Chapter I
Introduction

America, by the end of the 19th century, had taken its place among the powers of the world. Its fortunes were so interrelated with other nations that inevitably it became involved in two world wars. Meanwhile, the rise of science and industry, as well as changes in way of thinking and feeling shaped and brought to the fore many modifications in people’s lives. All these factors in the development of the United States formed the literature of the country. Hereby, a new generation by its ethnic, regional, and social character came out of the war and was quite different from that of the preceding one.\(^{(1)}\) Drama, naturally, could not remain unaffected. It had to come out of its traditional domain as it inherently is linked with life and cultural mutations. A new development in the dramatic art, therefore, is apparent in the plays of some prominent American playwrights. Modern and contemporary dramatists’ focus has shifted from the protagonist’s quest for moral order of the universe to characters who lost the right to be in a society that has become increasingly hostile to their individual needs and desires. These characters are trapped in a materialistic world which interferes with their essential humanness. They are, either intentionally or not, framing some new cultural confines.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002) described culture as follows:

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\text{......culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value system, traditions, and beliefs.}^{(2)}
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In addition to that Arnold says, “Culture is the best that has been thought and known by human beings.”\(^{(3)}\) Greetz believes that “culture is the meanings embodied in symbols through which human beings communicate and pass on knowledge and attitudes.”\(^{(4)}\) Berger defines culture as “the externalization,
objectification, and internalization of human experience."(5) The second part, the word mutation is defined by The Free Dictionary by Farlex as “the act or process of being altered or change. An alteration or change in nature, form, or quality.”(6) So cultural mutation is the process of change or alteration on culture.

The American drama of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century portrays how gradually the social change, social problems and the cultural mutations took place. The importance of the American drama especially in modern and postmodern era is obvious in the various themes which are reflecting the American society in particular and the whole globe in general. Themes are varied including the horrors of the wars, biographies and autobiographies, the great depression, political hypocrisies, radical politics, personal issues such as fragmentation of the personality, self realization, , the struggle to preserve personal values, the outsider in a hostile group, anguish, despair; family issues such as family fragmentation, family relations, father-son relationship; social and moral issues such as the ambiguity of morality, fear of death, the dehumanization of modern society, the individual resisting social values, social injustice; horrible diseases, the psychological disorder and its interrelated effects on the individual, family, and society; Racism, African American social, ethnic, regional, and moral traditions treated critically and satirically; black-white relationships, the destructive consequences of alcohol and drugs abuse, and many other themes touching the soul of the modern society. So how American drama reflects the cultural mutations and how the American society is affected by those cultural mutations? All of that constructed multi-layer culture and various cultural dimensions which are changing radically, gradually, and consequently.

bell hooks, in her essay \textit{A Revolution of Values: The Promise of Multicultural Change}, moves from her experiences as a young woman dealing each day with the affronts of patriarchy and racism to her current situation working on behalf of a cultural diversity which recognizes not just equality and difference but the continuing presence of exploitation and conflict. It bears witness
to experiences but also a practical will for change that cultural theory often assumes. She says:

Our notions of social change were not fancy .... We were simply trying to change the way we went about our everyday lives so that our values and habits of being would reflect our commitment to freedom. Our major concern then was ending racism. (7)

As the upheaval of war and depression came to an end, Americans began to raise their heads and look at what their country had become. This was neither the America of 1929 nor even the America of 1939 and, because of this, a cultural realignment was required. This means that America needed to develop a new culture or society that would fit the changes over the last sixteen years. This was marked by the mass movement of people from the South to the West and the North. This movement occurred as a result of several factors: to look for work during the depression and then take new jobs created by the war; racial dislocation as African-Americans followed whites into the war industries and the armed forces; the challenge to gender norms, as women left home for work in war industries or service in the armed forces; and the return of those men and women from war service and their re-entry into society. As a result, the culture needed to be adapted in order to shape people's acceptance of the situation at hand. People had to believe that America was the best place on the earth in order to sell the anti-communist Cold War that had already begun by the end of the Second World War and that their place in that great society was secure.

Postmodernism is the term many people now apply to the culture of contemporary society, just as modernism- abstract art, atonal music, psychoanalysis, stream-of-consciousness fiction, starkly functional architecture, the anomic produced by rapid social change – was the culture of modern society.

In the middle and late 1960s, the United States experienced: a controversial war; unusual but unevenly distributed economic prosperity, legislation bringing the agenda of African Americans, other minorities, and women into mainstream
politics, and a demographic bulge (the baby boom) that was going through its teenage years. This combination laid the ground for extraordinary cultural change. Ideologies, foods, artistic movements, behavioural change—from cohabitation to long hair to the drug culture to Pop art to the Black Panthers to Women’s Liberation to acid rock— all represented cultural responses to the unsettled times that were the 1960s. In many respects, the slower pace of the cultural change from the mid 1970s until the present may be seen as a consolidation of changes made during the previous decade.

The term 1960s also refers to an era more often called The Sixties, denoting the complex of inter-related cultural and political trends in the United States. The 1960s have become synonymous with all the new, exciting, radical, and subversive events and trends of the period, which continued to develop in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and beyond. One of these events is the Cuban Missile Crisis (October 1962) - a near military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union over the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba. After an American Naval blockade of Cuba, the Soviet Union agreed to remove their missiles. The 1960s were also marked by several notable assassinations such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, President of the United States, and on April 4, 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., civil rights’ leader. In addition, the Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union would dominate the 1960s. In May 1961, President Kennedy set for the nation the goal of a manned spacecraft landing on the Moon by the end of the decade.

In the second half of the decade, young people began to revolt against the conservative norms of the time, as well as remove themselves from mainstream liberalism, in particular the high level of materialism which was so common during the era. This created a counterculture that sparked a social revolution throughout much of the western world. It began in the United States as a reaction against the conservatism and social conformity of the 1950s, and the United States’ extensive military intervention in Vietnam. The youth involved in the
popular social aspects of the movement became known as hippies. These groups created a movement of liberation in society, including the sexual revolution, questioning authority and government, and demanding more freedom and rights for women and the minorities. The Underground Press, a widespread, eclectic collection of newspapers served as a unifying medium for the counterculture. The movement was also marked by the first widespread, socially accepted drug use and psychedelic music.

Americans protested the American involvement in Vietnam. Students became a powerful and disruptive force and university campuses sparked a national debate over the war. As the movement's ideals spread beyond college campuses, doubts about the war also began to appear within the administration itself. A mass movement began rising in opposition to the Vietnam War.

The multitude of discrimination at this time represented an inhuman side to a society that in the 1960s was upheld as a world and industry leader. The issues of civil rights and warfare became major points of reflection of virtue and democracy. The 1960s has also been associated with a large increase in crime and urban unrest of all types. The counterculture movement dominated the second half of the 1960s. The counterculture movement had a significant effect on cinema. Movies began to break social taboos such as sex and violence causing both controversy and fascination. They turned increasingly dramatic, unbalanced, and hectic as the cultural revolution was starting. This was the beginning of the New Hollywood era that dominated the next decade in theatres and revolutionized the movie industry.

Television and drama of the 1970s reflects the broad spectrum of critical engagement and vision, entertainment and polemic, formula and experiment. Moreover, both cultural arenas demonstrate that, as in literature, race and ethnicity had become inescapable. Susan Harris Smith notes:

*The modern playwright becomes more important than the historians, for in no other war of our history was the private word more important than the public pronouncement.*

(8)
This is not to say that external, public conflict was not at all a concern of the 1970s playwrights. On the contrary, David Krasner interprets the drama of the decade, particularly the latter half, as a collective expression of rage, growing out of the social conditions. Now, in the post-industrial age thoughtful processing was no longer possible; the developed world’s culture was by now a mass culture which was bound by the fact that it is a visual culture. Unlike print, visual culture becomes rapidly deleted in the cultural sense, a depletion most readily evident in cinema.

Movies are many things- a window on the world, a set of ready-made daydreams, fantasy and projection, escapism and omnipotence- and their emotional power is enormous. It is as a window on the world that the movies have served, in the first instance, to transform the culture.\(^{(9)}\)

Today the United States of America is a diverse and multi-cultural country as the result of mass scale immigration from many countries. The strongest influences on American culture came from northern European cultures, most prominently from Germany, Ireland, and Britain. There are great regional and sub-cultural differences, making American culture mostly heterogeneous. The inhabitants of America come from elsewhere and reflect different individual experiences as well as cultures, and because they must coexist in the country, there is a sense of community as well as a recognition and tolerance of individual differences. It is expected that everyone will be different, so different types of people accommodate each other. Hence, can one say that the country could be considered an archetype of multiculturalism?

The United States of America is a country in which many people from all over the world come to live harmoniously with each other. As a multicultural country, it is a melting pot since each person brings his peculiarity to enrich the culture of this country. But the melting process is not always without pain or hurt. Culture shock is a state of bewilderment, anxiety, disorientation and distress as an individual suddenly exposed to a social or cultural environment radically different
from his own. That adds to the diversity of American life and helps mainstream American people to understand more easily other people in the world.

Culture change is a term used in public policy making that emphasizes the influence of cultural capital on individual and community behaviour. These cultural capital influences include the role of parenting, families and close associates; organizations such as schools and workplace; communities and neighbourhoods; and wider social influences such as the media. Cultural capital—such as the attitudes, values, aspirations and sense of self-efficacy which influence behaviour—is itself influenced by behaviour over time.

There are inevitable difficulties in defining cultural change. An emphasis needs to be put on how people think, work and act as a community, their relationships, perceptions and attitudes. Language and communication is very important. How the use of language changes over time; the words, meanings, and concepts which become an accepted part of natural terminology of a community provide evidence of changes in culture.

Frans Boas maintained that the shared language of a community is the most essential carrier of their common culture. For Boas, the fact that the intellectual culture of people was largely constructed, shared and maintained through the use of language, meant that understanding the language of a cultural group was the key to understanding its culture. Numerous scholars have suggested that the form of language determines specific cultural traits. This is similar to the notion of linguistic determinism, which states that the form of language determines individual thought. For Boas, habitual patterns of speaking and thinking in a particular language may influence the culture of the linguistic group. Such belief is related to the theory of linguistic relativity. He, like most modern anthropologists, relates the interconnectedness between language and culture to the fact that, they have grown up together.

Discourse is widely used in social theory and analysis, for example in the work of Michel Foucault, to refer to different ways of structuring areas of
knowledge and social practice. Discourses in this sense are manifested in particular ways of using language and other symbolic forms such as visual images. Conversation analysis is an approach to discourse analysis which has been developed by a group of sociologists who call themselves “ethnomethodologists”. Ethnomethodology is an interpretative approach to sociology which focuses upon everyday life as a skilled accomplishment, and upon methods which people use for producing it. Conversation analysis have produced accounts of various aspects of conversation: conversational openings and closings; how topics are established, developed and changed; how people tell stories in the course of conversations; how and why people formulate conversation. 

The language of the state, of the advertising which fuelled the new consumerism, and of the business corporations, whose own structures offered a substitute for that sense of community increasingly eroded by the fragmenting power of the urban and suburban world, all celebrated conformity.

Willy Loman’s conversation, in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman, is sprinkled with references to consumer products and to the advertisements which recommend them. It is a language detached from his being. Miller’s characters, accordingly, have to move towards the moment in which they can speak their lives as Tennessee Williams’s characters resist the prosaic language which seeks to contain and define them. They are engaged, in a debate over the nature of the real. Sam Shepard’s Curse of the Starving Class openings offer a speech in which Westley describes his feelings on listening to his father’s drunken attempt to break into the house. Its meaning lies partly in its rhythms, partly in the way the language is placed under strain, reflecting a sensibility under pressure. The narrative logic of the speech suggests that the threat is external. David Mamet explores the myths of capitalism, the loss of that spiritual confidence which was once presumed to underpin individual identity and national enterprise alike.

The theatre and all drama can be seen as a mirror in which society looks at itself. So, the American identity has been represented on the stage in various
modes mirroring or reflecting social reality. Since the World War II, the ways in which America was reflected through drama and performance have taken various forms, from the conservative conventions of domestic realism that reassert the dominant social order, to more anti-realistic that resist the restrictive definitions of “what it means to be, or to actually count as an American in terms of ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, and race.”

