? That calls for power, and that is what Africa sees in Moses to worship. For he is worshiped as a god------

All across Africa, there are tales about the powers of Moses, and great worship of him and his powers. But it does not flow from Ten Commandments. It is his rod of power, the terror he showed before all Israel and to Pharaoh, and THAT MIGHTY HAND (7-8). Unfortunately, Hurston never resolves the tension between the conjurer Moses and the Moses of the Bible, the law-giver and emancipator. As a result, Moses seems extremely holy and mysterious at times; at other times, he seems extremely worldly, impulsive, tempestuous, a regular braggadocio, running his game on those who cross him.

Hurston discounts the biblical version of Moses’ origins, presenting it as a mythical concoction of Miriam the daughter of a Hebrew couple, Amram and Jochebed, to get herself out of a tight spot. According to Hurston legend, Miriam had
actually fallen asleep while watching the basket containing her brother on the Nile, and when she awoke to find that “child and his basket were gone that was all,” she had invented the story that the princess had taken the baby to the palace to raise as her own. Despite the lack of corroborative evidence, the story had spread quickly, and become legendary. “Men claimed to have seen signs at the birth of the child and Miriam came to believe every detail of it as she added them and retold them time and time again. Others conceived and added details at their pleasure and the legends grew like grass”. The Hebrews want to believe that “We is kinfolks to Pharaohs now” and that they have played a dirty trick on their oppressors, gotten the upper hand after all: “Ho, ho! Pharaoh hates Hebrews does he? He passes a law to destroy all our sons and he gets a Hebrew child for a grandson. Ain’t that rich”.

The story functions much like the African American folk tale where Blacks, unable to triumph over whites in reality, triumph over them in their minds and in their literature: “The crowd talked far into the night of the Hebrew victory over Pharaoh and went home. They did not question too closely for proof. They wanted to believe and they did. It kept them from feeling utterly vanished by Pharaoh. They had some thing to cherish and chewed on; if they could say they had a Hebrew in the palace” (50-51). The princess had taken the baby is unlikely; she did take a casket from the Nile, which Miriam told herself contained “the things for washing the princess” (42). When Jochebed presents herself at the palace gate to offer to nurse the child, she is informed that there is no new baby to be nursed. Later, however, Moses’ radical activities lend credence to the rumour. As chief of the Army, he demands that the slaves be included in the forces of Egypt, but is opposed, naturally, by most of the court. Moses’ wife and his uncle begin to question his birth and year later even Moses himself considers the possibility of being a Hebrew. To Hurston, however, Moses was clearly an Egyptian.

It seems ironic that the great leader of Hebrews is not himself a Hebrew the irony is compounded by the fact that the reader is never sure if Moses is white or black and it brings the question of motive to bear on the story. Why, after all, would a member of the ruling class a liberal, who may be unwittingly passing wish to help the peasants, especially when he has very little if any thing to gain, and every thing to lose including his life? The answer Hurston offers is that Moses is a MAN, a good man, who unlike his peers is not interested in the money, position, and personal gain
like who Instead, he is interest in people, in human life, in justice, and he feels it his calling to help those less fortunate than he. Moses doesn’t need to be a Hebrew to feed and to do all this. All he needs to be is a man.

Moses began preparation for his mission while he was still a child at court. Unusually wise, inquisitive, and imaginative, he studied diligently, learning from Metnu, an old stableman employed around Pharaoh’s castle, all about animals and the languages they speak. From observing palace priests, he discovered how to master people by distracting their minds “from their real troubles”, and tainting them “with the fear of life”. From the book of Thoth, recommended by Mentu, he learned how to enchant the heavens, earth, abyss, mountains, and sea; how to understand the birds and creeping things and how to understand “the secrets of the deep.” His greatest and most influential teacher is the Midianite Jethro, seemingly God’s emissary, who teaches Moses how to emancipate the children of Israel.

After Moses’ abilities and knowledge surpass Jethro’s, Jethro informs Moses that he is ready for “That big job I been saving up to get done over forty years---Those people, I mean those Hebrews, need help, Moses. And besides, we could convert ‘em may be. That really would be some thing a big crowd like that coming through religion, all at one time”.

Actually, however, Moses had been unwittingly preparing for the big job all along. While he was in Egypt, he had killed Egyptian foreman for beating an already bloody slave, and he had “found a new sympathy for the oppressed of all mankind” (92). He had suggested to Pharaoh that the Hebrews be allowed to serve in the Egyptian army, and all the studying he had done was really readying of his mind to tackle the monumental task. When he fled Egypt because he feared his crime would be revealed and because his birth right was being seriously and maliciously questioned in the palace,”He was wishing for a country he had never seen. He was seeing visions of a nation he had never heard of where there would be more equality of opportunity and less difference between top and bottom.” He was seeking a place, in short, where there were no rules and slaves, where all were free and equal. Even though he did not know it yet, Moses was to help create this ideal nation. In crossing the Red Sea, there by imposing self-exile, he had taken a giant step toward the fulfillment of his dreams. The narrator records the significance of Moses’ flight:
Moses had crossed over. He was not in Egypt. He had crossed over and now he was not an Egyptian. He had crossed over. The short sword at this thigh had a jewelled hilt but he had crossed over and so it was no longer the sign of high birth and power. He had crossed over, so he sat down on a rock near the seashore to rest himself. He had crossed over so he was not of the house of Pharaoh He did not own a place because he had crossed over. He did not have an Ethiopian princess for a wife. He had crossed over. He did not have enemies to strain against his strength and power. He had crossed over. He was subject to no law except the laws of both and talon. He had crossed over. The sun who was his friend and ancestor in Egypt was arrogant and bitter in Asia. He had crossed over. He felt as empty as a post hole for he was none of the things he once had been. He was a man sitting on a rock. He had crossed over (103-104).

