Chapter III

Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in *In My Father’s House*

The most vital movements in American history are the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and both movements place serious debates among the leading historians and changed the social-political background of American society. The vibrant role of these two movements is mostly for the right for equality and to have rights in the institutions of American society. The blacks fight against racial discrimination and their racial autonomy and self determination play a vital part in changing American social and political landscape.

Several organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Sudden Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) play vital roles in the origin of the Civil Rights Movement. In the year 1954, Brown Versus Board of Education, and the Supreme Court decision on nonviolent activities enhanced the
power of these noted organizations such as NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and SCLC. These organizations fight for the injustices advance grassroots activism and support for mixed race combination and promote international relations and finally support cross generation alliance.

Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were originated in the Southern cities of the critical states such as Montgomery, Selma, and Alabama. The black’s fight against racial discrimination was finally achieved by the leaders of the movements like Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Even though the legislative victories and court judgements provide equal rights for the blacks, the white supremacy suppresses the blacks. African Americans raised their voice against the whites and they form the solidarity among themselves. White people did not overcome nor do the black people step down against the racism which has been firmly creeping into the society.

African Americans try to free themselves from the house where slavery is built. They moreover declaimed for freedom and demanded equal rights. Black Power movement enhanced the protest against white dominants, in the
American society. Perhaps it is a major formation which motivates blacks. Joseph Logsdon in his article "The Americanization of Black New Orleans" remarks that, as a result of this movement, African Americans became aware of armed self defence and developed a racial consciousness among the blacks. Starting with the sufferings of black in urban centres, the racial consciousness developed as a transnational freedom struggle for the blacks. Joseph notes that this black empowerment advocates "Community control of schools, welfare rights, prison reform, job, and racial justice for the poor" (3).

Many confederations emerged as the part of the Black Power Movement. Among them the Cultural Organization US, The Black Panther Party, and The Republic of New Africa was more retinue. The three confederations battled for equality of rights and made pressure on the whites. Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement determined the intergenerational argument against the injustice. Africans need equality. American government supports their equality for the sake of the word and the various notions of imperialism are simplified. The words of the government do not make the African Americans happy so
that it leads to fight for equality and the formation of these types of movements. The men and women leaders still remember their struggles against the American constitution and their fights against the whites to assert their equality.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X are the great leaders of the Black community. These leaders are interconnected with the African American freedom struggle. King and Malcolm are admirable in their society for their valuable contributions to the black community. They are icons of black masculinity and fight against racial and gender discrimination experienced by the blacks. These two leaders’ representations as exposed in the form of handshakes in newspapers indicate their interconnectivity with the black society. Their meeting represents the power of black people; The Civil Rights and Black Power have been interlocked in the human form. This chapter focuses on Ernest J. Gaines’ portrayal of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements which most notably resulted in creating the black to search for power against the dominants.
Ernest J. Gaines’ *In My Father’s House* (1978) depicts the problems of several black male characters in the small Louisiana parish of St. Adrienne. In this novel, Gaines portrays the tension among blacks towards their life during the period of the Civil Rights Movement and black power eras. The novel depicts how the blacks use their militancy as a strategic defence to avoid the violence and the problems which come through interracial coalition. During this time, leaders like Malcolm X and King inspired the blacks and shaped their black identity with these movements which become popularized in the society. Through the novel, Gaines explains the ways in which this era neglected to address black men’s interpersonal relationships. Gaines’s novel explores the complexities of black men’s relationship, and ideologies which shape the African American men’s thinking. By imagining “a black men’s conference”, Gaines portrays the interconnected periods of African American freedom struggle.

In the novel, Gaines focuses on the complex interpersonal relationships between the African American males. Gaines illustrates these relationships through five black male characters; Reverend Phillip J. Martin,
Robert X (born Etienne Ray), Howard Hills, Jonathan Robillard, and Billy. Martin, a prominent minister and leader of the Civil Right Movement in St. Adrienne, met his illegal son, Robert X and remembers his hard flashbacks which take place in his young age. His son Robert X meets his father in the Parish and questions Martin’s abandonment from his familial responsibilities. Martin is troubled with his buried past. The sinful activity in his youth is being pasteurized by the person Robert X.

The novel is set in the year 1970s. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy play a major role as the leaders of the Black Power and the Civil Rights Movement. Martin places their photos on the wall which insists that he is the supporter of these movements and leaders. Gaines’s repeated reference to the historical context and ideological tensions shaping the novel, and their particular import to the central theme and the action of In My Father’s House not only enhances understanding Martin’s relationship with Robert X, but it also draws our attention to other black men in the novel. Male figures surrounding Martin and Robert illuminate how the
severed bond between fathers and sons is one of many endangered relationships involving African American men. It is important in any reading of the novel to analyse such relationships, and to explore how certain conflicts are shaped by the social, political dynamics of the historical period and by the regional backdrop of the American South.

Gaines’ choice of father-son relationship in *In My Father’s House* succeeds in representing the anguish and disillusionment of the Reverend Philip J. Martin, who is a famous activist, whose past life recalls by the presence of his son, Robert X which leads to many changes in his life. The title with its allusion to many rooms suggests the multiplicity of Martin’s character traits and desires, which seem to be conflicting and contradictory obligations.