After the violence and atrocities of the World War II, however, the fragile foundations of meaning and truth were shaken. As a result a more fragmented and dislocated individual emerged to usher in what is called postmodernity: a historical phase where there were no certainties, no origins and no absolute attitude to view the world. The term postmodern refers to a particular historical era that is considered to have begun after the World War II and the cultural or artistic products that mark this era. There is a distinction between the terms postmodernity and postmodernism. Postmodernity implies the social or historical period that involves a transition from modernism while postmodernism is associated with the specific ideas, styles and cultural formations that came out of this historical period.

Playwrights of the period 1940s and 1950s dramatize the war and its aftermath, relations between the sexes, the tension between the individual and society, and the realities of ethnic, sexual, and racial difference. Dickstein hypothesizes that perhaps the most telling clue to the time from 1945 on can be found in "its changing perspective on war, since the whole period was shadowed by memories of war and by Cold War fears of its recurrence in even more unspeakable forms". In a 1960 essay entitled The State of the Theater Arthur Miller comments on what he considers the limitations of American playwriting during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

*The plays of the forties, which began as an attempt to analyze the self in the world, are ending as a device to exclude the world.*

Modernism implies cosmopolitanism and brings a sense of cultural leadership and the feeling that art and literature should be politically and socially
relevant to the working class. Along these lines, Christine Stansell, in her book *American Modernism: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century*, says:

> An attraction to modern revolutionary and “political” art, jumbled together would henceforth run through American culture, leading enlightened audiences and artists to advertise their solidarities with the “people” and see themselves, by virtue of the books they read, the art they admired, or the plays they attended, as subverting the status quo.\(^{\text{(14)}}\)

Every decade is a reaction to the one which precedes it “the political earnestness of the thirties to the supposed political frivolity of the twenties, the moralizing consumer-oriented fifties to the wartime freedoms and relative austerity of the forties,”\(^{\text{(15)}}\), but the ambiguity of legacy is left by the sixties which ends around the 1972, and which brings about vital movements and various social and cultural changes. Radical changes happened till the present day are the result of what happened in the 1960s, culturally, socially, politically, economically, etc.

During the years immediately following the Second World War, two major playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, dominated the American stage. These playwrights were often interested in exploring social issues, specifically the human costs of postwar industrial capitalism and the contradictory nature of the American dream. Williams's first major success was the production of *The Glass Menagerie* on Broadway in 1945. *The Glass Menagerie* was followed by *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Summer and Smoke* (1948), and *The Rose Tattoo* (1950). Williams’ plays of the 1940s and 1950s often involved a critique of the superficiality of American capitalism, which winds up rewarding appearance over substance. His plays illustrated how capitalism’s ruthless obsession with competition and materialistic success at the expense of deeper emotional and artistic values destroyed the sensitive and the weak, discarding human complexity and creating social outsiders who struggled to survive.
Thus the Second World War played a central role in the emergence of the Absurd as rebellion against essential beliefs, ideas, and values of traditional culture and traditional literature. So, the world was no longer a unified whole, but Esslin says: “a disintegrating world that had lost its unifying principle, its meaning, its purpose – an absurd universe.” (16). In such a world, it is quite natural for man to feel alienated since it is no longer possible for him either to know why the world is created or to distinguish between right and wrong actions.

The universe for the absurd writers and philosophers is irrational, defying logical explanation, and in such an irrational universe, man’s existence becomes meaningless and purposeless. All of what Albee wants to declare is a lot closer to the truth than the empty belief that America is the land of the free and the home of the brave where everyone is guaranteed life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. George and Martha in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, are a married couple whose relationship is held together by, once again, an imaginary child who completes the fantasy of the ideal family in an American drama that has gone perversely wrong. In 1958, American playwright Edward Albee attacked the very foundations of American idealism with his first play, The Zoo Story. The American Dream proposes that the goal of American identity is deliberate emptiness and superficiality.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of American identity as performative was becoming increasingly evident in the work of African-American playwrights, who were often presenting race as a series of roles based on cultural expectations rather than as an essential and stable core of being. Playwrights such as LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Ed Bullins and Ron Milner were central to organizing the Black Arts Movement, a social, political and artistic movement that took shape in 1965 after the assassination of Malcolm X and lasted ten years. Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange were also instrumental in opening up new avenues for African-American voices with their plays that pushed boundaries and challenged traditional dramatic form. Their highly symbolic language and
fragmented structures reflected the cultural experience of being a black woman in America, and were followed more recently by Suzan-Lori Parks, who uses fragmented repetitive language to comment on established historical narrative. Amiri Baraka’s two best-known plays, *The Slave* and *Dutchman*, both force the audience to confront its own prejudices through violent dramatic presentations that challenge society’s assumptions about race.

The complexity of the black experience in America, particularly the black female experience, is probably best explored by playwright Adrienne Kennedy. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is brilliant in its depiction of the struggles of identity and identifications that haunt the African-American psyche. Adrienne Kennedy. During the 1960s and 1970s plays such as *The owl Answers* (1965), *A Rat's Mass* (1966), *A lesson in Dead language* (1970) and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976) addressed the performance of the self as an outsider, the doubleness of seeing oneself through the eyes of the hostile and alien world. These earlier plays of her were written at the height of the civil rights era (1961-1969), the years of church bombings, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the beatings and murders, the riots, the bloody protests, and violent sit-ins.

Pressure to conform to a common ideology dominated the cultural and political landscape of the United States during World War II, and because even more pronounced during the Cold War that followed. There was a strong reaction against this forced conformity. These mainstream values and social structures were propagated in popular culture, including novels, magazines, radio shows, film and television. Many of these values make up the American Dream, such as the idea that anyone can attain success, where success means a university education, a traditional family with at least two children, a house, a car, and a well-paying job that offers opportunities for advancement. The American Dream took on a different dimension during the post-World War II years. The American Dream is the dream of the average citizen living in the United States. But in reality, not everyone, can become a business, create a happy family and prosper.
Discrimination- racial, gender, and class prejudices- often worked against American dreamers.

The cultural theories projected the cultural mutations in various ways. One of the most important is Jean Francois Lyotard’s The Fall of Grand Narratives in the Postmodern Condition. Postmodernism is a new way of seeing the world. Robinson defines it: “Postmodernism is perhaps just a convenient label for a set of attitudes, values, beliefs and feelings about what it means to be living in the late 20th century”.

Some theories have suggested that it is as much a mood or attitude of mind as anything else. Stuart Sim regards postmodernism as a “rejection for many cultural certainties of Western culture over the last couple of centuries”. It also analyzes a late capitalist cultural condition of postmodernity.

According to Lyotard social order is very important and each society must have social order for social bound among people. In Traditional time it was the work of Myth that made social order for social bounds. Therefore, Mythology is system of social order. It defines the relation between man and supernatural. By passing of time people did not believe in myth. After myth it was religion established social order, but after Renaissance people lost their beliefs in religion. Then in modern era Grand narrative takes the place of religion to establish social order. Grand narrative means general theory, a narrative which intends to give full account of other one, of another event. There are two famous metanarratives; first one is Hegelian: Totality of knowledge, the idea of progress. Another one is Marxism: the emancipation of humanity to explain economic, philosophy, art, music and everything. But after 1950s nobody believed in Grand narrative. Marxism became dictatorship and Hegelian idea failed because of a lot of diseases, war and future was not better or rosy; as a result, postmodernism does not believe in Metanarrative. One can say after two wars, TV as mass media gives images without any originality. People are bombarded by advertisements of mass media like newspapers, magazines, TV, radio. They are means of power in the
hand of capitalist societies. Reality is lost because of these images. They force people to buy something which they do not need. Therefore people buy goods not because they need them, but they buy for prestige and joy. Then Lyotard in his *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarrative. A metanarrative sets out the rules of narratives and language games.” (19) Also postmodernism can be used as referring to aspects of a more general human condition in the late capitalist world of the post 1950s which have an all-embracing effect on life, culture, ideology and art.

In critical theory, and particularly postmodernism, a Metanarrative, sometimes Grand Narrative, is an abstract idea that is supposed to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. According to Lyotard, in the postmodern period, people no longer believe in Grand Narratives, Grand Narratives are old fashioned and oppressive – oppressive because one grand narrative excludes another. Lyotard (1984) explains:

> In contemporary society and culture - postindustrial society, postmodern culture- the question of the legitimization of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation. (20)

Postmodernists attempt to replace Metanarratives by focusing on specific local contexts as well as the diversity of human experience.

Lyotard and many other poststructuralist thinkers have viewed this as a positive development for a number of reasons. First, attempts to construct grand theories tend to dismiss the naturally existing chaos and disorder of the universe. Second, Metanarratives are created and reinforced by power structures and are therefore not to be trusted. Metanarratives ignore the heterogeneity or variety of human existence. They are also seen to embody unacceptable views of historical development, in terms of progress towards a specific goal. The latent diverse passions of human beings will always make it impossible for them to be
marshalled under some theoretical doctrine and this is one of the reasons given for the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Social tensions in the United States like losing identity in a mechanized world, fears of losing jobs, insecurities, and dehumanizing aspects began to preoccupy dramatists after the World War I. The American family and its development and disintegration also was a recurring theme of playwriting at this time, and it would dominate much American playwriting for the rest of the 20th century.

Eugene O’Neill is the most experimental of American playwrights in the 1920s. Expressionist playwrights tried to convey the dehumanizing aspects of 20th-century technological society such as minimal scenery, telegraphic dialogue, talking machines and characters portrayed as types rather than individuals. O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* (1922) depicts a rejected ship laborer who feels he belongs nowhere until he confronts an ape in a zoo. In the play, O’Neill’s protagonist, the Hairy Ape himself, is Yank, a fireman in an ocean liner. Yank’s journey in the play is from found to lost; at the beginning of the play he makes this statement about his place in the world, the world below deck:

> I’m at de bottom, get me!......I’m de end! I’m de start!......I’m steam and oil for de engines;........I’m smoke and express trains and streamers and factory whistles; I’m de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I’m what makes iron into steal! (21)

Yank takes his identity from his place in mechanized society, but this sense of self is a form of expression imposed on him by his station in life. Above deck is the soft, privileged class represented by Mildred Douglas whose father is the chairman of the board of directors of the ship line. When Mildred sees him filthy from work, she whispers about the filthy beast. This hurls Yank that Mildred’s expression was as if she had seen a hairy ape who had escaped from the zoo. Then on the shore of New York City, Yank is taken to prison for hitting a man rushing for the bus. Here, he is convinced that his real enemy is the capitalism represented by Mildred’s father. Yank’s journey ends in the zoo. Suddenly, Yank tries to open the
gorilla cage. The loose animal embraces Yank in a deadly hug, breaking his ribs and squeezing the air out of his lungs. Yank sees in the Hairy Ape every element supports Yank’s view of the world as a dangerous place. The American expressionism was also explored by other plays of the 1920s; such as *The Adding Machine* and *Roger Bloomer*.

The fear of losing one’s job and the insecurities was one of the social tensions of post WWI. *The Adding Machine* (1923) by Elmer Rice, is a good example of that. It focuses on the emotional journey of the leading character, Mr. Zero, after he is replaced at his job by an adding machine. Rice’s protagonist, Mr. Zero, is told an adding machine is replacing him. He subsequently kills his boss and is executed for the murder. The play does not end with Zero’s death. Rice describes the stage revolving wildly and flooding with theatrical sound effects as: “*The noise is deafening, maddening, unendurable.*”(22) These chaotic visual and aural effects serve to express Zero’s shock at losing his place in life. Zero is Rice’s modern American everyman, “*A waste product. A salve to a contraption of steel and iron*. ”(23)

Susan Glaspell’s dramaturgy reflects the tents of American modernism. Her drama mirrors the nation’s tensions of WWI and WWII and their aftermaths—politically, socially, and culturally. In her play *Inheritors* (1920), she challenged the growing jingoism of the postwar period. Through her central character Madeline Fejevary Morton, she exposes how the government manipulates core national values of liberty and equality. In the middle of a celebration, a dispute erupts between some Hindu students who oppose British imperialism in their home country and some of the American students who refuse to recognize the parallels to their own history in the Indians’ anticolonial struggle. Madeline, the inheritor, sides with the foreign students and she is arrested. Madeline measures out the dimensions of the prison cell of her friend Fred Jordan, jailed for his stance as an objector to World War I. Madeline steps inside this space and becomes “*all the people who are in those cells*. ”(24) Women writers of the period believed
passionately in the progressive advances in sexual equality and women’s independence.