His sojourn in Midian where he meets Jethro and Zipporah, who becomes his second wife, may be seen as a kind of tarrying, a readying of the body and the spirit for battle. He flees from his mission but simultaneously prepares for it. He is sidetracked by his desire for Zipporah but once that is placed in its proper perspective, he prepares to do battle. He practices his art by causing small, relatively harmless, plagues in Midian, and he perfects that right hand. He comes to believe and accept what Jethro tells him: “I know that the God of the mountain has been waiting for you…. You are a hundred times my superior. The great I AM took the soul of the world and wrapped some flesh around it and that made you. You are the one being waited for on this mountain. You have the eyes to see and the tears to hear. You are the son of the mountain. The mountain has waited for the man” (137). After Moses talks with God via the burning bush on Mount Horeb, he tells Jethro, “I am a man that has been called” (165).

The “abundant humour” of the novel that Darwin Turner refers to its part and parcel of Hurston’s seemingly irreverent view of the biblical legend, the result of
the juxtaposition of a historical, solemn occurrence with a modern-day, dialect filled insolemnty. The attitudes of the Israelites are enough to try Job’s patience. When the Egyptian foreman whom Moses killed in the slave’s behalf, is replaced with a Hebrew, the slaves reveal the ubiquity of intra racial strife. I don’t intend to let no Hebrew boss me around because “He ain’t no better than I am” (94). This attitude, of course, suggests that the slaves do feel that the Egyptians are somehow better than they and are thus, deserving their positions, as rulers.

When the slaves’ suspicious, ungrateful and light attitudes are juxtaposed with the solemnity and seriousness of Moses, the result is twofold: first a light ironic humour prevails and second, the realization that the slaves are clearly not ready for the land, of Canaan is brought painfully home. The tarrying in the wilderness forty years is absolutely necessary. There must be time for self-actualization, for throwing off the bondman’s attitude and appreciating individual worth. The Hebrews must prepare to liberate themselves, for as Moses painfully learns, “freedom was something internal. All you could do was to give the opportunity for freedom and the man himself must make his own emancipation. “Joshua has every reason to shake his head and mutter “My people! My people…. My people just won’t do.”

Although the Hebrews in general complain constantly, two “upstarts” in particular worry Moses about making significant changes tailored to the two of them. These two are Aaron and Miriam, who claim to be the brother and sister of Moses. Because these two are haughty and feel that they should be distinguished for being “the very ones that got this thing together and kept it together all down the line,” they are brought down by Moses. Miriam is finally so under his power that she has to ask his permission to die and Aaron has to be stripped of his priestly robes and killed. Moses’ killing of Aaron on Mount Hor is one of the few departures in plot from the story of Exodus. By making such a change, Hurston seems to be saying that this is the real story behind Aaron’s death, he is killed by Moses to keep him from disgracing himself; thus he becomes a saint. In the Bible, Aaron dies on the mountain and is not nearly as arrogant and deserving of punishment as he is here. Of course, he seems more representative of that group which struggles to acquire power about himself and his strategies, Aaron says: “I got too much brains for people. You don’t meet my kind every day. I let folks thinks they are using me for a tool when all the time I’m using
them for a step-ladder “(329). When Moses reminds him of God’s decree that all the old folks who came out of Egypt, with exception of Joshua and Caleb, had to die in the wilderness, Aaron responds with:

Oh, I never took much stock in that, Moses, I not the people you know. I believe I am going to make it and when I do, I mean to be folks over there. The thought of it has kept me living or else. I would have gone like Miriam. She fretted herself to death about who was going to get us there. That was foolish; I let who can get us there than can see about things after that I know how to handle people (331).

The deaths of Aaron and Miriam were extremely painful for Moses. He had wished and prayed for better, but there had been no easier way. Miriam and Aaron, like the majority of the Israelites, had hindered the movement more than they had helped it.

All the Israelites were a people who formed it difficult to believe that life could be different and better for them. They were afraid of the unknown; real freedom for them seemed impossible. When left to their own services they reverted to the old familiar ways. For instance, when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments from God, the erstwhile slaves returned to their old gods and built a golden calf to worship.

The thing shook Israel like a wind. Suddenly the camp came alive….. “A real old down home Egyptian ceremony getting ready to come off with Aaron at the altar. Just like old times back home. And they tell me a break down and stomp is going to follow” (283).

At the end the forty years in the wilderness, however, the Israelites were finally ready to enter the Promised Land. As Moses reasoned, he had given Israel back the notes to songs. The words would be according to their own dreams, but they could sing. They had songs and singers. They might not be absolutely free inside, but anyway he had taken from them sorrow of serving without will, and had given them the strip of freedom. He had called to their memories the forgotten words of love and
family. They had the blessing of being responsible for their own (346). In a number of instances they were their own ‘massas’, in that they retained their slavery mentality even when they were no longer slaves. They felt incapable of leading themselves and even after the generations growth before they approached Jordan, they still offered Moses a kingship:

The people had missed the whole point of his forty old years of work. He loved freedom and justice with a fierce love and he wanted Israel to be free and just. All that he had done to them and for them was intended to bring them to his viewpoint. And here they were wanting to be like other halted people that they touched along the way. They despised their high destiny. They misunderstood him so far that they even offered him a crown! (327)

On the other hand, in spite of their bickering, the Israelites had rallied to their cause. They had fought and conquered when it had been necessary and they had produced Joshua, who “had all those big virtues that command respect and all those common place vices that make men understood. Men congregated about him. They respected his virtues and admired his vices. So he became the left hand of Moses’, and Moses confided in him freely about his plans and after thoughts” (304). Whether or not they had produced Moses was incidental. That Moses’ mission was to lead them made them special. Jethro and God thought Moses competent enough to handle the job made him special. The Israelites, Jethro, and Moses were all clearly God’s chosen people which mad them all very special.