After the sudden appearance of Robert X to meet Martin make his time more critical. During that time, the movement members planned to send Martin to Washington D.C as a representative. This makes him to be notified as a leader in solving political problems. Gaines gives more importance to time, place, and setting. Unexpressed
issues between the father and son change their expectation towards each other. The past and the present life and the leadership role create the tension in African Americans. All these major ideas are focused in the novel between the characters Robert X and Philip Martin. Martin is responsible for all the incidents happened to his son, Robert X. In the novel, Robert X is described as a “thin, brown-skin young man scraggly and hungry-looking with little twisted knots of hair and deep, bloodshot eyes” (4). Robert X has the problem with his surname. When he aims for killing Martin, the lady in the hotel asks his name, she finds difficult to know which group he belongs to; whether it is a Black Panther Party or Black Muslims.

Martin compares the past and future of Robert X, an illegitimate son unknown to the present world who suddenly appears. He looks very much a burned out case. It is explained as:

He was too thin, too hungry looking. He didn’t like the little twitted Knots... They probably had let him go because they figured they had
punished him enough already and knew he would
die soon. (16)

Martin believes that he is responsible for this
condition. After Martin meets Billy, he recognizes how he
made his son to suffer and feels for the irresponsible
father and later he realizes that he must help him. The
prison of Robert’s life has been his resentment of Martin
for abandoning his mother and himself. He is
psychologically disturbed and made his mother’s small
room as a prison.

In the conversation with Martin and Robert, Robert
answers to the question posed by Martin about his
rejection of the mother. Robert says: “I am not a man who
rejects of mother likes you quit your wife and children”
(53). Robert complains that he never possesses masculine
identity and fatherhood and rejected by the God and law.
Martin realizes his mistake after meeting Robert. Given
the new systems of rules at work, Martin is not
comfortable in understanding the rural folk community.
The tense meeting with Robert is the sole difficult
interaction that Martin confronts in the novel.
Later in the novel, Martin’s wife Alma delivers the news that Robert committed suicide. When he hears this news, Martin falls into self-destruction, and deep despair haunts him. He wants to give up the present life and spend his time in drinking. But his childhood friend, Chippo advises him to accept both the present and past history to lead a life in the future. He gathers strength from his past political life and his fight for equality. Thus, he comes out of his despair and he wants to experience the reality.

The social, moral, and ethical appraisal separates father and son. The novel is written in third-person omniscient point of view because no character, certainly not the protagonist, could plausibly tell this story. The novel is about the people who help to shape the social and political agenda of its members of Louisiana. Formerly the group members take the violence against racism, but later identifies that it results only in separation. It is explained through the voice of Billy, who is the member of the Blank Panther Party who finds that violence is the medicine to solve the racial problems. He says that “nothing is changed” (34). All the youngsters in Gaines’ novel, In My Father’s House express
the quest about the social direction. The blacks want to come out from the inequalities in the society. They arrange a conference to select their leader of the movement and design, plans to transform the movement into a new path. The challenge posed by Jonathan about movement leadership and questions on Martin’s commitment to protest efforts raised by Howard Mills and Billy, forces Martin to assess the effectiveness of conventional liberation plans, which eventually make real social change. The influence of gender racial reminiscence on the men’s words and actions are evident in their reaction to Phillip Martin.

Gender racial remembrance brings out the relationships between the blacks, whites and African American women. Gaines sorts out fully and concentrates on promoting the Civil Rights Movement and the problems of interracial relationships between the blacks. Gaines’ use of gender and racial memory is examined in the novel by Edward P. Morgan. He notes that the use of gender, racial memory reflected in the novel and calls it a “Democratic Exchange,” an interpretation of the past that opposes what Morgan sees as the central quality of “public memory” (138).
Gaines depicts the characters who engaged in the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement and their experiences. The novel focuses on their relationships with the whites and within the black community. The major theme in *In My Father’s House* is gender and racial retention, which pops up to identify the importance of their personal responsibility. Civil Rights and Black Power era were shaped in the South to their black experiences in America. Contemporary writers implemented the impact of Civil Rights and Black Power Movement in their works. Richard H. King considers Gaines’s work as a historiographical fiction. He comments:

(Historical) understanding may be enhanced... by a fictional working-through historical phenomena.... At its best, fiction can illuminate certain dimensions of the experience of politics that otherwise might have remained hidden. (163)

Sharon Monteith and Peter J. Ling say: “By choosing the medium of fiction, writers should acquire a freedom to think beyond the dominant gender discourse and to posit
alternatives... may also operate to highlight overlooked possibilities or substantiate alternative scenarios” (10). This categorization is to understand the literature with the help of history and implements it in fiction. It is mentioned as history and literature are being still interconnected disciplines. With the historical discourse, fiction is evaluated in the present study. So Gaines’ fiction has been seen as the powerful historical literature.