In *Mr. Moneypenny* (1928), Channing Pollock’s play, Murphy, the custodian in the Day-and-Night Bank, upholds family values and resists the dream of easy money, while Jones, the night manager, takes the cynical view:

JONES: *Coin ……the only thing that counts! the only thing anybody gives a damn for!*

MURPHY: *money don’t buy happiness.*

JONES: *The hell it don’t! Having things ……..that’s happiness! All the things other people have, and a lot of things other people can’t get! Look around you! We’re all running the same way.*

So people of the time transform life into a greedy struggle for money as they value each other according to money they have and that’s breaking the grand narratives.

In the 1920s, many Americans enrolled in higher education. The middle-class prospered; Americans began to enjoy the world’s highest national average income in this era, and many people purchased the ultimate status symbol an automobile. The typical urban American home glowed with electric lights and boasted a radio that connected the house with the outside world, and perhaps a telephone, a camera, a typewriter, or a sewing machine. That marked a new turn in culture and a cultural confine.

The massive changes in the character of American labor were only part of the transformation of modern life reflected in the dramas of the 20s in the twentieth century. The drama of the 20s was a reflection of uneasy modernity. Examining the American Drama of the 1920s is an awesome prospect because the playwrights were facing cultural complexities during the decade. Advertising, radio, motion pictures, and mass production of consumer goods contributed toward homogenization of the American public. There are some cultural and social changes noticeable in the decade of 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance cast a spotlight on African American culture. The South-women not only began to vote
in 1920, but they smoked and went to college. Speakeasies, jazz, and motorcars gave rise to flaming youth.

When the madness of war and the economic euphoria of the 1920s ended suddenly in a worldwide depression, a widespread demand occurred for an art of the common man and woman, for a crisis not of speed and change but of want. The Great Depression was a dramatic worldwide economic Crisis (downturn) lasted between the stock market crash of Black Tuesday October 29th, 1929, and the beginning of World War II. The market crash marked the beginning of “a decade of high unemployment, poverty, low profits, deflation, plunging farm incomes, and lost opportunities for economic growth, personal advancement, and an 89% decline in stock prices.”(26) Unemployment rose and wages fell for those who continued to work, because industrial production fell, business failed and more workers lost their jobs as consumers lost buying power. By 1932, thousands of banks and businesses had failed. Millions were homeless, many drifted from town to town looking for non-existent jobs.

There are many causes of the Great Depression in America. The main cause is the unequal distribution of wealth throughout the 1920s. Money was distributed unequally only between the rich and the middle class. This mal-distribution and the imbalance of wealth created an unstable economy.(27) Therefore, examining trends in American theatre during the Great Depression shows that plays served as a reflection of the problems caused by the economic collapse of the 1930s. For example, Maxwell Anderson’s “Both Your Houses”, Clifford Odets’s “Awake and Sing”, and “Waiting for Lefty”, and O’Neill’s The Iceman Cometh, and many others express a growing climate of dissatisfaction and despair in American society which manifested in various social problems. America was festering with broken people, broken bank accounts, and broken dreams.

In Both Your Houses, Maxwell Anderson explores the initial repercussions of the Great Depression when a greater political awareness seemed to arise among the American people, looking to make the government to be blamed for their
personal troubles. If the government cannot handle its money in an honest manner, it is sure that its people would suffer the corrupt system. Hence, it is to be blamed for the widespread poverty among its people, because “You can look up and see the depression all around you.” (28) Money and politics then are simultaneously accepted as both the cause and solution to society’s problems.

Clifford Odets’s *Awake and Sing!* and *Waiting for Lefty* debuted in 1933 and 1935 respectively, when the panic of the Great Depression was reaching a peak and people began to realize the economic crisis might not be just a temporary phase. *Awake and Sing!* focuses on a struggle for life amidst petty conditions, the exact problem most families were facing the 1930s. In this particular case, it follows a Jewish family struggling to make both ends meet. Here, one comes to realize that no one of the characters has ever obtained exactly what he wants out of life, and due to the stress caused by their poverty they come to blame and resent one another, instead of solidifying in their mutual cause to survive the hard times. Ralph, the son of the family, remains bitter over never having the money to take tap lessons or getting his teeth fixed when he was younger. The pain and discomfort of not having money in a society flooded with costly dreams is quite evident. The mother of the family, Bessie, has lost whatever dreams she has as an individual. Her sole purpose in life is survival. It ends by the grandfather’s suicide for his family’s financial benefits. The poverty and hunger forth by the Great Depression clearly caused society at times to neglect not only their souls but also their dreams as it happens with Berger family.

*Waiting for Lefty*, also written by Odets, takes place during a taxicab strike. Fatt serves as the anti-hero of the play and provides a stark contrast to his starving workers. He is against communism. At this time in American history communism was practically considered a dirty word. Fatt tells the starving workers about the communism:

.....they’ll have your sisters and mothers in the whore houses, like they done in Russia. They’ll tear Christ off his bleeding
cross. They’ll wreck your homes and throw your babies in the river.\(^{(29)}\)

He is obviously invoking all the things that people hold dear – loyalty, family, religion, households and babies- as a cheap ploy to make the strikers fear communism as evil and destructive. The true concern of the play is a more abstract debate over the pros and cons of capitalism. Joe and his wife Edna, for example, are suffering because poverty affects their relationships. Poverty affects the individual as well as the group.

The threat of the World War II rapidly overshadowed the poverty of the Depression, compelling America’s theatrical community to mobilize against a clear-cut enemy- the Nazi regime. The 1930s emphasized cultural circumstances and Depression-era conditions. Experiencing a sense of meaningfulness is exhibited in many plays.

As the Depression worsened, the efficacy of democracy was questioned, and Elmer Rice explored the consequences of its potential demise. He challenged the evils of American capitalism and the frailty of the American judicial system. Rice’s *We the People* (1933) is a depiction of the consequences of the Depression on honest working-class Americans. In this play, the doomed romance between Helen Davis and Bert Collins unites the two families, Davis and Collins, and portrays the fallen dreams of many American couples of the Depression forced to postpone marriage or seek abortions because of financial dilemma. Rice’s plays of the 1930s merit reassessment as records of the cultural moment.

The Great Depression of 1929 affected most of the population of the United States. Workers lost their jobs and factories were shut down. They could not pay their debts and farmers lost their farms. Many saw the Depression as a punishment for sins of excessive materialism and loose living.\(^{(30)}\) The Depression turned the world upside down. The massive social change that went on during the Great Depression also had an effect on theatre in the United States. But only the
industrial build-up World War II renewed prosperity. Factories came to produce ships, airplanes, jeeps, and supplies.

Between the beginning of World War I and the end of World War II (1914-1945), the United States became a modern nation, torn apart by internal fractures. Literature of the period struggled to understand the new and diverse responses to the advent of modernity. Writers differ in their topics and intentions. Some writers celebrated the changes; others lamented the loss of old ways of being. Some imagined future utopias; others searched for new forms to speak of the new realities. (31)

A widespread sense of the utter meaninglessness of human existence is produced by World War II and its attendant horrors. This sense is brilliantly expressed through a new literary trend known collectively as the theater of the absurd. Absurdist playwrights came to believe in the sense that reality is unreal. Hence, they sought to convey modern human feelings of bewilderment, alienation and despair by abandoning traditional devices of the drama including characters. The playwrights of the period (1940s) dramatize the war and its aftermath, relations between the sexes, the tension between the individual and society, and the realities of ethnic, sexual, and racial differences. The aspects of this period from 1945 on can be found in “its changing perspective on war, since the whole period was shadowed by memories of war and by Cold War fears of its recurrence in even more unspeakable forms”. (32) Robert E. Sherwood’s There Shall Be No Night (1941) explores his own isolationism that had given way to interventionism in response to the fascist and Nazi threat. This play is unique and distinguished for the way it shaped public opinion about America’s entry into World War II. In a Finnish home on the eve of invasion, two men of science argue the limits of reason. While the German Dr. Ziemseen seeks to justify the Nazi’s extermination of inferior races, the Nobel laureate Dr. Kaarlo Valkanen speaks about humankind’s ability to discern an ethical dimension that will prevent their devolving into moral cretins. When right reason fails, then nations may have no
choice but to take up arms. Lillian Hellman is one of the playwrights who were interested in portraying America’s involvement in the World War II. In *Watch on the Rhine* (1941), a play by Hellman, Kurt disparages all violence by the Nazis as a moral sickness. He comes to assure that the Nazi is a danger threatens the lives of others. Hence, he finds it necessary to kill the Nazi supporters to protect others. Fanny, Kurt’s aunt, guided by her late husband’s conviction that an act of oppression committed anywhere affects everyone, everywhere, shows her mettle by financially supporting Kurt’s cause.

The men in these and several other plays from 1940s period tend to be vulnerable, dissatisfied, and disillusioned creatures. Some realize they are even unsure of their sexuality and are suffering from regret that what they have accomplished has fallen far short of what they have hoped and from the recognition that few choices still remain open to them. Still others are experiencing a more general sense of alienation and malaise, a feeling of disease or existential insecurity.

In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957), William Inge focuses on the insecurities that prevent individuals from forming intense bonds of communion. Set in an Oklahoma town during the background of the transition from a cowboy/agrarian to a mercantile/industrialized economy – and thus for theatre audiences somewhat analogous to the post-World War II shift to a corporate/consumer society. The play treats in part the impact of social change on cultural stability and traditional institutions. The Flood family, because of Rubin’s precarious livelihood as a travelling salesman of harnesses, find themselves pushed farther to the fringes of the newly moneyed local society where being outside the group results in distrust and rejection. Reluctant to marry because he saw it as restricting his freedom, Rubin has restored to drinking and womanizing. Losing his job in mid-career and recognizing the challenge in re-educating himself for another career, all of that allow him to admit to Cora his feelings of inadequacy in a world where economic progress has left him behind and where the future and
his place in it are unknown. The dark symbolizes that fear of the unknown. When Robin stands naked at the top of the stairs and beckons Cora to come, his nakedness suggests his acceptance of his vulnerability.

In the early years following World War II, the United States was the dominant economic and military power among the industrialized nations of the world. This was due in large part to how and where the war was fought. In the years before the United States entered the war, industrial capacity was increased dramatically as the United States became the major supplier of military hardware to those nations already at war with Nazi Germany. However, after the war, the industrial capacity of the United States was shifted to the production of civilian goods to keep its industrial supremacy. Therefore, the United States was the dominant economic and military power among the industrialized nations of the world.

Nevertheless, there was concern that the United States economy could not sustain the high level of production, profits, and employment that was stimulated by war mobilization. The memory of the Great Depression and a fear that it may return, with its high level of unemployment led the United States to establish a new world economic system that would maintain its economic, political, and military dominance. The dominance of American industry in the world economy was reflected in its role as the major exporter of goods and services to other nations while importing very little from the rest of the world. This imbalance of exports versus imports was due to the effects of the war on other industrialized countries. That is also because the nations that involved in the war lost factories that would produce the consumer goods for their people. Rebuilding the nation is another problem because those nations lost the workforce generations of young men and women who would do the work of rebuilding.

The first atomic bombs were created in America and dropped by Americans. As a double-barreled event, the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was simultaneously the final crescendo in an increasingly brutal,
inhumane war. The successful program as they think and the decision that leads to a missing triumphant were “at once American’s pride and American’s shame.”

In the 1955 the Hiroshima maidens came to the United States. These young Japanese had been badly scarred from the atomic bombing of their hometown. Their trip had been organized by Americans who sought to help arrange for corrective plastic surgery. Naturally, while they awaited treatments, they shopped, walked, saw movies, and lived the life of tourists. Americans, likewise shopping and film-going, were horrified by this abruption onto the scene of innocent daily doings-activities. Some people were so threatened by the presence of these disfigurements of American policy that they actually pondered whether organizers of the visit were communist agents.