What Hurston has done with the biblical story of Moses is unique and purposeful. The parallels of the legend with slavery in America are obvious. Both the slaves of Egypt and the slaves of America were unfortunate, oppressed and exploited. Both came to see themselves as God’s chosen people. Blacks in America had recognized and used, in song and story, the analogy, between the enslaved Hebrews and the enslaved blacks. It was not uncommon to hear the groans of the enslaved blacks rising from the hot, blistering cotton fields in words that arose from the biblical story:
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land, Tell ole Pharaoh, to let my people go.

Like black slave women, Hebrew women also tried to hide and protect their children from the oppressor. They knew that a cry in the night “might force upon them a thousand years of suffering,” that their children could be taken away from them without a moment’s notice. Pharaoh, of course, came to be identified with any unfeeling oppressor who profited at the expense of human misery. “Like some antagonists of African Americans,” observes Turner, “the Egyptian Pharaoh, by deceit and by force strives to preserve the old order— the slave labour which his nobles demand” (111). Pharaoh is afraid to do otherwise because to do so would jeopardize his position of power. The nobles on the other hand, with wisdom reminiscent of the mentality of some slave holders in the antebellum south, see nothing wrong with slavery: “what would slaves want to be free for anyway? They are being fed and taken care of. What more could they want?” (183). Both Pharaoh and the nobles see ruin in social change and thus seek to maintain the status quo.

Moses in contrast to Pharaoh, becomes a synonym for any deliverer, any honest and hard-working soul who seeks to free the enslaved and guarantee his right to equality and justice. Here, than as in most of her works, Hurston universalizes her themes. As Blyden Jackson asserts,

Art of this kind really fills to the brim the cup of miss Hurston’s Desire that a Negro folk experience of life be seen as what it substantially is, the reliable counterpart of every other human being’s experience of the same life (106)

One striking quality of the books is the Civil Rights Movement as political rhetoric Moses, who balks the status quo, is called a radical. He would have the common people talking about equality. The Hebrews circulate a petition in order to express their wishes to Pharaoh. When Moses comes with his plagues and threatens order, the palace priests recommend that Pharaoh “give him some sort of office to keep him quiet” (191). Next they consider bribery. In the wilderness of sin, the Hebrews “talk about splitting off. Some of them done formed a committee.” This
committee becomes “the complaint committee” and mediates between Moses and the people. These qualities and similar ones contribute to the African Americanization, or simply the Americanization of the Biblical Hebrew Movement.

Although Hurston couples folklore and voodoo with a great spiritual experience, the overall tone is poetic and majestic, suggesting the real need of a forceful leader with unusual powers by any enslaved or oppressed people struggling to retain their humanity, their loves. Here, as in her autobiography, Hurston seems to feel that force is necessary to any kind of successful liberation, even in a religious context, for people, no matter who they are, will constantly strive to keep their leaders, as well as each other down. Being a leader though is not an easy task; Hurston shows in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, with patience, perseverance, and force, one can succeed. Moses does not have a sword but he has something better hoodoo, the budding stick changed to a serpent, water turned to blood, plagues, upon Egypt, leprosy upon Miriam, death upon Aaron. The difference between Moses, who is a true leader and Pharaoh and Aaron who are false and petty, is that, Moses is a man. And a man, of course, in Hurston’s world, will always triumph over who are less than men. Moses however, is the ultimate man, the absolute man.

Irony still lies in the fact, however, that one cannot lead another to freedom the book almost suggests that it is presumptuous to try. Moses is dissatisfied because he has not accomplished all that he had hoped. His task was impossible from the beginning; however, one must free one’s self. When he reached the Promised Land, Moses’ mission was over. The way had not been easy, however; he had learned many painful lessons and settled for much less than he anticipated:

His dreams had in no way been completely fulfilled. He had meant to make a perfect people, free and just, noble and strong, that should be a light for the entire world and for time and eternity. And he was not sure he had succeeded. He had found out that no man may make another free freedom was something internal. The outside signs were just signs and symbols of the man inside. All you could do was to give the
opportunity for freedom and the man himself must make his
own emancipation (344-45)

He was able to profit from his mistakes and passes his knowledge on to another great leader, Joshua:

After doing all he could for the Israelites, Moses in a sense taken from the earlier “Fire and cloud” climbed Mount Nebo “and headed back over the years” (351). He had done his job and lived his life. To the Hebrews, it looks as if Moses died on the mountain; the Bible makes this explicit. By disappearing when and as he does, Moses retains that shroud of mystery which has surrounded him throughout the trip to the Promised Land. It is paramount that he retains that mystery because it has been the only thing that has kept the Hebrews in line; otherwise they would have killed him before they crossed the Red sea. This way, Moses is not merely a man to them, but is also a supreme and mysterious being that cannot be totally known by human faculties. In Moses, Hurston gives the old legend new life, infusing it with a universality and appeal hitherto unknown to the Christian world.

Because Moses, Man of the Mountain, does contain a folk hero who is not prosaic, as well as folk idiom, it is not surprising to find it among Hurston’s works. Just as Hurston felt that were certain qualities necessary for the ideal man, so she felt certain qualities necessary for the ideal leader. Moses, after a few stumbles, succeeds handsomely because he realizes and has at his disposal, those things necessary for effective leadership force (hoodoo in this case), respect consistency, mystery, poetry and determination. Although he is certainly the Biblical hero responsible for leading the Hebrews out of Egypt, he is also the African hero, Moses, the greatest hoodoo man in the world. Therein lies his importance for Hurston and Africa, and therein lies his importance for the reader of Moses, Man of the Mountain like Meridian in Meridian who act as “human rights crusader” (Walker, Meridian)

Later Carl Van Vechten was thanked by Lippincott for recommending Zora Neale Hurston’s Moses Man of the Mountain and adding: “It confirms our opinion that this is a remarkable book, possibly a great book” (Bertram). Though many reviewers responded positively, Alain Locke called it “Caricature instead of portraiture, (7) and Ralph Ellison commented in new masses, that this work sets out to
do for Moses what “The Green Pastures” did for Jehovah; Negro fiction it did nothing (211).