African American writers such as Gaines, Toni Morrison, and Charles Johnson made their works as possibilities for their black community. Melissa Walker and Rolland Murray focus on the prominent role which some African American women writers played in these movements. Like Gaines, women writers such as Alice Walker, Shirley Anne Williams focus on African American manhood and historical recollection connected to the histories of them. Gaines’ novel not only focuses on racial and gender politics of his era and but also converses about the historical and cultural situation. Gaines provides references to this through his male characters participating in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements.
Ernest J. Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* ensures that it not only claims the impact of Civil Rights and Black Power beliefs, but also the characters are connected to historical movements and the racial identities. Critics of the novel, *In My Father’s House* always examine about the father-son relationship. Adding to this, critics say that Gaines has suggested the most important relationship with black men. Daniel White, Alisa Ann Johnson, Annisa Wardi, and Mary Ellen Doyle analyse father-son relationship depicted by Gaines in the novel. White suggests that the novel is focused on the primary father in the text (Philip Martin), and the impact of Martin’s rejection of his elder children have both on the minister and his eldest son, Robert. Noting Gaines’s decisive shift from focusing on the plight of young men in prior works (i.e. Jackson Bradley and Marcus Payne with *Catherine Carmier* and *Of Love and Dust*, respectively), White claims that Gaines’s consideration to the psychological dilemma of the disobedient father illuminates the motivations behind a man’s failure to assume his responsibilities and the inevitable, far-reaching consequences of such negligence.
Nash remarks Gaines’s consideration to this insubordinate parent, and links Phillip Martin to the delinquent turned devout father, Gabriel Grimes, in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (Nash 355). Wardi sorts Robert X as “a reminder” to Phillip Martin of the “costs of dismembering the past” (132), a past that must be reconciled in order for Martin to fully advance into his future. This dismembered or abandoned past is precisely what Johnson notes as having shaped aspects of father-son relationships in Gaines’s corpus in general, and in *In My Father’s House*, more specifically. Legacies of an abandonment pass from fathers to sons resulting in destructive behaviours that cycle throughout generations.

Mary Ellen Doyle analyses the structure of the novel. She not only focuses on the broken bonds between African American fathers and sons, but also insists the character’s development which makes the novel more powerful narrative. Doyle comments:

Gaines is clear that the story was mean to reflect his constant concern about the separation of black fathers from their sons and the resultant damage, moral and physical, to
both ... But Gaines asks, if he has not in the past, can he (the father) hope to retrieve his error, attain his full manhood, and lead others to their responsibilities and rights? (156)

Doyle’s powerful assessment questions the central theme and historical era as depicted in the novel. Gaines gives more importance to the determination of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movements. Gaines insists that the main character in the novel is based on one who is regretting the memory of the past mixed with historical acts mentioned in *In My Father’s House*.

In an interview with Patricia Rickels, Gaines points out the importance of the Civil Rights and Black Power periods in his eminent work, *In My Father’s House*. Gaines also insists the lack of progress in multiethnic relationships, mainly between black fathers and sons. He affirms:

What I am saying... what the story is saying, is all the things we've done we fought to drink together, ride on the bus together, eat in the same places, but we have only recently realized that we are strangers. [Phillip] Martin and his
son are strangers. We’re not close…. The movement was not aimed at fathers and sons. It was aimed at breaking down social conditions.

(Lowe 131)

Gaines focuses on the historical contexts and tensions in his novel *In My Father’s House*. The novel enhances the protagonists’ relationship as well as the bond between other black characters. It is one of the endangered bonds with African American people. It is very important to argue that this type of relationship in the novel shapes the social-political dynamics of the historical times and the regional place of the American South.

Historical discourse of gender and gender relationships in Civil Rights and Black Power periods mainly insisted on African American women and their experiences with Black men. Mainly Gaines says that African American men is gender biased and gives importance to the Civil Rights Movement which is their unique matter. A recent body of historical literature of the period, not only concentrated on gender performance, but it also focuses on the complication in Southern regionalism.
Peter J. Ling’s reflection towards men and different gender actions within the SCLC expose their connections towards this type of organization. Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* converses about the struggles between the old men and the modern men when they interact regarding their society. Gaines gives more importance to black masculine identity during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. Philip J. Martin in this novel, who is the protagonist and the leader of this movement, set a revered position in the society. Virginia Colar, a local woman proudly tells “our civil rights leader” (10). Martin is symbolically described by the women who came in one of the political gatherings that: “Philip Martin wore a black pinstriped suit, a light gray shirt, and a red polka-dot tie. He was sixteen years old just over six feet tall... just beginning to show some gray” (34).

Interest and idolization with Martin is implemented in women’s word, but also the overall assessment of town people is enlightened as “everybody round here is proud of (Philip Martins),” and Virginia says that Phillips has “done such a good job here so that people thinking about sending him to Washington” (10). Martin’s work has been praised by Virginia and others and they support
participate in his actions. She encourages and supports him who is the voice of African Americans and racial injustice, living in their small town with the support of both blacks and whites. Another character in this novel praises Martin as “political and moral leadership” (16). He fights against isolation and makes it into the success with it. In this novel Martin’s latest call is against the Parish store owner, Albert Chenal. This eventually enshrines Martin’s grade by his supporters and calls him “Martin Luther King” (16).

The senior Pastor of St. Adrienne’s solid Rock Baptist Church teaches and impress by frequent repetitions or admonitions through Christianity and reminds the followers that their fight for justice is for a noble purpose like the Dr. Martin Luther King did. Philip Martin’s performance of moral or religious act is insisting on the novel. Gaines portrays Martin’s commanding presence “a charismatic quality that draws people,” (32) especially women, to him.

He was sixty years old, just over six feet tall, and he weighed around two hundred pounds. His thick black hair thick and well-trimmed
moustache were just beginning to show some gray. Phillip was a very handsome dark-brown-skinned man, admired by women, black and white. The black women spoke openly of their admiration for him; the white women said it around people they could trust. There were rumors that he was involved with women other than his wife, but whether these rumors were true or not he was very much respected by most of the people who knew him. And no one ever questioned his position as leader of the civil rights movement in the parish. (34-35)

During that period, many black women want to admire their leaders by joining in the movements even with their sons, husbands, and brothers. It is an important aspect which leads to struggle for their people by the leaders. Black man’s courage is insisted by Gaines, through Martin’s first presence in the novel which describes his political speech text. Gaines highlights a few of the moral continuities and discussions between “Civil Rights” and “Black Power” and also draws some of the tensions that exist between members of St. Adrienne’s Civil Rights Committee and the activist from the organization which
Martin leads. Martin describes their reason for boycotting Albert Chenal’s store standing before a group of supporters gathered at his home. He remarks Chenal’s unfair hiring practices, biased treatment of black workers, and his undervaluing of African American patrons as the storeowner’s major offenses.