It is the larger cultural effects of the nuclear age. People fear the bomb itself and probably such fears were indeed overstated by officials who wanted every new home to be built with fall-out shelters.

Fragmentation was one fear. The loss of control was another. The bomb symbolized the tow fears in one.\(^{(34)}\)

Paul Boyer has written a book called *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1985). He puts it that,

American culture had been profoundly affected by atomic fear, by a dizzying plethora of atomic panaceas and proposals, and by endless speculation on the social and ethical implications of the new reality. \(^{(35)}\)

Several American plays of the post war period by some playwrights do treat the nuclear situation involving Hiroshima and its aftermath. The first full-fledged American drama of the atomic Age is Upton Sinclair’s *A Giant’s Strength* (1948). This conventional play portrays reactions on the domestic plane to both Hiroshima and an atomic war, while presenting an array of disturbing information and ideas about the real and imagined nuclear situations. Sinclair claims that the atomic power must be controlled by a world government if civilization is to endure. *A Giant’s Strength*, a three acts drama of the atomic Bomb, depicts the political
conditions that lead to an atomic war, the war itself, and the aftermath for a group of survivors. They are two sisters, their husbands, father, and a ten-year-old son. The boy is informed:

You my little man, are going to live the rest of your life with one of those dreadful bombs hanging just over your head. You will never have it entirely out of your thoughts: and you are going to have to make the world all over- or else have the bomb wipe you out in the millionth part of a second, you and everybody and everything you know. (36)

In the play, France invades Spain and the United States siding with Spain, demands France to withdraw and turn the problem to the United Nations. America has the largest store of bombs. Unfortunately, the attacks on cities are carried out in a deadly method. The image of the survivors is portrayed in the play as:

Hundreds of thousands of people will be massed at the entrances ..... crushing each other to death and climbing over the bodies of the dead and dying. ....... And don’t forget, if you beget children, they may turn out to be freaks of some sort, pinhead idiots, or without eyes. (37)

To Sincailr’s credit, he does not overdo injecting the audience with such grisly images of the probable consequences of nuclear war.

Herman Wouk’s The Traitor (1949) focuses on an idealistic atomic scientist who is about to give the secret of the latest nuclear technology to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics so that both superpowers will realize they must cooperate to prevent war and to put atomic power under international control. This thinking leads him into a crisis of conscience which he resolves by choosing what he clearly perceives as the higher good:

In the end, I found myself between conflicting loyalties- loyalty to the United States and my oath of secrecy- loyalty to all mankind and my own reason. I decided that one was provincial and limited, and the other eternal and right. (38)

Between 1900 and 1945, the Western World replaced balloons and gliders with intercontinental aircraft, fighter jets, and ballistic missiles. It leapt from
Telegraph to radio and television, from ineffectual medicines to modern surgery and antibiotics, from conventional pyrotechnics to atomic weapons. New aspects of the modern era challenged the old paradigms of intellectual life. An endless tide of motives arose for regarding life as utterly transformed, and for creating literature that responded to this turbulent newness. A rising anxiety pervaded that human experience was too vast and diverse, and changing too quickly for the artist to achieve any broad and stable perspective. The first half of the twentieth century abounded with manifestos that questioned everything. Every traditional structure of expression inevitably collapses under the pressure of modernity – the speed, power, and whirlwind changes of a mechanized, electrical, chemical and technological world. Accelerated life required accelerated art.\(^{39}\)

In American history, Vietnam War was the first war opposed actively by thoughtful citizens including university students. It parallels with many breakdowns in American history with protests, with widespread rioting and looking as protests against racism. Dramas relating to the war reflected the turmoil. Theatre is for sharing and examining culturally dramatic experiences that shatter a sense of certainty and reveal contradictions of acting and being. These contradictions are more apparent in the United States in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The New York theatre was the first to explore the ambivalence surrounding the Vietnam War.

In *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, Richard Sullivan suggests that in the literature of the war,

\[
\textit{Vietnam is represented as a place where ordinary experience merged with extraordinary experience to create a new world of meaning.}^{40}\]

While war may always have been a part of American society, representations of the Vietnam War, in the theatre, films, television, novels, poetry, photography, documentaries and biographical accounts, incorporated war into America’s modern cultural psyche as a permanent scar on American life. These representations illustrated the fragmented and contradictory sense of national
identity that resulted. The close contact with the sights and smells of death, blood, 
vomit, dismembered body parts, the unspeakable become the experiences through 
which new identities for Vietnam veterans are formed. The American soldiers had 
get the experience of violence in Vietnam. So the Vietnam plays attempt to 
express the inexpressible. Therefore, with no stable sense of identity and no stable 
sense of identification but national identity, what it means to be an American that 
is called into question- the American Vietnam veterans in these plays are rootless 
and lost, left with a sense of dislocation that arises from both physical and psychic 
fragmentation. The antiwar movement enforced feelings of guilt and 
purposelessness towards the war and denied the veterans the welcome that may 
have helped justify their experiences.

There are also many plays written by Vietnam veterans such as David 
Rabe’s trilogy, The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel (1969-1971), Sticks and 
Bones (1970-1972), and Streamers (1970-1976); and John Difusco’s 
psychodrama, Tracers (1980). These plays represent fragmentations of the body, a 
loss of wholeness and coherency, a psychic and physical castration, violence, loss 
of identity and illusion.

Throughout The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel, the physical and the 
psychological are united in the act of violence, and the boundaries between self 
and other are blurred, as Ardell tells Pavlo:

_When you shot into his head, you hit your own head._

Moreover, Pavlo had already transformed his identity. He confesses to his fellow 
soldier, Pierce, that he had his name legally changed from Michael Hummel to 
Pavlo Hummel. For Pavlo, changing his external identity, his name, changes the 
essence of his identity. Back home, Pavlo asks his mother who his father was, and 
she answers his quest for a tangible identity by telling him that he:

..._had many fathers, many men, movie men, film doom’s great.........they were your father._
Hence, his history, his origin, is oriented as myth when she suggests that he substitute image and metaphor for reality.

Racial and gender identity too are ultimately presented as myths. Yen’s identity, a Vietnamese prostitute, is already suspect, a condition which seem to stem solely from the fact that she is Vietnamese. Jones warns Palvo of the dangers of Vietnamese women, telling him that they have no essence, they got no nature. Yen’s racialised body and her national identity are therefore illusions so the women of Vietnam are all myth. And, like its people, Vietnam itself is characterised as myth.

*Tracers*, by John DiFusco, a docudrama about the Vietnam War experience, aims to recreate the struggle with identity and the real faced American soldiers returning from the war. It reflects the Veterans’ fragmentation of experience and identity. There is clearly a sense of fragmentation and alienation throughout the play, as characters struggle to make sense of their new identities in Vietnam. When Professor, a character in the play, was told that Doc had killed himself, all that was left was a note. But the Professor didn’t read the damn note. Language fails him and he tries hard to cry but he cannot shed a tear for his friend who has killed himself.

The American soldier’s experience in Vietnam points to the body as an orienting force. But the experience of the body is one of violence and fragmentation, not of reconciliation and wholeness. “.....these veterans are ultimately left with non sense of self, no sense of place, feeling like they’re nowhere.”(43)

All of what mentioned above are personal narratives come from people who were actually there such as soldiers, reporters, medics. The war in Vietnam was fought differently. A guerilla war, American soldiers found themselves in unfamiliar, jungle terrain. The ordinary soldier is usually presented as someone at the mercy of forces greater than himself, as the victim of a bungled American policy in Vietnam, or uncaring or glory- seeking officers and politicians.
Vietnam War literature is also criticized for presenting the conflict primarily as an internal war. It is for depicting Vietnam as a war in which the United States battled the United States. The literature, for instance, often depicts disagreements between those who supported United States involvement in Vietnam and those who opposed it. Even though, the literature of Vietnam War is an emotionally powerful and increasingly popular category of contemporary literature. It is a literature that speaks to the human heart.

The cultural revolutions and social upheavals of the 1960s gave rise to an alternative kind of theatre that was more immediate and ephemeral than traditional drama, one that emphasized performance of the authoritative text. That also gives a new turn in writing those texts. The drama of the 60s mainly reflects frustrating contradictions and meaningless existence.

During the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of people took part in several different protest movements, including the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women’s rights movement, the African American movement, the gay rights movement, and the environmental movement. These activists were attempting to change American society through demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, and teach-ins. Each, to varying degrees, changed government policy and, perhaps more importantly, changed how almost every American lives today. Supporters of these movements questioned traditional practices about how people were treated. Why did black and white children attend separate schools? Why were women prevented from holding certain jobs? Why could a person be drafted at 18 but not able to vote until 21? This questioning inspired people to begin organizing movements to fight against injustice and for equal rights for all people. Also activists asked this: “How can the United States tell African or Asian countries to reject Soviet-style Communism and emulate the American way of life, when racism and inequality are so obviously a part of that way of life? Americans, they said, need to work toward democracy and equality for all citizens if they want to win the Cold War.” (44)
The term 1960s also refers to an era denoting the complex of inter-related cultural and political trends in the United States. It is a term used by historians, journalists, and other academics to describe the counterculture and social revolution near the end of the decade. The 1960s have become synonymous with all the new, existing, radical, and subversive events and trends of the period, which continued to develop in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and beyond. One of those prominent events that marked the 60s in the United States was the nuclear threats by the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba and also China possessions of hydrogen bomb. Some of them are also political such as Martin Luther King Jr.’s *I have a Dream* speech in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963. The 1960s were also marked by several notable assassinations such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X., George Lincoln Rockwell, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy.

There was a huge and magnificent development in the field of science and technology. The space race between the United States and the Soviet Union would dominate the decade (1960s). By the middle of the decade the United States was taking the lead. In May 1961, President Kennedy set for the nation the goal of a manned spacecraft landing on the moon by the end of the decade. On July 20, 1969, Appollo 11, the first human spaceflight lands on the moon fulfilling president John F. Kennedy's goal of reaching the Moon by the end of the 1960s, which he had expressed during a speech given before a joints session of Congress on May 25, 1961:

> I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the earth.  

As the 1960s began, American cars showed a rapid rejection of the 1950s styling excess. The Big Three American automakers enjoyed their highest ever sales and profitability in the 1960s. The decade would see the car market split into different size classes for the first time.
During the sixties, young people played a significant role by rejecting the mainstream of liberalism and materialism, and by criticizing the American intervention in Vietnam. They marked and paved the way for the counterculture and the cultural revolution of the 60s in America which affects the way of life of Americans till today. The 1960s was one of the most controversial periods in United States’ history. By framing the sixties as a cultural revolution, it is necessary to go through the social movements of the decade. As a cultural revolution, the sixties represented a crisis of authority.

American history has some horrible events that resulted in a series of negative impacts and attitudes within the American society. Some of those historical events are World War II, the Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, president’s assassination, and the political disillusionment of the Watergate. It resulted the idea that man is entrapped in an irrational, hostile, impersonal, and indifferent universe where the search for ultimate truth is an exercise in futility-which seeps into American drama, with Gelber’s *The Connection* (1959) and Albee’s *The American Dream* (1961). The life experience being investigated, that the overwhelming majority of American plays continued to find that their concerns could best be dramatized through the everyday, personal experiences of ordinary characters.

The beginning of the 20th century ushered in an era of moral bewilderment and uncertainty. Because of moral unease and uncertainty and a collapse of faith in the patterns of social relationships, there is a search of new patterns. Moreover, moral and ethical values are no longer accepted as absolutes. Consequently, pessimism and despair of the age overshadows the dramatic picture of man. Pessimism views the universe as basically unfavorable to man and ruled by some power bent to evil and hostile to man. The devastation and brutality of the World Wars I and II heightened these feelings; people who had believed their governments’ propaganda that they were fighting the war to end all wars, saw their leaders cynically pursuing profit at the expenses of millions of lives.
The breakdown of the economic system has much to do with the breakdown of social and moral values. As a result, life has become mechanical and impersonal; this has further shaken man’s sense of security. By the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach, life has lost all meaning; a universe is deprived of all hopes of light. Lawrance and Federman have a pertinent point to make in this regard:

*Man for Beckett is alone thrown into a meaningless world; a closed world; he is chained to the process of waiting. He is tied to the hope of delivery by something outside the self, tied to the hope of arrival of Godot, who will apparently change his being.*

So man wanders in the darkness, and is condemned to wander more and more, without any hint of solid footholds to redeem this wretched condition. Browne says:

*A tradition that once meant civilization and have evolved a society that is grasping repressive and destructive. Anything that was honorable is gone and the codes of the past have become anachronistic and ridiculous in the present.*

All of what have been mentioned earlier of social conditions lead to the emergence of the theatre of the absurd.