Meridian, published in 1976, is about the female protagonist who gradually awakens from her subordinate status as a black female, daughter, wife and mother to her own self and tries to become the maternal provider of the larger black community. The novel signals a radical departure from earlier work in its representations of history and its narrative strategies. Alice Walker’s Meridian directly concerns the conflict between personal needs and public commitments of young civil rights activists. Here it is like in Hurston’s Moses, Man of the Mountain, which shows Moses’ growing interest in the plight of the oppressed Hebrews pushes him closer to choosing between a privileged life as Egyptian royalty and a sacrificing life of exile and deprivation.

Although they experience considerable ambivalence about how to deal with their conflicting demands and desires and while the novel explores the consequence of their inevitably inconsistent choices, the book is unequivocal in its presentation of young activists paying an enormous personal price for their public actions. Scene after scene dramatizes their physical and emotional exhaustion, rending breaks with family and the devastating consequences of the sexual politics that invaded the movement in its last years. As one who lived through the movement and experienced many of its battles, Walker presents a firsthand picture. She transcends the boundaries of the female gender to embrace more universal concerns about individual autonomy, self-reliance, and self-realization.

Meridian the protagonist of the novel shows courageous behaviour in her life to achieve a meaningful life. She gets rid of her own child to seek new way like Moses’ in Hurston’s novel which a privileged life as Egyptian royalty. This new way and identity enables Meridian to attain, the highest point of power, prosperity, splendour, health, vigor, etc. As a result, she develops “a completeness of being” (Deborah, 262). Hers is a journey from the most ordinary position as a high school dropout to a self-illuminated person who has attained selfhood and knows what is the purpose and mission of one’s own life. To begin as an ordinary black female and to end as a self-assured person is not an easy development. To gain the glimpse of her which is in full bloom she has had to undergo innumerable trials and tests. As a result,
she is evolved “from a woman raped by racial and sexual oppression to a revolutionary figure effecting action and strategy to bring freedom to her and other poor disenfranchised blacks in the south” (Washington, 148). In fact Meridian’s “quest for wholeness and her involvement in the civil rights movement is initiated by her motherhood” (Christian, 47-48).

Meridian is seemingly in a state of decay. She begins to neglect her body; “she hated its obstruction.” She begins to bald. Continually forgetting to eat, she begins to suffer fainting spells and blurred vision, which result in a coma, described by Evelyn Underhill as a death-like trance lasting for hours or several days, during which “breathing and circulation are depressed, the body is more or less cold and rigid” (Mysticism, 359-60). She is suffering from fainting spells and her hair fallen out. Her face is “wasted and rough, the skin a sallow, unhealthy brown, with pimples across her forehead and on her chin. Her eyes were glassy and yellow and did not seem to focus at once. Her breath, like her clothes, was sour.” (Walker, 25). Both Moses and Meridian have left personal comforts, and desires to fight for the black folks.

In her school days, Meridian falls in love with Eddie who initiates her into sexual life, resulting in her pregnancy. They marry thereafter. Even before marriage, she is seduced by a mulatto called George Dexter. Dexter’s assistant thinks that she is a fair game just because she is black. However, it is only after giving birth to Eddie Jr. that she understands what it is to be a woman and more importantly to be a poor black woman, and a mother. Though Meridian and wild child do not share a common social ground, they come together on one point, and that is possibility of being made pregnant. For both of them, conception stands for oppression (Willis, Specifying, pp.111-12).

Basically, Meridian wants to give some meaning to her life as an individual. She is awakened to her true self the moment she learns about the Civil Rights Movement. She has no idea how to break through her stasis. A bomb blast does what the community and the family have failed to do. Provoked by this violence, Meridian longs to become a volunteer only seventeen yet she protests along with the other volunteers against the town’s segregated hospital facilities and participates in the freedom march to the church, in singing freedom songs and keeping a midnight vigil.
In a melee the police knock her down, and she trampled by people running back and forth. The sheriff grabs her by the hair and someone begins punching her and kicking her in the back. As a volunteer, Meridian does some typing work, and teaches illiterates to read and write. Similarly Moses reacts to the incident (quarrel between A Hebrew and an Egyptian) and he kills Egyptian and runs away.

In *Meridian*, however, heads are bloodied and brains damaged, women raped, children jailed, families torn apart, lives irreparably devasted. But there are scenes showing a united community euphoric with a sense of common mission; despite its action being embedded in the movement, conspicuously absent are references to particular episodes such as the 1963 March on Washington, the Birmingham campaign, Mississippi summer, the Selma march or incidents of urban violence that followed the passage of Voting Rights Act. While no one refers to specific civil rights organizations, the experiences of the young activists coincide with those who worked for the student Non-violent coordinating committee. Though Meridian allegorizes the black folks’ experience and speaks to the issues of collective struggle for freedom, self-determination, and self-definition, it is first and foremost an analysis of individualism and individual self-empowerment. Even Moses also shows the same concern for the Hebrews.

*Meridian* does not trace the history of the movement in an orderly, chronological fashion, but moves forward and backward in time, presenting as a series of highly visual vignettes. Some of the novel’s thirty four pieces focus on public events: People singing, marching, being beaten, and going to jail the funerals of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., a political sermon in black church. Others are highly personal, one girl having an abortion, another riding south in a car with her boy friend; a man and woman grieving over a dead child. Even the most private experiences in this novel have public, political implications, and the public events are presented not in terms of the large sweep of history but as the personal experience of individuals. In *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, the condition of the Hebrews was also pathetic as they were burdened with heavy load of preparing bricks.