Christianity performed as a turning stone of black southern protest in the Civil Rights Movements. Rhetorics of Christianity serves as a main tool in fighting for their equality. When the plights of Southern African Americans were shown before national and international audiences, the moral values and Christian humility were continually evoked consciousness among their white supporters also. The interesting thing in the novel, *In My Father’s House* is its setting in the 1970s and the rise of black power noticeable during the time. As Marin’s words suggest, protest should inspire the confrontation of one’s enemy, but it should not avoid the Christian principle of loving others as loving oneself. He is aware that his views may place a conflict among blacks in the discourse of black power activism. Hence, in his speech he enhances:
Love is the only thing. Understanding is the only thing persistence, the only thing. Keep on pushing, the only thing. You got some out there screaming black power. I say, what is black power, but what we already doing and what we been trying to do all these years? Then you have the other crowd sitting in the bars- they even worse than the black power screamers- they saying, "What’s the use? Nothing will ever change. Hey, Mr. Wrigley, pour me another brink. (37)

Martin’s delusion towards love understands with his deliberate analysis. Black power supporters are mutually connected to Dr. King’s views. Dr. King in his speech made at the SCLC’s convention in 1967, questions the importance of the black power approach toward racism: “let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, ‘white power! ‘When nobody will shout ‘black power…. But everybody will talk about god’s power and human power” (197).

The meeting between Martin and his son made Martin to faint. But he was unquestionable by the society due to
his illness. While taking rest in his home, Martin remembers his rash behaviour of his youth and his responsibility for Robert’s absence. This insists on Martin’s dream during the night before his encounter with his son:

In the dream he was sitting on the side of the bed, just as he’d been doing twenty-one years ago. In the dream, just as it had happened that day, he saw the boy’s small hand in the crack of the door as he took the money from the women. He left with the money, but soon brought it back. When left the second time, martin got up from the bed and ran after him. In the dream it happened like that…. (52-53)

Robert’s final entry into his life made Martin to recollect his memory and realizes his responsibility for making his son apart from his family bondage. Martin re-imagines the past which is closely aligned. Martin has earned the adoration of his community would have chased after his son; he would not allow his child nor Robert’s mother, Johanna Rey to leave. He has never searched for
his son whom he left twenty years before, but the past recreates in the present which is mentioned in his dream.

Gaines explains the bond between the father and the son and also highlights the relationship with black women. He recalls the loss of his son who makes him guilty and claiming this violence inflicted upon the boy’s mother. Martin recollects the injustice he made by abandoning Johanna. Even though he repents for his brutal actions by “burying his face in his hands and crying” (96), the memory of his fight with Johanna haunts him. Martin rejects Johanna by telling her she can “do whatever she wanted with the money” so that he may more freely pursue his son. In his dream, Martin sees Johanna “calling” and Robert “reaches out to him” (53). He neglects Johanna’s calling as he is drawn to “the boy” in his dream.

African American men lack the personal accounts. Martin feels guilty for his lack of care as a father, a negligent partner to Johanna, mother of his son. The relationship between Robert, Martin, and Johanna are negotiated. Gaines also focuses on the gender and racial quest which connects to the black men’s relationship with
black women and with their children. Martin is disturbed by the gender and racial memory. He bailed Robert from the prison. Martin requests, officials for Robert’s freedom, but later only Martin finds the mistake which he committed in the past.

Nolan, the white sheriff, is not convinced with Martin’s interest in his latest inmate is solely political. Martin confesses his real reason for investing in Robert’s name. When Martin says Robert is his son, Nolan enjoys in a leader’s situation and demands for the cancellation of protest against the Albert Chenal, if he wants to bail out Robert. Nolan and Martin have some understanding that they have an unspoken agreement during the Civil Rights Movement. Martin and Nolan had no love for each other. Gaines insists this, “still there was no running hatred for each other either. Each felt the other was doing his work the best way he knew how accepted the fact that there would be conflicts between them” (85).

Martin takes steps to link Albert Chenal with the larger community. Nolan knows his efforts to this, and Sheriff also finds Martin’s love towards his son. He threatened Martin to select anyone; politics or his son.
He needs his political interest. Nolan is aware that even though Martin’s popularity did not earn public support of the brand of activism, Nolan voices on sentiments flowered by a group of young black teachers in St. Adrienne. They also echo Martin Luther King’s death as the end of tradition. Martin was threatened and later he resolves to seek the assistance of his white friend and also lawyer, Anthony McVay. Nolan says that white people have a sincere investment in African American’s personal crisis.

Nolan suggests that Martin’s confusion regarding his family was eagerly watched by the white liberals and it seems personal which is connected with the political improvements. According to white liberals, African American men have personal affairs that kindled their interest to involve themselves into the public affairs. As whites were interested in their private life which is reflect the interracial coalition. The advocates of black racial liberty have been the extent of white eagerness toward black experiences. Gaines uses white protagonists to make sure the white’s insincerity towards the colour line. In some ways Nolan feels:
This is personal, not political. They can’t blow it up like they can do a demonstration... see what cares about blood kin. The only time they care about blood is when it’s running in the street. They don’t give a damn for your kin. (91)

Robert complains that Martin is responsible for Robert’s dilemma because he was not present in his life to guide him into manhood. Robert says that his absence made him into a castrate and for this reason he came to his father’s place to revenge Martin. Robert is long awaited for bold challenge. Gaines insists it as “a black man’s conference” (16).