The term absurd is not used in the absurd drama in the sense of ridiculous, but in the sense of out of harmony, life has lost its sanctity, traditional values are in the melting pot, man is thoroughly disillusioned about things, once invested with glory and romance; he is deprived of illusion, light, and color. The absurdists regard language not as a means of communication but as an obstacle to it. Beckett is one of the absurdists who are preoccupied with the problem of communication between people. According to Beckett:

*...the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with furniture.*
It is no coincidence that Albee’s first plays bear so much resemblance to plays by Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. All of Albee’s plays in one way or another are overt criticism of American history, culture and society. So Albee is a political and social playwright and is also criticizing the belief in civilization itself. In 1958, Albee attacked the very foundations of American idealism with his first play, *The Zoo Story*, followed by his critique of the shallow fantasies of domestic perfection, *The American Dream* (1959-1960), which attacked the hypocrisies of America’s national identity embodied in the notions of progress and optimism. Esslin places Albee in the category of the absurd: “precisely because his work attacks the very foundations of American optimism.” The severe sense of alienation portrayed by the outcast Jerry in *The Zoo Story* is marked by his inability to connect with other human beings or to find any sense of identity in community. He is contrasted with Peter, an apparently well-adjusted bourgeois conformist whom he encounters in Central Park. After a series of uncomfortable exchanges, Jerry impales himself on the knife Peter has been provoked to draw, as he thanks him for that one bizarre and ironic moment of human connection. With *The Zoo Story*, Albee aligned himself with the absurdists in his illustration of the frustrations of human connection and communication.

In *The American Dream*, the American’s worship of the superficial, empty of any genuine content, is explored through the presentation of an American family in the play. After having lost the adopted child, they mutilated for failing to live up to expectations. They are confronted with a Young Man at the end of the play. This character is apparently the twin of the lost child, but he no longer has the capacity to feel anything, making him a perfect addition to the emotionally dead and sanitized American family. *The American Dream* proposes that the goal of American identity is deliberate emptiness and superficiality. For Albee, the achievement of the American dream requires a denial of the messy complexities of being human.
Murray Schisgal has sometimes been labelled a comic playwright with an absurdist streak. His plays are often tragicomedies reflecting dark humour and frustrating contradictions in modern urban life. Christopher Olsen says:

Schisgal features characters lacking direction in their lives and seeking to change their mundane and meaningless existence. The price of conformity and lack of meaningful interaction between humans are among Schisgal’s favorite themes.\(^{(50)}\)

To sum up, the attendant horrors of World War II produced a widespread sense of the utter meaninglessness and arbitrariness of human existence. This sense is brilliantly expressed in the body of the plays that have come to be known collectively as the *Theatre of the Absurd* by Esslin Martin. By abandoning traditional devices of the drama, including logical plot development, meaningful dialogue, and intelligible characters, absurdist playwrights sought to convey modern humanity’s feelings – the sense that reality is itself unreal. The trauma of living from 1945 under the threat of nuclear annihilation also seems to have been an important factor in the rise of the new theatre and new kind of linguistic modalities. So the reality is lost and that shows the breaking of Grand narratives.

The social movements of the 1960s are known as the cultural revolutions and they are civil rights movement, anti-war movement, black movement, feminist movement, and gay movement. The issue of civil rights and warfare became major points of reflection of virtue and democracy, what once was viewed as traditional and inconsequential was now becoming the significance in the turning point of a culture by some events including the famous march to Washington in 1963, when Martin Luther King gave his famous “I have a dream” speech. A document known as the *Port Huron Statement* exemplifies these two conditions perfectly in its first hand depiction,

....while these and other problems either directly oppressed us or rankled our consciences and became our own subjective concerns, we began to see complicated and disturbing paradoxes in our surrounding America. The proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its
One of Albee’s early plays, *The Death of Bessie Smith*, written in 1959, but set in 1937, is an attack on racial discrimination in the United States. It is based around a series of conversations between the staff of a "Whites-only" hospital in Mississippi in 1937, on the day that the famous Blues singer, Bessie Smith, was supposed to have been brought in following a serious car crash, and denied admittance because of her race. Albee's play follows the commonly-held belief that she had indeed been brought to a whites-only hospital first, and that her death could have been prevented had she been given immediate medical treatment there. Bessie Smith herself never appears in the play, but what is really important is the historical background to the play. It is at this moment in American history that Albee first came to prominence, a moment when the difference between the American Dream and the American reality had become painfully clear to the whole nation. *The Death of Bessie Smith* was Albee's contribution to the advance of the civil rights movements, by making dramatically clear to American audiences just how unfair the treatment of Afro-Americans in the United States not only was at the moment when it was written, but in fact, always had been.

Civil Rights Movement in the United States is a political, legal, and social struggle by black Americans to gain full citizenship rights and achieve racial equality. The Civil Rights Movement has also been called the Black Freedom movement, the Negro Revolution, and the Second Reconstruction. Segregation was an attempt by white Southerners to separate the Races in every sphere of life and to achieve supremacy over blacks. Hence, the black’s struggle is universalized. As Sergie Burbank says:

*The universal struggle for minorities in America has been the struggle for recognition within the mythology of your collective origin and, subsequently, our national vocabulary. Our "culture wars" entail entirely new history, as our national story is reconstituted; it seems, from whole cloth.*

35
Thematically, the social upheavals of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s provided impetus for new plays that explored the lives of minorities and women.

The conflict in Vietnam would eventually lead to a commitment of over half a million American troops, resulting in over 58,500 American deaths and producing a large-scale antiwar movement in the United States. It causes a wide civil unrest. Students became a powerful and disruptive force and university campuses sparked a national debate over the war. Many students became politically active to protest the war in Vietnam, which they believed was immoral. They organized large protests that eventually put pressure on President Johnson to begin peace negotiations. Young people also began to reject their parent's cultural values. The most visible signs of the so-called counterculture were long hair, rock-and-roll music, and the use of illegal drugs. As the movement's ideals spread beyond college campuses, doubts about the war also began to appear within the administration itself. A mass movement began rising in opposition to the Vietnam War. Plays portraying the Vietnam War were discussed earlier.

The antiwar movement was initially based on the older 1950s Peace movement, heavily influenced by the American Communist Party, but by the mid-1960s it outgrew this and became a board-based mass movement centered in universities and churches. Voter age-limits were challenged. Many of the youth involved in the politics of the movements distanced themselves from the "hippies". Some have suggested that the responsibility for the ultimate failure of this policy lies not with the men who fought, but with those in Congress. Even some regarded the achievement of the United States military forces in Vietnam was a dangerous illusion.

African Americans began to take advantage of opportunities in the North because of the industrial needs of World War I and the Great Migration out of the South. W.E.B. DuBois argued that African Americans had a double consciousness— they were aware of being American and being black. African Americans made significant contributions to the American modernist movement. During the Harlem
Renaissance, black Americans such as Langston Hughes and Zara Neale Hurston became prominent and applied modernist techniques to speak of the realities of black cultural and political life. Largely white audiences of Harlem Renaissance art and culture became attuned to the specificities of cultural political realities of African America.

August Wilson faced two obstacles. One of them is the indifference to telling the Black American story on the part of the white theatrical establishment. The other obstacle was the eagerness of his subjects to forget the past as well. It was Malcolm X who laid out the issue in the distinctive tones of blackness:

*Our cultural revolution must be the means of bringing us closer to our African brothers and sisters. It must begin in the community and be based on community participation.*

The place for African slaves and their descendants in the mythology of American history has always been problematic, because it has always been painstakingly circumscribed. The personhood of the slave was distilled to a numerical value (as three-fifths a citizen). As George Lipstiz says:

*...whiteness is everywhere in American culture, but it is very hard to see... as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.*

This lack of a defined understanding of the limits or the shape of whiteness problematized the relationship between African-Americans and whites on a personal and public level. What the world saw as a Negro problem in America, African-Americans saw as a white problem. A large part of the problem, beyond issues of white identity itself, was the conflicted position of having to decide between their own self-interest in a white identity over the possibility of equality for African-Americans or the immorality of their continuing segregation and degradation.
In the decades of 60s and 70s, African American playwrights were focusing on the notion of American identity. They were presenting race as a series of roles based on cultural expectations rather than on the core of being as essential and stable. Playwrights like LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Ed Bullins, and Ron Milner were central to organizing the Black Arts Movement, a social, political, and artistic movement that took shape in 1965 after the assassination of Malcolm X and lasted ten years, providing a forum for many new African American writers. Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange were also instrumental in opening up new avenues for African-American voices with their plays that pushed boundaries and challenged traditional dramatic form. Their highly symbolic language and fragmented structures reflected the cultural experience of being black woman in America, and were followed more recently by Suzanlori Parks, who uses fragmented repetitive language to comment on established historical narrative. As a political movement, Black Arts Movement grew out of the social upheavals of the turbulent 1960s reflecting the revolutionary frustration that was fermenting in United States cities around the country. Anger around racial issues exploded in riots of 1968 as cities went up in flames following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. BAM opened important doors for black writers to be heard on their own terms. Robert J. Norvell says about the movement:

*Black Power, a political movement is expressing a new racial consciousness among blacks in the United States in the late 1960s. Black Power represented both a conclusion to the decade’s civil rights movement and a reaction against the racism. It is a revolutionary political struggle to reject racism and imperialism in the United States, as well as throughout the world.* (55)

In 1966, Baraka in *The Revolutionary Theatre* wanted a theatre that would be honest about African-American anger and frustration, and that would accuse and attack anything that can be accused and attacked. It must accuse and attack because it is a theatre of victims. Baraka's plays were applauded for their honesty exposing African-American identity as a mask, a performance that covered up
hatred and anger. These plays, however, were also criticized for embracing violence and for their reductive character portrayals and simplification of complex issues. His two best known plays, *The Slave* and *Dutchman*, both challenge society's assumptions about race. *Dutchman* is an allegory of race relations in America. It signifies the cycle of history. The play’s two characters are Lula, a beautiful thirty-year-old white woman who represents the sadistic temper, and Clay, a twenty-year-old black man who believes he can live as an individual in American society and avoid the politics of race relations. In terms of identity, Clay, as a black man, is not allowed to be an individual. When Lula asks him what his surname is and he responds with an American surname. Clay wants to fit in and be accepted as a part of American culture, but Lulu, representing society's relentless persecution and the forces of history, does not allow that. She baits Clay both sexually and intellectually, pointing out that his identity as an American is wrong, that he has no right "to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie .... [since his] grandfather was a slave, he didn’t go to Harvard".\(^{(56)}\) He is eventually provoked to violence, slapping Lulu hard across the mouth. Lulu casually stabs him dead and orders the other passengers throw his body off the train. As another young black man gets on at the next stop, Lula readies herself for her next performance, giving his a long slow look as the cycle is doomed to repeat itself. From a feminist point of view, Lulu as a character is symbolizing the white seductress who baits and then coldly destroys the innocent Clay. The play, however, is not realistic and Lulu and Clay are representatives of historically determined racial categories. *Dutchman* is Baraka's vision of the fate of African-Americans in white America. With *The slave* Baraka continued exploring the theme he presented in *Dutchman*, the false identity of blacks in America.