The absence of an interpretive narrative voice to make connections between the individual vignettes requires filling in from memory the missing details, which in
1976 would have still been quite fresh. It had, after all, been only eight years since the funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr, was flashed across television screens around the world. The whole movement as it was experienced by television viewers was one of the high points punctuated by sensational acts of violence. *Meridian* focuses on activists who did not have time to watch the evening news to see what was happening in Birmingham or Selma and who experienced the movement as a series of disconnected episodes interspersed with disabling personal conflicts, rather than as interesting narrative smoothly moving from one stage to the next. Knowing that *Meridian* is about civil rights activists, it must be expected to be about their contributions to the movement, but in fact this novel is more about what was lost than what was gained.

The form of *Meridian* is not that of a political or historical novel that sequentially traces social progress. In searching for a structure for *Meridian*, Walker explains she “wanted to do something like a crazy quilt … something that works on the mind in different patterns.” The image of quilt is spatial and in *Meridian* the “scenes” mainly from the civil rights movement and from the lives and family histories of the young activists are arranged in a spatial rather than a temporal structure, despite the historical emphasis. Its thirty four pieces are put together without apparent regard to chronology scenes from the mid sixties are next to scenes from the mid seventies; the events of the civil rights movement are juxtaposed with vignettes from the heroine’s childhood and pieces of family history, folklore, myth, and current events. There are tales within tales scenes within scenes and it is sometimes difficult to see relationship among the pieces. Yet there is a kind of order in this chaos. Walker explains that there is a significant difference between “a crazy quilt and patch work quilt, “since the patch work is literally just patched and crazy quilt is planned. *Meridian* then, is a deliberately patterned work made of seemingly different and not necessarily harmoniously arranged “scenes”.

The impact of crazy quilt depends on shapes, colours, and textures, but what usually gives such quilts significance and emotional validity is that each individual piece has a history: a blue patch might be from an old man’s overalls, a red one from a party dress, and a pink one from a child’s playsuit. The women who owned the red dress may not be related to the man in blue overalls. Fragments might
come from discarded clothes of the quilt maker’s family members or the ragbags of friends’ kin and neighbours may recognize the origin of patches, recall their history, and so “read” the apparently “crazy” quilt that is meaningless to outsiders. The garments of *Meridian* are also bits of history.

Some pieces are not stitched through narrative comment to the core narrative. The piece entitled “Gold” for example, relates the time when seven years old Meridian finds a large bar of gold. When her parents ignore her and refuse even to look at it, Meridian buries the gold and forgets about it. The gold is Meridian’s talent and intelligence, which her parents do not recognize and which she therefore buries and forgets, or the gold represents something of value that Meridian finds the civil rights movement perhaps, but which her parents refuse to affirm. But the novel does not offer an interpretation, and in fact it is never mentioned. Again “Gold” is a discrete vignette, a brightly coloured piece of fabric in the guilt, a part of meridian’s life story that is not echoed in any other part.

Meridian may be like a crazy quilt, but as a verbal structure it is more complex and intricate than a cloth quilt could ever be. Not only are there scenes within scenes, stories, within stories, but there are pictures within the pictures that the stories make. The novel seems more like a first hand documentary of the civil rights movement that presents raw history in a non-narrative, spatial structure.

It may be useful then to reconstruct the primary or core narrative that is subtly embedded in the scenes: Meridian Hill, a bright teenage black girl, whose young husband has abandoned her and their baby, watches television learns about voter registration drives, a bombing in the local movement head quarters, and the deaths of children. Responding to these events, occurring “in the middle of April in 1960” (73) meridian volunteers to look at the local movement house “typing, teaching illiterates to read and write, demonstrating against segregated facilities and keeping the movement house open when the other workers returned to school”(85)

Sometime in the summer, probably 1961, meridian accepts a college scholarship from a white family that contributes to the movement by sending “a smart blank girl to Saxon college in Atlanta” (86). After concentrating on her studies for a
year, she joins the Movement in Atlanta and falls in love with a young activist, the handsome Truman Held. Together they become acquainted with Lynne Robinowitz and other white students from the North.

In the fall of 1963, “during first televised Kennedy funeral” (33), she makes friends with Anne Marion, a fellow activist. She canvasses voters, marches in the streets of Atlanta, sees old women beaten, and “brandishing ax handles” chasing small children. Frequently jailed and beaten, “once in to unconsciousness”, Meridian begins to suffer as well the consequences of the stress, made worse by the turbulence of her, relationship with Truman. After only one sexual encounter with him, she gets pregnant, has an abortion, and was her tubes tied all in a matter of week. Further complicating her feelings is Truman’s involvement with the white students, particularly Lynne Rabinowitz, whom he later marries. For Meridian, and for the reader of the crazy quilt, life in the civil rights movement seems “fragmented, surreal” (96)

Meridian’s activities after she leaves college are not all precisely dated, but much of the chronology can be inferred. While sharing an apartment with Anne-Marion in Atlanta, she develops a debilitating illness. Around 1966, she is in New York with movement colleagues who demand that she take a vow to “kill for the Revolution”(27); refusing to do so, Meridian goes off on her own to work with poor blacks in small southern communities. Truman and Lynne periodically visit her and seek her help with their various crises. In the mid 1970’s when Meridian is living in the small town of Chicokema, “near the Georgia coast” (144). Truman pays her a visit, and while he is there, she finally recovers her health.

The Opening passage of the novel recounts Truman’s arrival in Chicokema; the last tells of Meridian’s departure. Left alone, Truman climbs shakily in to her sleeping bag, grieving, thinking that “perhaps he would” resume her work there.(220) All the past, Meridian’s early life, her family history, the story of Truman and Lynne, and the civil rights movement itself, are placed between the accounts of these two events.