Johanna seems happy with her family in San Francisco. When Martin continues to engage in his dream, he remembers his friend Chippo Simon takes Johanna and children from Reno plantation, which is not far from South Baton Rouge and he drops them in St. Adrienne’s Parish bus stand. Johanna with some amount of money got tickets for herself and children and start to California. Robert does not say about his past particulars, it is only known through Chippo Simon which was revealed in
meeting with Martin later. Robert recollects the incident of Justine’s rape and realizes how this tragic flaw alters their entire family dynamic. In this novel Justine, who is Johanna’s daughter was raped by one of the several men Johanna entertained. Robert reveals this to Martin says:

My sister viciously raped. Viciously raped
Instead of me taking the gun like I should do,
I took her in my arms and called on God.
Viciously raped, her young body torn and
bloody- and I sat there rocking her in my arms,
crying, and calling on god. My brother brought
the gun to me. Pushed it to me three times. ‘Go
kill that dog. Go kill that dog.’ But all I did
was sitting there holding my sister and crying.
So he did it for me. He found the man, shooting
pool, and blew out his brains. (102-103)

Robert does not want to “revenge” (99) for Justine’s rape and his reputation in society is destroyed by his deference to divine intervention. When his family arrives San Francisco, Johanna assumes Robert as the “man of their house” (195). Gaines portrays Robert in the early
part of the novel as a young boy, his duty to save his family in order to protect from poverty until his family rejoin with Martin. After hearing his mother’s departure from Martin, he became panic and cannot continue his duty properly. Robert tries to have room for him and mother Johanna. Johanna requests him to work and needs to get money to support his family. After Justine’s rape, he became more responsible person to work for the family. Robert manifests as an example of black masculinity that counterpoints his father who was being seen as a model. He becomes distress after seeing his sister’s torn and bloody body, he became mad, but he did not take an immediate step to attack the attackers. The kind of sensitivity Robert manifests to address Justine’s need contradicts the unsympathetic gestures he witnesses that Martin exhibits to Johanna. Robert understands the values of family and relationships; he is men tenderly explained as “man” of one’s house. He questions his instinctual response and a remark to the act of violence to comfort Justine seems insignificant.

Robert does not want to be in violence act with the accused. He wants to protect his mother and sister. Robert’s manliness and his desire have been revoked when
Antoine kills the rapist Quick George. Quick George is the man who “pushing dope to pimping to robbing the church” (195). Quick George sets his sights on Justine by following her more than a month while she moved with Johanna and the children. Antoine killed Quick George and been poisoned for five years. During that time he has been maintaining distance with Johanna and Robert because he was the reason for bringing him to the place where they live.

Antoine’s behaviour is changed towards Robert after his brother visit in the prison; Chippo Simon explains:

Antoine and Etienne (Robert) would talk. He had even forgiven Etienne for not taking the gun. But now he was the man, and he let Etienne know it. When he pulled the trigger, then he was the man. His sister, the way she looked at him, let him know…. Even Johanna even Etienne himself, let him know that he was the man now. (198)

Antoine decides to avoid the law and wants to serve for justice. Anyway, he rejects to embrace Johanna and later Robert and besides, Antoine has a strong bond with Justine that lasts after he comes out of prison. Later
they left California and went to northern side and end up contact with Robert and Johanna. The bond between Johanna and Robert shattered irrevocably. They cannot forgive themselves because they realize their part in Justine’s violation. In spite to bring up their family well, they both blame themselves. Johanna finds fault on Robert that he was the reason for destroying their family. He blames his father for his position in the society and seems it as a result of Martin’s abandonment. Johanna contempt his wishes and her attitude changes and responds in such a manner reminding her last meeting with Martin. Robert remembers:

When I heard where you Martin was, I told her I wanted to come here to St. Adrienne and kill you for destroying the family. And she slapped me. She slapped me so hard I went blind. She went and got the jar of money and slammed it down on the floor in front of me. She made me get down there and pick up every penny. I cut my hands, I cut my knees, picking up pennies and wrinkled old dollar bills’. ‘Get yourself a ticket and go kill him,’ she told me. ‘Sew back your nuts by killing your father.’ (99)
Robert and his mother Johanna both have traumatized on the violence happened. They both missed Martin’s support; as a child with a father and as a wife to husband. Robert seems it as a failure and sympathize the violence happened to them. Robert’s failure as the head of the house made Johanna to criticize him violently. Johanna thinks that by killing Martin, Robert can regain his manhood. In the novel, the young man is judged by the mother to show their black manhood, and her anguishes confirm that father does not being part of their family to support. Johanna wants his son to be the part in the society. Robert is aware of the necessity of alternative responses to injustice.

Gaines does not mention about Robert’s abandonment of his birth name Etienne and why he named as Robert X. The exchange of memories between Robert and Johanna act as a catalyst and these memories explain the disappointments happened in their life. Robert’s plan to kill his father contrasts to his earlier attitude of non-violence. He even keeps non-violence stand after he came to know his sister’s rape by Quick George. A storekeeper in the novel remarks that Robert’s response was not only
consoling battered Justine but also pleading with Antoine and let the law interfere for justice.