The complexity of the black experience is best explored by Adrienne Kennedy. During the 1960s and 1970s plays such as *The owl Answers* (1965), *A Rat's Mass* (1966), *A lesson in Dead language* (1970) and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976) addressed the performance of the self as an
outsider, the doubleness of seeing oneself through the eyes of the hostile and alien world. Kennedy work addresses racial issues, cultural identity, and self-worth in a biased society in a different style. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) is brilliant in its depiction of the struggles of identity and identifications that haunts the African-American psyche. The main character, Negro-Sarah, is a young African American girl who is split into four other characters that represent her various identifications, her selves. The title of the play refers to the ways in which identity is represented and distorted in the reflections of society's mirrors, Sarah's funny house; “Funnyhouse lady”, her landlord; her boy friend ‘Funnyhouse man'. Clandia Barnett writes in *Modern Drama*:

Sarah transforms her world into a house of mirrors where she watches herself in the glass; she becomes an outsider observing her life.\(^{(57)}\)

Sarah's sense of her own identity is so conflicted, torn between images of whiteness as good and blackness as evil, that it leads to her self-destruction, culminating in suicide. Her identity as a black woman becomes a non-identity, as she seeks to possess no moral value.

Often compared to Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, August Wilson's *Fences* chronicles the life of Troy Maxson and his family during the 1950s, exploring an African-American family's search for the American Dream. Troy and his family want to build a fence around their house. Rose wants the fence to hold her family together. Tory, on the other hand, sees the fence in terms of shutting out the outside world and its impending changes that were taking place after the Second World War, even as he continues to feel fenced in, limited by the social structures of American Industrial capitalism. Tory's friend Bano also explains: “Some people build fences to keep people out ----- and other people build fences to keep people in.”\(^{(58)}\)

Hip hop / rap is clearly part of this continuum of African American performance. Hip hop as style of expression is one of the more recent performative genres of African-American cultural expression to explore the contradictions of
identity. In his book *Hip hop America* (1998), Nelson George reads the hypocrisy of the American dream in terms of hip hop culture, reminding that the values that underpin so much hip hop materialism, brand consciousness, gun iconography, and anti-intellectualism are very much byproducts of the larger American culture. In gangsta rap’s deliberately ironic performance of the real, there is a postmodern gesture using contradictory constructions of black male identity in American culture in order to undermine them and expose their contradictions. In his introduction to *Colored Contradictions*, an anthology of contemporary African-American plays, Harry J. Elam, Jr argues that for African-American, “the contemporary social and cultural condition is one of paradox, complexity, despair, and contradiction.”(59) The plays in Elam’s collection deal with stereotypes that intersect race, gender, sexuality, and history.

In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of Harriet Beecher, one of the novel’s central characters, Topsy, is reconfigured as a slave who embraces hip-hop/rap culture. She performs the contradictions of her own empowered identity while ironically rapping on command for her new owner. Topsy’s next rap in Act II is longer, violently revolutionary, more concerned with race than gender, and louder (it is presented in capital letters):

>`I’M TOPSY TURFY I’M WICKED AND I’M BLACK. ALL YOU YELLOW-ASS NIGGERS BETTER WATCH YOUR BACK. I’M WICKED AND I’M SO SO MEAN. I’M THE BADDEST BLACK NIGGER YOU EVER SEEN. [..........] I DON’T CARE IF ALL THE WHITEYS DIED TODAY. WHITE PEOPLE ALWAYS GOT SOMETHIN STUPID TO SAY [..........] BUT REMEMBER, I’M TOPSY, I’M WICKED AND I’M BLACK I STAND HERE WITH MY EVIL ASS READY TO ATTACK I KEEP YELLING AND ‘BELLING LIKE I DO IT ‘CAUSE THAT’S THE ONLY WAY I KNOW TO GET THROUGH IT. (60)`
Proclaiming her empowered sense of self deriving from her Blackness, Topsy’s by the end, declares that the rebellious aspect of African-American performance has been important because it created a culture context where one could transgress the boundaries of accepted speech, both in relationship to the dominant white culture, and to the decorum of African-American culture mores.

Martin Luther King Jr., speaks about Nonviolence resistance, a tactic that he advocated during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. King and his followers used nonviolence to protest against racial discrimination and inequality. They organized the 1963 March on Washington, D.C., for jobs and civil rights. On August 28, 1963, King delivered a stirring address to an audience of more than 200,000 civil rights supporters. His *I have a Dream* speech expressed the hopes of the civil rights movement in oratory as moving as any in American history:

> *I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. . . . . I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, I have a dream today.*

This speech is about a nonviolence resistance and the emergence of the African American movement and mark a new turn in the cultural mutations of the 1960s.

Black feminist thought focuses on such topics as the objectivation of African American women, the oppression of African American women and the controlling images that surround them, the self-image of the African American women (hair colour, texture, and standards of beauty), and finally the reaction of African American women to the various controlling images. Black feminist thought is built around the following items: self-valuation, respect, independence, self-reliance, change, and empowerment.

The United States feminist movement, one of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s, involved new practices that produced a shift in gender relations, altering both gender and economic structures. “Feminism is a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women’s rights and
women’s position in culture and society.” Women writers also contributed in vital ways to the heterogeneity of the literature during the interwar period. Authors like Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dorothy Parker, Amy Lowell, and Nella Larsen were intent on depicting the thoughts and experiences of women. By demanding cultural freedom for women, many of these authors began to also operate as public figures that took positions on public issues from race to labor and women’s issues.

In general, the social and economic conditions had helped to expand the role of women out of the home to factory and office. Women started to demand equality because of that and some other social changes. One of the basic rights for women is that women will not face discrimination on the basis of their sex. Rochella Owens says in an interview:

> My writing is feminist because it has much to do with my personal and social identity as a woman in a patriarchal culture,....... on ought to question the assumptions of the culture which created the social role of women. \(^{(63)}\)

Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* gives an evidence of feminism in the 1950s and 60s. Feminism is displayed throughout the play by Beneatha, the radical of the Younger family. She is the clearest example of feminism within the play with her high aspiration and dreams, the need to express herself, and her defiance of the stereotypical female role within America. The belief that becoming a doctor in a white and male dominated field exhibits one example of, a main character, Beneatha’s feministic attitude within this play. By refusing to accept to become the traditional housewife, she continues to challenge the stereotypical female character of the 1950s represented by her brother, Walter. When Walter complains that Beneatha’s medical schooling will cost more than the family can afford, he bases his argument on the fact that since Beneatha is a woman, she should not even want to become a doctor. His resentment and anger erupts in Act I, Scene I:

> Who in the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing ‘round with sick people- then go be a nurse like other women- or just get married and be quiet. \(^{(64)}\)
Wlater’s chauvinistic view of Beneatha and other women presents a perpetual problem for Beneatha. The obstinate defiance showed towards her brother symbolizes her defiance of the stereotypical female character towards her brother, George Murchison (a lover), and the like. Also, throughout the play, Beneatha searches for her identity by rediscovering her African roots. That causes her to naturalize her hair. Instead of forcing her hair to conform to the style of the stereotypical female of the time, she cuts it off and declares natural is beautiful. Hence, Beneatha displays traits of supporters of Feminism social theory through her need to express herself by discovering her roots, her defiance of her brother and her males in the play, and her optimistic stance when facing the troubles of entering a male-dominated profession.

A rich foundation for the several contemporary, successful, young black female playwrights was a result of many factors. Some of them are Sonia sanchez’s ability to raise difficult questions from within the black community, to challenge boundaries in terms of dramatic structure and language, and to offer new terrain in the effort to understand the struggles of black women. Sanchez thus must be acknowledged as a key force in the development of African American women’s dramatic literature.

Feminism has influenced culture, resulting in greater coverage of women’s interests and concerns, particularly by the mass media. Feminist thinking has adapted and diversified to deal with new issues, including AIDS, homophobia, technology, and warfare. Some feminists have combined feminist ideas with pacifist and environmental ideologies to condemn nuclear weapons and criticize new technologies.

In the 1960s, gay Americans began to protest for equal rights. Gays in the United States had long endured discrimination in many areas of their lives, including employment and housing. The gay rights protests held to make homosexuality a more accepted life style and reduce discrimination. In the 1960s, laws in most states prohibited homosexual acts. They also did not allow couples of
the same sex to marry or adopt children. State and federal laws often made it illegal for gay men and lesbians to work for the government, and private employers routinely discriminated against them. The armed forces did not allow gay men or lesbians to serve. And most Americans felt it was acceptable to scorn, ridicule, and even physically harass homosexuals. As a result, gay Americans usually hid their sexual preference. The gay rights movement had a dual agenda: to gain acceptance of homosexuality and to end discrimination against homosexuals. Once homosexuals were open about their sexual identity, then gay activists believed that they could work to end legal and social discrimination against homosexuals in American society through protests and lobbying. (65)

In David Savran’s *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers* (1992), Savran cites Arthur Miller’s *A View From the Bridge* (1955), as well as Tennessee Williams’ *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1954) thematizing same-sex longings and desire helps to shape characters’ personalities and destinies, while alternative sexual practices remained taboo in American culture.

Gay playwrights like Edward Albee shrouded gay themes in his play’s subtext and symbolism and left homosexuality incidental to their larger meanings. For example, in Albee’s *The Zoo Story*, which takes place at a bench in Central Park, Jerry, a young man who has been to the zoo and who identifies as queer, having had sex with a Greek boy, provokes Peter, a reticent married man with two children whose sexuality is left ambiguous, to kill him. William Hoffman wrote one of the first so-called AIDS plays. *As Is* (1985), a dark comedy about HIV’s impact on several gay men, their families, and the medical community. The play focuses on one gay man who learns to accept his HIV-positive lover. Larry Kramer’s earliest play *The Normal Heart* (1985) solicits identifications with an ill gay man and his partner, and exhorts gay and heterosexual spectators to express their outrage at the lack of public funding for AIDS research and virus intervention. Gay male playwrights have drama that placed their gay male characters in familiar domestic situations and allowed them to suffer some of the
traumas (including coming out, death, and illness) into which such realist forms often devolve.

From the birth of America to America today, the driving force and the heart of America has always been The American Dream. The American Dream is a goal for the majority of people who live in the realms of the Americanized world. Examples of this dream are things like television, automobiles, supermarkets, malls, internet, planes, trains, etc. The American Dream is success, freedom, and being able to control your own destiny. So what the American dream actually is and then some of the most popularly known dramas of the 20th century American drama will be analyzed according to how they explore the American dream.

Historian James Truslow Adams says that the American Dream is that “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement,” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the second sentence of the United States declaration of Independence which proclaims that “all men are created equal” and that they are “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights” including “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” It is the opportunity to make individual choices without the prior restrictions that limit people according to their class, caste, religion, race, or ethnicity.

The term American Dream is a universally known concept. But surprisingly there is no consensus in terms of a fixed definition what the American Dream is about. Robert A. Rosenbaum's The Penguin Encyclopaedia of American History describes the American Dream as:

*a nebulous term, much abused by politicians, that seems to have evolved from the early immigrants' and pioneers' hopes for lives of political and religious and personal independence in the New World to a largely materialistic expectation of upward social mobility and ever increasing affluence.*

46
Two thirds of the American people say the American dream is becoming harder to achieve, especially for young families, and they point to financial insecurity and poor quality public education as the most significant barriers, according to a new survey released by the National League of Cities (NLC). Parts of the overall American Dream are the Dream of Equality, the Dream of Upward Mobility, the Dream of House Ownership, and more recent interpretation about the Dream of Beauty and Youth. Because these parts form an overall American Dream they overlap every now and then. Besides the glorious reputation the American Dream has, one must consider that it is achieved seldom.

Many people believe that the structure of American society belies the idealistic goal of the American Dream, pointing to examples of inequality rooted in class, race, and ethnic origin which suggest that the American dream is not attainable for all. The idealistic vision of the American dream also assumes that people are not discriminated against on the basis of race, religion, gender, and national origin, another thing which is unfortunately not true in the United States. Some critics suggest that the American dream may always remain tantalizingly out of reach for some Americans, making it more like a cruel joke than genuine dream. One American says, giving his point of view, in a discussion about American dream, “The American dream is a nothing but a tool used by the rich to keep the poor in their place. Think about it: class distinctions are evident in this American society. We worship nothing but sex and money. ...... The rich fear losing us as their workers, so by instituting an imagination of the American dream the rich keep us working hard for them while we hope that we will be one day be “living the dream” but we won’t”. (69)

Consumption patterns portray the dynamic effect of the American Dream. This is true for all people; they want more money, a better job, a new car, better benefits, on and on until suddenly it is clear that Americans have wasted their lives in search of something that actually never make them happy. Needs are really wants in the world today, though at times little the difference between the two is
understood. When bank account points out to ones financial limitations, then and only then he truly comprehend what he needs from what he wants. This is why the American dream is dying. Nowadays one needs the right car, the right computer, and the right everything. In a book called *Who stole the American Dream* written by Burke Hedges, the author touches some giant truths. If a good education, a satisfying job, and a nice spouse aren’t enough, then what’s it? In his book, he says: “The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.”(70) He also says that some people buy luxury houses and cars, but they don’t have the time to enjoy them because of their work. But why the American Dream is dying? It is dying because what someone used to consider relevant, has become secondary.