The novel is divided into three parts: “Meridian,” “Truman Held,” and “Ending”. The first and third parts focus on Meridian, and the second on Truman and Lynne, whose experiences after intersect with Meridian’s. After their days together in
the movement in Atlanta, Truman and Lynne return to the North and secretly meet in Truman’s parents’ home. Horrified that she is involved with a black man, Lynne’s parents disown her. Some time later, Truman and Lynne move to Mississippi. It is not clear exactly when they marry, but some three years after ward, Truman, having tired of Lynne, periodically leaves her to visit Meridian. Paralyzed by fear of being thought a racist if she denies sex to black men, Lynne submits to “rape” by one of Truman’s acquaintances and endures the sexual assaults of others. Shortly after Lynne becomes pregnant with Truman’s child, she sends Truman “back to Meridian, at his insistence” (166), and returns to New York, where she lives on welfare and becomes fat and depressed. She is exploited by black men as an “easy” woman and insulted by their wives who do not credit her sincere concern and love for blacks. The Lynne-Truman episode in *Meridian* aptly depicts the blacks as perpetrators of criminal and base tendencies that pre-empt any sort of possible black-white relationship. As we generally observe, most of Walker’s heroines are peasants. In this context, Susan Willis states:

> Bound to the land and their husbands or fathers, worn by toil
> in the fields and the demands of child bearing, these women
> are the underclass of the underclass

(*Black Women Writing the American Experience*, 110-128).

Truman sets up a studio in New York and becomes a successful painter. When a street hoodlum murders their daughter, Meridian comes to nurse Truman and Lynne through their grief. At the end of the novel, Truman tries to atone for what he has done to Lynne by telling her he wants to provide for her, like a “brother” (215). Interleaved with the saga of the Meridian-Truman-Lynne triangle are stories of the poor, the disenfranchised, the sick, and the uneducated, whose limited lives have hardly been affected by the social changes brought about by the movement and whose welfare first Meridian and finally Truman are working to ensure.

Though little of substance has changed for society’s outcasts, much has altered, though not necessarily for the better in the lives of the young activists. Truman, who once earned money working in an Atlanta country club serving white people, now drives his own Volvo and is making a sculpture for the Bicentennial. The former revolutionary Anne-Merion, now a well known poet, writes about “the quality
of lights fellow across a lake she owned” (201). In contrasting scenes, we see Lynne, once slim and vivacious, now fat and depressed; Truman once arrogant and confident, now tearful and uncertain; Meridian, once sick and helpless, now strong and purposeful. It is suggested here that Meridian has emerged from the trance like state to a saint. She explains to Truman that she has volunteered to suffer until her people are delivered from oppression.

In other words, the continued progress of her search for identity requires that she go back ward in order to move forward, and backward is the South. It is significant that much of the novel is set in coastal Georgia, where the survival of Africanisms-particularly of the oral, religious, and musical traditions is the salient. Walker sees the south, despite its history of racism and oppression, as regenerative, for it is the south that is the cradle of the black man’s experience in the New World, and the south that has continued to shape his experience in this country. It is in the south, then that Meridian rediscovers the power of the black past, accepts it and draws strength from its vital traditions, most notably the symbiotic musical and religious traditions.

In general, then core narrative is about a black man and the two women in his life one black and one white and how in the mid 1970's their liver have been transformed by their shared experiences in the civil rights movement. The first and Third parts contain much more than the vivid scenes from the core narrative; however, there are highly visual, dramatized scenes from Meridian’s childhood, legends of her family history accounts of her adolescent sexual encounters, lore of Saxon college, and tales of the daily struggle of those working in voter Registration drives.

*Meridian* was published in 1976, when this country, still reeling from Vietnam and Watergate, way making little noticeable progress in civil rights. The contribution that Meridian and others like her were making to the tedious work of the Voter Education Project, headed at the time by John Lewis, to whom the book is dedicated, was slowly yielding results, as increasing numbers of blank officials were being elected to public office.

By using Meridian’s name as the tittle of the novel, Walker invites to consider her as “prime”, the Meridian from which all else measured. But Meridian’s
way is only one way, and significant portions of the novel concerns alternative lives and views, some perhaps more suitable for the less saintly among them. All of the young activists have paid dearly for their involvement in the movement; none of the characters has smoothly paved roads ahead; all live with and expect to continue to endure conflict. None finds easy ways to negotiate the interaction between private and public aspects of life. For a brief time in the early dates of the movement, Meridian experiences the feelings of solidarity and absolute commitment, untainted by contradictory claims: as she is being arrested and beaten, Meridian realizes that “they were at a time and place in History that forced the trivial to fall away, and they were absolutely together” (84). It is not long however, before the drama and the glory, and the unifying force of the movement are gone for all.

For Meridian and Lynne, Joining the movement results in a rending the past. Disowned by her parents and eventually rejected by the black community, Lynne ends an outcast from both races. Meridian’s mother is clear about where she stands on civil rights: “God separated the sheep’s from the goats and the black folks from the white; it never bothered me to sit in the back of the bus” (85). Fear of her mother’s criticism does not deter Meridian from responding to the compelling mandates of the movement, and when the opportunity to leave her child and go to college arises, she accepts it in spite of her mother’s profound disapproval and her own tortured nightmares of her baby “suffering unbearable deprivations because she was not there” (91).