Gaines wants to insist the injustice happened to African Americans, especially women who were left alone by their husbands. Robert questions the law which never protected the African Americans. He puts the responsibility on African men has to make their role as father, son and as a brother in their home.

Law? The boy asked, as if the word was foreign to him. 'There ain't no law. Why should the law protect us when the father won't? You think the law should care more for the family than the father? By law she wasn't even raped. Black girls don't get raped, black girls entice their rapist. Like mama musta enticed you. (103)

Robert makes a self assessment of his failure to look after his family and found that it is central to the African American fathers. Even he notices a Martin’s absence as his father’s failure. Even though Johanna instructs Robert to kill Martin, Robert came to a status of "man of the house" as he realizes Martin’s irresponsibility to look after the family. Antoine’s
influence and Martin’s rejection, made Robert to think that black men should be willing to resort to “any means necessary” (103) to satisfy their family and loved ones. It is because the law would not protect them. Robert follows Christianity initially, but he see inadequacy and ineffective non-violence followed by Christianity, which later changes Robert to a more violent and militant man.

Philip Martin came back to his home and met Robert in order to hear his past life. Gaines skilfully sketches the failed responsibility of a father who failed to discharge his duties to his son. When Martin came back to home after he bails out Robert, he was greeted by St. Adrienne Civil Rights Committee. The gatherings include Peter Hebert, Aaron Brown, Mack Henderson, Howard Mills and Jonathan Robillard. Later they got the information that Martin’s bargain with Sheriff Nolan and all were unhappy with this news because of their protest against Albert Chanel has been cancelled. Protesting against Chenal, many black old gentlemen have their own personal and political motivations.

Gaines presents the black men and their voices against white in his novel A Gathering of Old Men (1983),
similarly the black men in *In My Father’s House* were against Chenal. Howard Mills, the sound person mentions Chenal as the symbol of the white terror reign, who was against the black gender. Chenal’s activity mirrors the forced hatred and disregard for the lives of blacks explained by his own family’s patriarchy. Martin’s opinion to challenge Chenal and his claims about this challenge were countered by others, particularly Mills. Mills also insists his gender, racial memories of the white store owner and his family. He states:

I wanted Chenal. Because I know Chenal.... I knowed his daddy.... Thomas Chenal—I knowed him. I worked for him. I know what he was. I know how he felt about black women. No black’s woman looking anyway presentable couldn’t come in his store if he didn’t go after her. I remember when he raped Elliot Toussaint daughter. I was working for him I remember the day.... He raped her, and she runs out the store crying. He grabbed up one of them old cheap pocketbooks and stuffed pair stockings in it and threw it out after her. Told the people she had enticed him, and that’s what he had paid her with. That
she dropped it out there on the sidewalks when she left. But I knewed he raped her. I knewed it then. I was just too scared to say a word. (125)

The novel ends with class conflicts and gender, racial memories of African American women figure prominently in men’s remembrances. Unnamed women’s rape makes Howard Mills get into sentiments. Chenal always justifies the women’s rape, which Mill refuses. Robert X assumes that Mills is equally mindful of his inaction. It can be considered as same as Philip Martin’s recollection of memories about the injustice towards women. The violence and his participation against American women are brutally subordinated in Martin’s memory, but Mills stresses his silence and passivity also equally participates in black woman’s violation. Like Martin believes that his failure to protect his son and considers the same as a mistake, Mills also repent that he was not able to protect an African American woman. He remembers Chenal’s treatment of the woman and admits that this knowledge never made him to empower to stand up for the victim.
Mills witnesses the rape of Elliot Toussaint’s daughter, and compares the older incident as one of Chenal’s crimes against black women. Mills says that as a result of this violence against countless children born of the rape did by Chenal; make the African American women as intolerant humans in the south. The incident is connected to slavery because the violence against women caused by the white men’s brutal action. This brutal action of men resulted in illegitimate children. The mixed race children follow the condition of their enslaved mothers. The black women consider their husbands powerless because they could not protect their wives as well as they could not prevent the biological father from bringing gifts to children.

African American men consider the biracial children as byproducts of violating black bodies. The blacks are unable to protect their women—wives, daughters, sister and mothers from white male lust. Hence the black male considers the illegitimate children as the symbol of white men’s disrespect for black families. Mills says that black men in St. Adrienne protest against Albert Chenal’s have great significance. He says:
No, Chenal ain’t just another battle. It’s war.... “Look, Chenal, we ain’t baboons and apes.... We mean, Chenal, and we’ tend to fight you till we change you or destroy you. We got nothing but our bodies to use for weapons, but we go’n use that till we get what we want. Respect for our women, our children, respect for the dead who couldn’t get respect from your paw. (127)

Mills’s interests towards gender, racial memory and how he is motivated by these actions is mentioned in his declaration. Mills and other men think that Martin’s failure towards the racial and gender memory makes him realize their stance against Chenal. Martin’s bargain with Nolan is a disappointing thing to Mills and other friends. They think that Martin did not help to improve the social conditions in St. Adrienne and insults their collective work to build a free state, to which all of their children will come back one day.

Gaines declares that all sons will one day return to their father. Even though the young black men migrated from their native place to survive, like Martin’s son
Robert left the region to earn money. Mills declares that his son was not interested to come home and admits they have little communication with each other. All young black men do not want to be back to southern home in order to run away quickly from the gender racial memory and ignores their regional subjectivities.