Albee’s *The American Dream* makes the assumption that “the dream is hollow and shows the causes and symptoms of a sick society”. (71) Lorraine Hansberry’s play *A Raisin in the Sun* discusses the impact of labor and housing discrimination on the American dreams of these black populations through the experiences of two generations of the Younger family. First, the play suggests the distinct impact of job discrimination in the life of Big Walter Lee, who is Mamma’s deceased husband. Second, the play reveals the frustrations that complicated the Younger family’s dreams for success. Job and housing discrimination were interrelated consequences of educational and economic discrimination against African Americans in Chicago. The result of such discrimination in Big Walter’s life is exhaustion, poverty, anger, and despair. So it is a failure of the dream of job and house ownership. These feelings are perceptible in Mamma’s words:

*I seen ..him ....night after night.....come in......the red showing in his eyes...the veins moving in his head....working and working and working like somebody’s old horse...killing himself.*(72)

The repetitions and the ellipses in Mamma’s assertion suggest that big Walter’s work was a cycle of hardships and self-sacrifice.
The Dream of Upward Mobility is expressed by improving a family's standard of living from one generation to the next. This can be best seen in *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller's salesman Willy Lowman and his attitude toward his sons who should be better off. He inwardly senses that he cannot achieve the goal of a better life and therefore projects his hopes onto his children. So Willy has put his whole life into his two sons and he thinks they have turned their backs on him because they did not follow his ideals respectively because they struggled to find their own way. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* demonstrates that only a few persons can achieve the Dream of Upward Mobility while most people fail to achieve their dreams. Commercial success is of course the most important form of upward mobility.

Hickey in O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* is another realist who breaches his own ideal. Like Willy, he believes that the key to success is in being well liked and early and a fully he achieved it. The Iceman is the Salesman but he is ultimately selling death. As in Hickey’s case, America’s success seemed easy, yet finally hollow and frustrating. Americans apparently would have to sell their brand of realism to the rest of the world for its own good. “A society that rejected tradition and culture, turning everyone into a seller or a buyer instead, was tough, strong, genuine, even moral in its way. America would sell [the rest of the world] its view and destroy their illusions….. ultimately, America would try to sell its brand of realism to the Vietnamese, the Nicaraguans, the Selvadoreans, even to the Russians, and then the Iraqis, never realizing that – like Stanley, Hickey, and Willy – what it is actually selling is DEATH”. (73)

The American Dream is not as easy to achieve as many people think. Barriers are race, gender, age, social class, income, looks, and health, just to name some. In everyday life, people are confronted by the limits of the American Reality. Although the American society boasts of liberty, independence and the promise of success, this comes true to only a few. Still, the United States of America attract many people all over the world. But even for the US citizens it
becomes obvious that the American Dream is not well anymore. Different dreams of different people hinder each other in fulfilling.

One can only understand the 1970s as a decade of disillusion, cynicism, bitterness, and anger by examining it in the context of the aftermath of the Vietnam War and Watergate and the Cold War. These events damaged Americans’ faith in their government and their leaders. In addition to this political disillusionment, American society of the 1970s was also suffering from economic decline and declining standards of living. The decade of the 1970s marked by confusion, frustration, and an overwhelming feeling that America had lost its direction. In this decade Americans were faced by bitter divisions over America’s fundamental cultural values.

Let’s look at the major problems that Americans faced in the 1970s. In the 1970s, some of those problems are such as increasing divorce rates, a rise in female-headed households caused by these divorces, increasing numbers of women working to support their families, the increasing breakdown of the family, the increase in drug-use throughout all levels of society, increasing rise in crime and violent crime, the growth of equality and opportunities for both women and blacks. One sees a rise in premarital sex, the increasing presence of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in American society. One sees the increasing loss of millions of high-paying factory jobs, increasing numbers of women and children in poverty, the real income of American workers fall on average two percent a year. As a result of many of these changes, many Americans were losing their faith in the American Dream, their society, their government, and their future resulted in a crisis of confidence. (74)

In addition to all of that, automation produces various sorts of fears in various sorts of individuals. For a professor to stay alive, not obsolescent, in an American university, he must indeed change from year to year like an automobile, refrigerator, or washing machine. The sense of being useless is a common element in emotional crisis in America. America’s industrial progress has made many
people spiritually useless to themselves. This renunciation of the needs of the self – selflessness – is a product of the most successful effort to meet an infinite variety of material needs.

To explore personality disorder, Sanchez’s *I’m Black When I’m Singing, I’m Blue When I Ain’t* confronts urban life in terms of racist, economic, and social oppressions and their debilitating consequences on the mental health of a young black woman, Reena. She suffers from multiple personality disorder, the consequence of numerous traumas in her life precipitated primarily through familial rejection. Her light mother treats her harshly and ridicules her because of her dark skin; her husband is overbearing and abusive. Reena has retreated from her conflicted reality into the relative safety of an insane asylum, where her different selves emerge. Mama B., the first personality to reveal herself in Reena, provides a glimpse of some of the most blatant and aggressive manifestations of white racism on black female lives.

In Act II, Toni reveals herself as the second personality challenging Reena’s control. Toni’s damaged sense of womanhood is shaped by her victimization as an object of cruelty and relentless exploitation. In response to Toni’s inability to hold herself, at the end of Act II, Sanchez seems to finally offer Reena some hope, through Reena’s last personality, Malika. Malika is Sanchez’s solution to the incomplete and harassed black female personalities in the play. Malika is a well-adjusted, confident, and culturally centered young black woman whose strength comes out of her clear connection to her African heritage and her understanding of the essential nature of self-worth and self-love. She offers Reena a comforting solution through a culturally rooted identity, a way to resolve her divisions:

*I’m not trying to replace you. I just want to continue you in a newer form. I will rock you in your blackness so you will grow to love yourself.*

Malika, representing these elements of cultural strength, ultimately convinces Reena that she can be part of what can work toward a synthesis of all
toward a better self. As the technological system has ground up numberless selves, the popularity and usefulness of psychoanalysis have grown so that America is one of the most psychoanalytically minded countries on earth. Behind seeking high-rising standard of living, there is job change. That’s why American psychology considers frequent job change as a symptom of emotional disturbance.\(^{(76)}\)

The contemporary crisis is not caused only by the external world but also by the internal. It is clear that the psychological crisis of loneliness and alienation has interred into the psyche of modern man. The issue of fragmentation is also a psychological problem. Sometime after the World War II, the notion of the progress plays a great deal on a global scale, equated with high technology. It has led to a crisis of confidence and inhumanities everywhere. All the external threats of ecological and nuclear disasters are symptoms of a deadly psychological disorder in the human brain itself. It is clear that this awareness is necessary, and to see that modern civilization has taken giant steps. The giant step has to be radically different from what went before, for example, it is a breakthrough from the past, a discontinuity, since creativity is of that order.\(^{(77)}\)

The contemporary drama mainly concentrates on how recent generations view the world around them. It also focuses on human psychology. To understand the social ideologies that have shaped the present cultural worldview, one has to study the historical background and the imagined characters of the contemporary playwrights. American theatre in the 20\(^{th}\) century has demonstrated family disintegration as a prevalent trend. The various family disintegration issues are such as, the role of the father, father-son relationship, mother-son relationship, the societal treatment of women and other marginalized groups, and outside economic pressures affecting families. Those issues are shown in plays of some prominent American playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard, Marsha Norman, August Wilson, and many others. Here is a discussion of those issues with reference to some of their plays. The analysis
here is also to clarify how severe capitalistic culture emerges and strongly dominates the society.

Relationships between husbands, wives, and their children have consistently been used by American playwrights to explore and illuminate the American experience and how filial relationships are affected by a capitalistic culture of consumption that permeates twentieth century American society. Capitalism affects these social structures; family members are not valued in terms of their intrinsic worth, but rather as economic producers and consumers. Writers pay attention to such effects of capitalism on family. Wakefield says:

*The American family was forever changed as a result of this new capitalistic culture of consumption. For not only were families ......, but the actual fabric of familial relationships became affected by this dominant culture of consumption.*

(Wakefield 78)

Family members are objectified and commodified by economic standards.

Twentieth century American drama lends itself particularly well to a family systems interpretation because of its focus on the family. American drama is rooted in conflict, both internal and external. In his book, *Family, Drama, and American Dreams*, Tom Scanlan (1978) takes a similar view of the American family:

*American drama in the twentieth century has been strikingly preoccupied with problems of family life. Its most characteristic moments are realistic scenes of family strife and squabble and bliss wherein conflicting themes of freedom and security recur and are expressed as dilemmas of family relations and personal psychology.*

(Scanlan 79)

The goal of any dramatist is to bring the reader to a greater understanding of the world in which they live. Aaron Lipton’s essay *Death of a Salesman: A Family System Point of View* in (1983) was one of the first family system analyses of a work of modern American drama. Lipton’s analysis reveals three important family system themes throughout the play “which related to the family and its struggle for health and stability: the failed American Dream, the role of women in
the family and our society, and the struggle within the family for separation and individuation." (80) The Loman’s instability to reach the American dream creates tension among all members, affecting how they communicate with each other.

This important point of this study is an analysis of the impact of the American capitalistic society on American family and the effect of family members on each other. That is for an attempt to analyze social and familial relationships as shown in some specific American plays, the effects of capitalism and modern style of life on American society, family, and individual. The playwrights explore how the American myth of family harmony has been strained by the contradictions inherent in Americans’ culture that posit freedom against security, community against selfhood.

In Long Day’s Journey into Night Eugene O’Neill recounts an autobiographical story of a family’s disintegration caused by the family members’ love for money over their love for each other. Tyrone is rich. He prefers to make money above any and all other loves, passions, and desires. He loves money more than his family. Greed, the main motivator in a consumer-driven economy and capitalist society pervades all interpersonal relationships, especially one’s family. As a protector of his wife and children, he fails to protect his sons from becoming alcoholics. According to Marxist and sociological criticism,

...capitalism’s ideology of producing and consuming commodities dominates the thoughts of the society and individuals within that society, resulting in the alienation of the individual from other pursuits of interests. One of these aspects is the interest of one’s family. (81)

Tyrone ignores his family’s immediate social, personal, and emotional needs because he is consumed with his pursuit of wealth. None of the four members of Tyrone’s family are able to lead the family from its deep dysfunctional into some measure of stability and health. The Tyrone are bound together in love/hate relationships, their raw emotions holding them simultaneously together and apart. Instead of communicating, they blame each other for loneliness.
The relationships within the materialistic society are economically determined, and that financial and economic thinking permeates all aspects of an individual’s life – including filial relationships as in Willson’s *Fences* clearly shown:

TROY: *all they want is the money. [They] see me coming they stick out their hands.*
BONO: Yeah. I know what you mean. That’s all they care about ....that money.\(^{(82)}\)

Troy in Wilson’s *Fences* believes that it is his producing that gives him authority over his family, yet this thinking results in his alienation from his son. When he confronts his son and asks him to leave the house, Cory remarks:

*I ain’t got to say excuse me to you. You don’t count around here no more.*\(^{(83)}\)

This confrontation reveals the extent to which capitalistic ideologies have pervaded the father-child relationship. Troy Maxson, like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* is betrayed by a capitalistic society that values money over family members. Similarly, in Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, The distance between Mama and her children is caused by their open acceptance of society’s materialistic ideals that identify them as merely commodities, ideals that Mama rejects.