Like the mammy woman, Meridian is, at various stages in the novel, a daughter, though not obedient; a wife, though not devoted; and a mother, though not adoring; for the demands of these roles are circumscripive and stifling. It is in her role as daughter, particularly in her stormy relationship with her mother, that Meridian’s insurgent self-awareness and independence first surface. This conflict between the generations is a motif peculiar to the apprenticeship novel. It is imperative that the initiate come to terms with a parental figure to free himself or herself from that parent’s possessive hold before personal development can proceed (Buckley, *Seasons of Youth*, pp. 65-66). She strongly opposes her mother’s church where it was with the futuristic eschatology, severed the black man’s attention from the exigencies of the “here and now” and riveted it to the putative rewards of the hereafter, but she embraces her slave ancestors’ that rooted in the soil of protest
against oppression, the church of “communal spirit, togetherness, righteous convergence.” This black church is according to E. Franklin Frazier, “the most important cultural institution created by Negroes” (70)

Because she does live in an age of choice, Meridian opts for the twin “ills of ending her marriage and offering her child up for adoption, thus willfully abdicating her roles as Devoted Wife and Loving Mother. Likening her life as wife and mother to being “buried alive, walled away from…life, brick by brick.” In a very different way, Meridian equates motherhood with slavery. Her mother Mrs. Hills tells her that she herself had raised all of them herself. Meridian recalls the past:

If her mother had children in slavery she would not, automatically, have been allowed to keep them, because they would not have belonged to her but to the white persons who “owned” them all. Meridian knew that enslaved women had been made miserable by the sale of their children that they had laid down their lives, gladly, for their children that the daughters of these enslaved women had thought their greatest blessing from ‘freedom” was that it meant they could keep their own children(87)

Slavery is a blot in the sense that it does not seem to have been ended, as it is passed down from generation to generation. It is also a blot on the basic family structure because the children are “owned” by the white slave master and not their parents. So Meridian escapes and commits herself to the civil rights struggle, a commitment that earns her scholarship to Saxon College. The extent to which Saxon upholds tradition in its emphasis on form is pointedly dramatized in the account of the Wild Child, an uncivilized, pregnant, orphan girl whom Meridian brings to the honours dorm of Saxon to care for. Shortly afterwards, the Wild Child runs to her death and Meridian arranges a funeral to be held in the school’s chapel. By order of the president, however, the chapel guards refuse to let the coffin in. Meridian, who knows the president well, imagines him

Coming up to the Wild Child’s casket and saying, as if addressing a congregation: “we are sorry, young woman, but it is against the rules and regulations of this institution to
allow you to conduct your funeral inside this chapel, which
as you amy know, was donated to us by one of the finest
robber baron families of New York.

The bureaucratic mentality epitomized by the president pervades the Saxon
community, and Meridian becomes increasingly aware that her growing individuality
cannot be nourished in such a convention-bound climate. Therefore, she intensified
her search for an opposing set of value system, a search which takes her into the realm
of the mystical. This notion of mysticism is congruent with the evolutionary motif, for
the idea of a New Birth, a remarking or transmutation of the self inheres in mysticism
(Evelyn, 140-41).

Meridian, Truman, and Lynne have all paid high prices for their roles in the
movement. Not only have they endured the conflicts of the public and private, but
they have lost what many people consider the focus of private life: children, parents,
personal love. Rootless and homeless, they must find their way into the future
without the stability provided by a sense of connection to a history in which cause and
effect lead inevitably to a predictable future. Although it is clear that the two women
made an irreparable and rending break with the past and with families refuse to
acknowledge the value of their lives, the novel is not so specific about the price
Truman has paid. But it is clear that he is tortured and uncertain about how to live.
Like the patches of these young people have been torn from family and community,
and each must create a pattern without support of that context.

In order to engage in the intense political struggles of the movement, Meridian
has to forget the events in her personal past that once kept her from the larger
historical context of her life. She even finds it necessary to give her baby away. The
historical context for Alice Walker, however, is not only traditional or political history
but of what we might call cultural history. In an interview in which she discusses the
structure and significance of Meridian, Walker speaks of her fear about “how much of
the past, especially our past, gets forgotten.

In an essay, written in 1970, Walker wrote of the importance of ordinary black
Americans having a sense, not just of public history, but of continuity and context, of
learning to “see them selves and their parents and grand parents as part of a living,
working, creating move next in Time and Place” that is, temporally or historically, as
well as spatially. Thus, when she writes of Saxon College’s “Long, plaid, impeccable history”, Walker is referring to the kind of homogeneity of experience that has characterized the institution she does not mean its impact on external events or the nature of society at large.

In a rebellion against the college’s authority figures, who have reprimanded them for their activities, the students respond by destroying the “Sojourner”, a giant magnolia tree long a symbol of cultural, mythic history. Since legend says the tree grew from the tongue of a slave woman, they literally sever a living link with the past but ironically, taking a public stand results in the students breaking with the cultural history that strengthens them and makes activism possible. By joining the civil rights movement, many young people black and white placed a permanent barrier between them selves and habits of their heritage, cutting them selves off from their cultural or historical roots-the morals, customs and habits of their families and communities, as well as their own personal or sequential histories.

The cultural history that Walker treasures is represented in visual images, inspire the young activists. It is through pictures, of course, Meridian first gets involved in the movement Watching television , she is inspired by the pictures of the struggle; at the same time a white family in Connecticut sees the same pictures of “courageous blacks----marching and getting their heads whipped nightly on TV” and responds by sending Meridian to college. Throughout Meridian, pictures gives their mute testimony, mental pictures of “old black men in the south who, caught by surprise in the eye of a camera, never shifted their position but looked directly back; by the sight of young girls singing in a country choir” (27-28)

In Truman’s mother’s house, there are paintings by Romare Bearden, Charles White, and Jacob Lawrence, all black artists. As an artist, Truman is of course, always making pictures. When he and Lynne live in Mississippi, for example, he paints a mural of the civil rights struggle. He also creates a series of paintings of Meridian’s dark brown face and other black women depicted “as magnificent giants, breeding forth the warriors of the new universe” (168). When he and Lynne go south together, among his few possessions are two cameras (154); at one point, he frames a picture of Lynne, sitting on the porch of a shack, surrounded by black children but then stops suddenly and takes instead “a picture of the broken roofing and rusted tin
on wood which makes up one wall of a shabby nearby house” (129). Anne Marion sends Meridian a photograph of the stump of the, Sojourner, with “a tiny branch growing out of one side” (217). A grieving father stands, before the congregation of a black church beside a photograph of his son, a slain martyr in the civil rights movement Lynne is pictured “nestled in a big chair----under a quilt called the Turkey Walk” (130), and when she grieves over the loss of her daughter, she finds comfort by spreading the same quilt over her knees.