Jonathan questions Martin when he supports white and he feels that blacks are becoming more racially alone. Martin supports Octave Bacherin and Anthony Mevav, the white supporters, Jonathan feel sad and tells to his fellow members about the desires, which is mentioned as: “I hope one day we won’t have to depend on white support.” He tells Howard Mills: “I still believe we must bring our own together. Not them. We must do it.... Get what we can get from them, but don’t trust them all the way” (32-33).

Jonathan strongly declares in public, Martin’s active support of the black race is exposed during a rally. He speaks:

[Jonathan] raised both fists over his head and looked around at the people in the room. ‘We need more people,’ he said. ‘More young people
more old people. We need the ones in the bars. We need the school teachers. We need them who go to work for the white people every day of their lives. We need them all. All, all, all. No reason to stay back, no reason at all. That wall is crumbling let’s finish tearing it down. (37)

Jonathan learns that, “wanted to say more” but Martin, ignoring the crowd’s applause, “didn’t give him a chance” to continue his call to action (37). In his assessment of the young man, Martin insists, “Jonathan is that new breed, Jonathan needs a communication skill to reach people” (50). Mills too supports him. In the Civil Rights Movement, Jonathan speaks for the people. Martin says that Jonathan is now a young activist who believes that freedom struggle started during the age of the sixties. But Jonathan fails to acknowledge the long existed freedom struggle which undergoes their contemporary moment. Disputing Martin’s asserts, Mills declares:

You right, blacks had a world out there. But ‘for the sixties people round here wasn’t doing nothing to change that world... But not till
then, till the sixties, I found a way to go 'again Chenal, and the likes of Chenal. Tom (Chenal) was dead, but his son car' his seeds, and he ain’t no better. He’s got no more respect for men, for you, for any other black man or woman than his paw had We animals far as he’s concerned. (126)

In American history, 1960s is considered as the revolutionary period which introduces many new directions for struggling in African American freedom. Charles Payne, who insists that, marked a new wave in black struggling for freedom which was headed by young activities. Payne argues: "the definitive break with the past, the beginning of a period of sustained mass activism that eventually came to encompass a much broader range of issues than race" (129).

Jonathan Robillard is against Philip Martin in the committee. Jonathan needs to fight for their black, his rhetoric of black racial autonomy leads to express the rebellions real life. Jonathan’s uncompromising resolve strengthens Carmichael and other young leaders of the time. Jonathan Robillard was also not satisfied with the
old men who bargained their personal investments and for hiding their fight for injustice. It cannot be compromised by all, so Jonathan joins in the group who was in disappointment with Martin’s act.

Jonathan was elected as president of the St. Adrienne’ Civil Rights Committee and this leads to the tension between Martin and Jonathan. Martin starts to burst and was shocked by this election, he gets angry with the committee, but he can see Jonathan as a clear minded leader who has good qualities and limited views make him to lead the movement.

Martin says that getting support from the white and black might make him a leader one day, but as an effective leader, he must know how to negotiate the rules set of Nolan’s and Chenals. Martin got frustrated by new presidents’ lordliness, Martin said:

You (Jonathan) don’t have enough sense to be scared of him (Nolan) and that’s the danger, you not scared of nobody. But you are gone find out bravery is not all. Knowing when to move and what to say is just as important. And, boy, you got a lot to learn. Not just about white
people... you got a lot to learn about your own people. You don’t even know anything about them yet. (131)

Martin is seen as reckless and powerless rather Jonathan is seen as having strength and the power to resolve the problem. Martin, as a Dr. Martin Luther King takes interracial existence into action.

Dr. King envisions a call for black power to change his society. Dr. King voices for social and economic needs even before his death, he fights for sanitary workers’ problems. Through this act, he earned a name even after his death. Martin warns Jonathan not to make aware of such things, Martin became crucial by his act, forgets he is a black, and part of Southern St. Adrienne. Jonathan is not only a young man who questions Philip Martin but also fights for gender and racial eras. Martin meets twenty four year old Vietnam man Bill in Reno plantation near Gaines’s fictive South Baton Rouge. Martin meets Billy in the liquor shop who uses the place for gambling, drinking, and gathering where “no women allowed” (157). Clad wearing “army field jacket” and “army field cap, combat boots” and “scar across his left
temple” (159). Billy seems to be aged far beyond his years.

Many people were laughing there as Billy feels disgusted and move from the place due to colour, “Nigger go’n be niggers,” (159). Billy is rejected as being part of the African Americans. He does not want to be among the black men's actions. He believes black men possess a lack of vigilance in confronting the discrimination. Gaines' reassessment of religion as communal influence is explained in the novel. Martin’s journey leads him to meet Billy, a troubled young man who is alienated from his own father. He is a symbolic figure of cultural division. Billy sees his father as a leftover of old ideologies. Billy has misunderstood Martin that has missed his duty for his son. So through him, he identifies that Robert is ready to kill Martin.

Billy says Martin that he cannot go back, he must go forward. It means that he cannot come out of the trapped world. Billy worries that nothing has changed and hopes that somebody will come and change the society. Billy’s approach is to change borders on appreciating the
radicalism espoused by a small fraction of political activities during military years.