Having concluded that the church is “a reactionary power” Meridian is surprised to see a stained glass window in a church which depicts “a tall, broad-shouldered black man” dressed in brilliant red and blue, with a guitar attached to a golden strap in one hand and a “Shiny object the end of which was dripping with blood” in the other When Meridian asks the rather conventional woman sitting next to her what it is, she casually responds, “Oh that. One of our young artists did that. It is called “B.B., With Sword” (199).

Pictures were of course, the impetus for many episodes of the civil rights movement. Pictures of Emmett Till’s mutilated body in Jet magazine in 1955 moved blacks across the nation to send money to civil rights organizations, demanding something be done; those of demonstrators attacked by dogs in the streets of Birmingham in 1963 out raged and activated still others, that of John Lewis being beaten on the Edmund Pettis Bridge sent thousands to Selma.

Not all the novel’s strong visual images are found in the description of paintings, photographs, stained glass windows, or quilts. Equally powerful are the verbal pictures created by highly visual vignettes that are in a sense formed by their isolation from the progressive narrative. The ongoing suffering of impoverished black families in the seventies is evoked through vignettes that lead to see Meridian placing beside the Mayor’s gavel in negligence; the women dying without proper medical care lying beneath a “faded chenille bed spread”, her son who “don’t have shoes” cuddled beside her(204-05) the round and clean baby strangled to death “with a piece of curtain ruffle” by its Thirteen-year-old child mother(212) Lacking narrative buildup or consequences of the welcoming threshold that tells what to think, these vignettes illustrate the continuing suffering that occurs in a society indifferent to its
poor. They depict the unfinished business of the movement in sparer verbal pictures unencumbered with narrative interpretation.

There are a few passages, however, that make the relation of out to social action problematic. In the opening piece set in the mid-1970s, Meridian asks Truman if he is a revolutionary. Truman answers; “only if all artists are” (24). Lynne feels guilty for thinking that “the black of the South were Art”. (130) Art functions in this novel, then only to confront its audience with the unmediated, and therefore realistic, scenes, however fragmentary and in complete, of specific social conditions. By portraying injustice and other social ills, or passing on cultural history, art can engender social action, though if does not exhort, direct, or define what action is to be taken.

The novel’s unresolved political issues demand as much as does inferring the social function of art. In the beginning and ending scenes of the novel, which take place in the mid-seventies, Meridian is still obsessed with the question of whether she can “Kill for the Revolution”(27) an issue that was first raised in the movement and then directed specifically at Meridian in the sixties by her friend Anne Marion. Musing on whether her friends, “a group of students, of intellectuals, converted to a belief in violence”, could actually face, “the enemy, guns drawn”, Meridian concludes, “perhaps, perhaps not” (28). Her ambivalence persists; she alternately feels that “indeed she would kill” and that such resolve is prompted by false urgings-- -in periods of grief and rage”(200).

Conflict about whether violence is an appropriate response to racism divided members of the various civil rights organizations and “perhaps” even brought an end to effective coalitions among those groups. By the time Meridian meets Anne-Marion in 1963, the role of violence had already become a major subject of debate among civil rights leaders, including John Lewis, to whom the novel is dedicated. As the chairman of the SNCC, Lewis was pressured to tame the potentially inflammatory rhetoric of the speech he had prepared to give at the great March on Washington in August of that year. By 1966, however, the issue of non violence versus armed self-defense had begun to divide the leadership of SNCC, and if was Lewis’s insistence on the importance of maintaining a stance of non violence that led to his resignation and to the rise of black power and its dominant advocates in SNCC, first Stokely
Carmichael and then Rap Brown. At about the time Lewis took his stand and resigned from SNCC, Meridian was heading south, having taken the same stand with her colleagues in the movement.

In the final scene of the novel, her health restored and her commitment made to “return to the world cleansed of sickness” (219). Meridian feels that she is able to bear “the conflict in her own soul” (220) though she still alternates between the fear that she will “not belong to the future” and the tentative consolation that “perhaps” if will be her role to “walk behind the real revolutionaries----who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black----and sing from memory songs they will need once more to hear” (201). Perhaps expects to play the role of poet and storyteller, following the choice that Walker herself has made in singing the songs she feels her people need to hear, providing in literature those models are in fact lacking in so many people’s lives.

Spatial in conception, fragmentary in structure, visual in impact, Meridian evokes the civil rights movement, while refusing to reach simplistic conclusions or to forge an orderly and there fore falsifying causal narrative. Its tentative, inconclusive qualities underscore the inaccessibility of the period and suggest the lessons of history cannot be systematized and their influence is easy to exaggerate. Meridian’s unremitting ambivalence is reinforced by the frequently repeated word perhaps. Perhaps Meridian will find a way to play a significant role in the future; perhaps Truman will renounce his self-indulgent ways and find or way relate his cart to society; perhaps Truman’s offer to take care of Lynne to be irreparable scars and to find a way to begin her life anew perhaps.

Ending with Truman’s recognition, Meridian’s sentence of bearing the conflict in her own soul----must now be borne in terror by all the rest of them”.(220) the novel suggest liberty and justice for all is at best a fragile prize to be won and paid for again and again. In the context of the Bicentennial celebration, Meridian is a powerful reminder that, for those who are committed to a just society, the struggle will be slow, tedious, conflict, ridden, and lifelong.

Thus, both Moses, Man of the Mountain and Meridian bear common theme. Both the writers focused mainly on black folks who face suffering, injustice, violation, domination, sexual harassment, and segregation from whites. But their
stories narrated in different style and Hurston has taken her source from the Holy Bible and Walker from incidents happened in their family. Though taken from different sources, their concern is on black people mainly women folks. They tried to bring the alienation and suppression of the black women in to the light; from white racists and men from their race ultimately they have shown male domination over female at the home, and in the society.