Billy helps and guides Martin towards an understanding of himself. He forms a group and teaches tactics about Guerilla warfare, group says it is little army and mockingly warns Martin that young militants may remove his clothes and make him run away. Martin hears Billy’s mockery. Martin warns Billy that he is dealing with Black liberation is “a dangerous game” (160) and states that Billy’s wish to employ one million African Americans to involve in a “one day war” (160) against the America would look like suicide not as a war. Revealing his idea in further point, Billy states Martin:

What could he (white) do if all the fields and swamps caught fire at the same time one day? What could he do if every department store in a big city like New Orleans or New York or Atlanta caught fire at the same time one day? What could he do if ten, fifteen thousand gas pumps all waste gas at the same time, and somebody there to throw the match? The same thing for jails, the same thing for hospitals,
schools, banks. What could he do if all this happened? This country here is the last crutch for Western civilization what they call civilization. Burn it down, you destroy Western civilization. You put the world back right, let it start all over again. (162)

Billy as a hero of black essential joined with Eldridge Cleaver in the Black Panther Party. The Party’s motive is to stand for “black resistance to the entire [white] American power structure was inspired by Panthers’ protest against Assembly on May 2, 1967” (Pearson 147). Cleaver’s conscription of mass support for freedom is more powerful after the assassination of Dr. King. Newton, the member of this movement later asked to become the leader but he refused. Herma Graham III insists about the manhood and military experiences of African American men in his study regarding black power and influence on manhood as, “To black men who were constantly fighting and seeing their friends wounded and killed, precise numerical statistics belied the psychological impact of these casualties” (21). This type of psychological hard work has been mentioned in a Wallace Terry’s 1984 collection of African American Vietnam veterans which
focus on their life during war service, after death, and before the war. After leaving from the Vietnam War, nobody comes again to participate in any movements “had neither the interest nor the liberty to join Black Nationalist paramilitary groups” (Terry 16).

Billy’s hostility arises from a sense of alienation from society and his solution to a changing world is to operate under a code of violence, which makes the country into the ground to destroy the western civilization. “The Honkey don’t understand But two things, Mister-bullets and fire this whole country been While Billy represents to the new generation who rejects old ways, Martin still believes in old guard. Billy says Martin, “Niggers can vote, Niggers can vote”, (164) Billy tells Martin when was asked to assess the social “changes” resulting from the movement:

Vote for what? Voting can’t fill your belly when you hungry. Another nigger sits up there in the Capitol. Doing what? They put another couple on television to broadcast news them the changes you talking about? I’m talking about changes that keep white men from coming into
the South Baton Rouge and shooting down our
people. If it happens… we hit back that’s the
changes I want to see. (164)

Billy’s adjudication towards the meaningless death of
African Americans in the hands of white people is because
of the treatment of colour consciousness which is
happening throughout the world. Billy declares in the
Black Panther Party executive about how white
imperialist’s uses of violence in America and abroad led
to the non-white people’s fall.

Billy also insists the experiences he had in service
to America in Vietnam. He says he is cursed than being
blessed. There was integrity of a fostered community
among the soldiers despite of their racial, religious,
and regional backgrounds. Billy says the time spend with
the militants was less with an enemy grenade killed all
his friends. He escapes and other friends’ life were
totally collapsed in the blast. Billy explains:

My boys all died. Boopy died. Jerry died. Manny
died. Jim died. Hal died today. All of them
fought for this country all of them dead. For
ain’t changed, Chicago ain’t changed,
California, neither South Baton Rouge. Nothing
go’n change till somebody change it. (169)

According to Billy, change does not mean the Christian
love and non-violence as Martin describes. He says that
they need to face the enemy with courage so that the
enemy will fear. Billy declares death as the noble
warrior. Billy wants society to change radically. Through
his words and his actions, Billy suggests that to “take a
chance” means fighting for the country “if he gets a
chance to die he will sacrifice his life” (167). Losing
for the nation is the attitude of Billy, who inquired
Martin to wonder how to bridge the symbolic among their
different models of existence; Billy’s attitude reveals
the reality.

Even though Billy is not related in blood, he
teaches Martin the importance of relationship and how to
take the past to blow in the future. Billy’s words change
Martin’s thought forever. He realizes how he
psychologically wounded Robert X and Mills and also he
thinks that he hates two men who can influence Bill,
Antoine, and Jonathan who stand for truth. He gets an
opportunity to understand his past injustice to his
family after the "Robert X suicide," which makes Martin
to move forward to a close relationship with his family
(203).

The apparently fugitive and fragmented
characterization of Martin is thematically appropriate in
the novel. Its dramatic objectivity has removed that
never assumes the full life of Gaines's most memorable
protagonists. In the novel, language revolves around the
Phillip Martin's character. Martin's use of language is
remarkable; particularly the avoidance of language. As a
structure, presents a barrier between his past and
present. Other characters support to fulfil the mission
of Gaines in drawing Martin's character.

History may be enlightening, but it must not be
detained caged by it. History can be taken as a lesson in
forwarding black life for the future. A normal
conversation between two black male characters in In My
Father's House takes up the notion of "a black man's
conference." When one grandee grumbles that "you never
hear of a damned thing come out of them," the other
retorts, “one thing always come out of them. Those involved always make plans for the next conference” (19).

Gaines has focused on the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and his consideration of its influence on African American men and their interpersonal relationships is clearly mentioned in *In My Father’s House*. The “conference” that is portrayed in this novel places an interesting communication between black men whose ideologies and actions are informed by their gender and racial memories of these movements and by their personal experiences therein. Gaines’s fictive representation of African American men’s interracial tensions exemplifies the difficulties of these transformative moments in American history.

In continuation to the political reverberation and a result of the black movement, Gaines has demonstrated an introvert change in the mind of black people. Gaines’s manifestation of the gathering of the blacks to voice against the white supremacy and the hopeful emergence of a new era is discussed in his novel, *A Gathering of Old Men*. 