Hence, as a result, cultural values of the family modified by a capitalistic influence pervaded all of the American society. They view themselves and each other in terms of money and that is grounded within capitalistic ideology. Regarding the family problems a detailed discussion of selected plays by Arthtur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Sam Shepard will be in the next chapters. It is to explore how the fragmented relations affect the industrial family and then society. It is a kind of social change in America. Combined with what discussed previously, it is one of the main aspects of cultural mutations in America.

At the turn of twentieth century, there was a revolution in communication technology. There is an anxiety that new communication technologies would
displace human artist. There are some plays which figure such fears not only thematically in their dystopia vision of modern life, but formally in their expressionistic style. These technologies also threatened to display, replace, or even erase the human body whenever the vehicles of technology was made to substitute for the tenor of the body. These new technologies alienated human beings from their natural condition, throwing the body’s rhythms out of alignment with the spiritual forces of the universe.

There are two opposed views regarding the ultimate progress in the sciences and technology in the world today. In most industrial advanced societies, the technological process is regarded as the root of evil and all social ills. Whereas in many developing countries, the insufficient progress in science and technology is considered to be main reason of general backwardness. Does technology cause alienation? If that makes sense, then it is as an inhumane force that has somehow manages to throw human relations into disorder. The Iranian thinker has put it as a necessary evil equally harmful in presence as in absence. If so, then many and many questions would be raised regarding technology. Although there is a friction between technological development and the preservation of cultural values, there is a great influence of the former upon the course of social and cultural changes. Today, human life is an industrial life. Technology advances constantly and rapidly, what has been useful and favoured one day runs out of style next day.

Technology is the most important, effective, and major component of culture. The other components are second place holding that all the components of culture are affected by technology. Technological innovation is the driving force behind social change. An introduction of any new technology is a cultural phenomenon, directly affecting the cultural values and the behaviour of communities. Development is a synonym for the cultural, social and economic, of the developed countries, the owners of technology. Cultural development is the process of self-sufficiency which is fulfilled by the community itself, the individuals and groups. Hence, technology is a means for change in the
environment in order to make it compatible with necessary and inevitable human needs; and culture is also man’s compatibility with the environment around him and the relation he establishes with it.

Born into a world where uncertainty was already a living principle, technological drivenness has intensifi ed uncertainty stimulates some to buy almost as a nervous man eats to calm himself. In the jargon of advertising in America, “education” means educating the public to buy, and “inspiration” means “inspired to buy.”

Because of the intensive progress in technology, people fear of becoming unnecessary and obsolete. That stirs hostility against science, the creator of obsolescence. A quotation from Automation and technological change will give the tone:

.....automation......produces various sorts of fears in various sorts of individuals – fear of change, fear of technology itself, fear of displacement, fear of unemployment, fear of machines, fear of science in general. (84)

The central preoccupations of the futurists were speed and technology; like Yank in The Hairy Ape, they were particularly drawn to the intoxicating power of machines, as Yank himself describes it in the following speech in the play:

Sure I’m part of de engines!..... Dey move, don’t dey? Dey’re speed, ain’t dey? Dey smash trou, don’t dey? ….. dat’s new stuff! Dat belongs! ….. I start somep’n and de woild moves! …..i’m de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I’m steam and oil for de engines; I’m de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I’m smoke and express trains and streamers and factory whistles…….. and I’m what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I’m steel – steel – steel! (85)

The futurists welcomed steel and all the other products of industrial society – with its electricity, urbanization, and revolution in the means of transport and communication – with an all embracing optimism, for they saw them as the means by which people would be able to dominate their environment totally. The effects of the speed of transport and communication on modern sensibility were such that
people were aware not just of their immediate surroundings but of the whole world.

John’s Patrick’s *The Teahouse of the August Moon* documents the attempts of the American military to introduce technology (atomic and hydrogen bombs), capitalism, and democratic rule into a culture more interested in beauty than utility. In *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* (1957), William Inge focuses on the insecurities that prevent individuals from forming intense bonds of communion. It is set against the background of the transition from a cowboy/agrarian to a mercantile, industrialized economy – and thus for theatre audiences somewhat analogous to the post-World War II shift to a corporate/consumer society. The play treats in part the impact of social change on cultural stability and traditional institutions. The Flood family, because of Rubin’s precarious livelihood as a travelling salesman of harnesses, find themselves pushed farther to the fringes of the newly moneyed local society where being outside the group results in distrust and rejection.

In Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, Howard represents the impersonality of a changing industrial technological world. As Willy tries to secure a small salary for his survival, Howard insists on demonstrating his new device, a tape recording machine on which has taped the disembodied voices of his ideal American family – a wife and two children. The indulgence of the expensive new technology and the taped voices that function as a representation of domestic American life are interspersed with Willy’s humiliated pleas. Howard is simply too self-involved to either understand or care about Willy’s situation, interrupting him with a list of all the old toys – a camera, a bandsaw and all his hoppies – that he is going to carelessly discard, as he discards Willy, in favour of his new tape recorder the most fascinating relaxation he ever found.

Miller’s emphasis on the refrigerator in the kitchen and a silver athletic trophy above Willy’s bed represents the only achievements in Willy’s life – a few basic luxuries for the house and a fleeting winning moment from his family’s past.
But it seems that Willy does not fit into the modern world of machinery; likewise, where deals are made with a smile and a handshake, are those of a bygone age. To illustrate this point, Miller frequently depicts Willy’s uneasy relationship with machinery such as his car, his refrigerator, and Howard’s recording machine.

Culture determines the way to recognize one another within their own social sphere of action; and the traditional cultures and value systems constitute the factor for social harmony and give a special cultural identity to the members of a community which is one of the needs for endogenous development. The main risk lies in the endangering of cultural identity which is rooted in the tradition of nations. For example, the development of communication technology, the ability to record and transmit sounds and images over any distance, and the easy production of these on a large scale, have changed the face of contemporary culture.

Globalization is a series of social, economical, technological, cultural, and political changes that promote interdependence and growth. Globalization raises the standard of living in developing countries, spreads technological knowledge, and increases political liberalism. Globalization is a historical process that results from human innovation and technological progress.

A wide and diverse range of social theorists are arguing that today’s world is organized by accelerating Globalization, which is strengthening the dominance of a world capitalist economic system, supplanting the primacy of the nation state by transnational corporations and organizations, and eroding local cultures and traditions through a global culture. The transmutations of technology and capital work come together to create a new globalized and interconnected world. The internet and global computer networks make possible globalization by producing a technological infrastructure for the global economy. In the movement toward post-modernity, Baudrillard claims that humanity has left behind reality and modern conceptions, as well as the world of modernity. This postmodern adventure is
marked by an implosion of technology and the human, which is generating a new post human species and postmodern world.

Cultural industries and mass culture served as new modes of social control, new forms of ideology and domination, and novel configurations of culture and everyday life. The ways of global flows of technology, goods, information, ideologies, and people can have destructive as well as productive effects. The technologies of information, communication, and transportation that facilitate globalization can also be used to undermine and attack it, and generate instruments of destruction as well as production. The institution of the open society unlocks the possibilities of destruction and violence, as well as democracy, free trade, and cultural and social exchange. Some saw terrorism as an expression of the dark side of globalization. Yet, the down turning of local and global conflicts, repression of human rights and civil liberties, and general increase in fear and anxiety are regarded as results of globalization. The use of powerful technologies as weapons of destruction also discloses current asymmetries of power and emergent forms of terrorism and war. 

The postmodern writing involves mutations in theory, culture, society, politics, science, philosophy, and almost every other domain of experience, and is thus inexhaustible. There is an indication that there is an increase in women’s liberation. Women are no longer facing as much social pressure to have lots of children and stay home to raise them. By having fewer children, women are exposed to more opportunities for employment. The role of women as housewives and domestic servants is rapidly changing, mostly due to the spread of globalization. In the last few decades, women have been encouraged to fight for equal rights.

The world nowadays becomes more interdependent by many factors. Some of them are the modern technological devices and instant capital flows. Samir Dasgupta points out that “multinational corporations and consumerism have captured the world. Money, technology and raw materials move ever more
promptly across national borders. Ideas, ideals, and cultures circulate more freely.\(^{(87)}\) With globalization emerging as Americanization, the myth of this country and its Dream has ascended to new heights. Americans yearn for the Cold War divisions in an era in which the enemy was clearly defined. As David Mamet observes:

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> Our endorsement of violence is art, like our endorsement of violence in our nation’s behavior, is a compulsive expression of the need to repress- to identify a villain and destroy it. The compulsion must be repeated because the villain does not exist in the external material world. The villain, the enemy, is our own thoughts….. the “information age” is the creation by the body politic, through the collective unconscious, of a mechanism of repression, a mechanism that offers us a diversion from our knowledge of our own worthlessness.\(^{(88)}\)

Benjamin Barber says in *Jihad vs. McWorld* that today’s corporate culture draws out a scenario of “corporate forces that demand integration and uniformity and that mesmerize people everywhere with fast music, fast computers, and fast food.....with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald’s, pressing nations into one commercially homogenous theme park: a veritable McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment and commerce.” \(^{(89)}\)

The American cultural crisis expression is used to describe a pervasive anxiety that makes many Americans feel that not only they are unable to deal adequately with their immediate problems, but far more seriously, they are uncertain about the actual nature of what disturbs them. The result is that they are quite prone to vent their hostility on groups and things which often cannot be regarded in reality as fully responsible for the threatened nature of their existence.

On the human level, cultural stability is the most relevant measure for assessing the relative health of a civilization. When the culture is functioning with some degree of stability, people can think, relate themselves to each other, and act with some genuine confidence. When the culture becomes people’s thoughts, relationships and actions provide no sort basis of confidence, even though they may appear to be pragmatically satisfactory, the expectancy which focuses social
life is blurred, and anxiety – inevitably follows. An important aspect of this crisis is that the society loses confidence of any kind; there is no awareness of the nature of the difficulties; there is no hope of practical solution to lift the situation for the better.

The American drama from the World War I to the Great Depression, to the World War II and the atomic age, to Vietnam War to the economical, political, and the social revolution of the 60s shows a cultural change. It is shown through the new invented, industrial technological devices as cultural objects that lead to social experience based on materialism, by other words on drives more than values. It creates intensive social criticism, regarding family problems; anger; fear; losing jobs, hope, and trust; and fear of the unknown future.

What is happening to the average man, the man who is caught in the web of a soulless consumerist and materialistic culture with all the temptations it offers him? The general scenario is one of utter helplessness and nobody seems to have any control over his future. And this has become a global phenomenon and no country seems to be free from it. Thus the average man finds himself to be truly at a crossroads of utter despair and helplessness. He is swept away by all-pervading materialism and consumerism. Economic well-being appears to be the sole purpose of life. From the world of philosophy, ethics, morality, religion, arts, and literature which acted like principal sources and supports to the evolution of the primitive man of yesterday to the computer genius of today, man finds himself caught in the dust and din of production, profit, distribution, and interest rate. The vulgar side of materialism is believed to have pushed humanity to the cut-throat world of consumerism with utter disregard for human and ecological concerns.

One is reminded of the famous story of the rich man and the poor man who happened to pray at the same time in church. While the rich man was pleading God to give him a million dollars to get out of his present financial difficulties, the poor man’s demand was simple and he asked God to grant him a loaf of bread or
he would die of hunger. The rich man heard this, opened his purse, took out a
hundred dollars and thrusting it into the poor’s man hand and said:

.....now take this money and buy whatever you want. For
heaven’s sake please go away from here for I need God’s
individual attention. And let me pray. (90)

All of us who were lulled into the newly acquired instruments of
“liberation” which science and technology put in our hands have been rudely
awakened by the alarm bells ringing all around now. From the intense heights of
materialistic comforts to the all-around environmental pollution, ecological
devastation, ozone depletion, the greenhouse effects, and so on, creates waves of
shock in all thinking men. When Gandhi at the turn of the present century drew
humanity’s attention to this eventual scenario many scoffed at him and he was
labelled orthodox and anti-progressive.

Global branding has been as strategic tools for multinational companies to
exploit international market through market standardization and simplicity. It also
becomes an agent that attempts to ingrain its cultural and political ideologies into
world market. Westernization, Americanization, corporate imperialisms, and
MsDonaldization are among the political and cultural connotations that epitomize
company’s strategies as to win world market.

Cosmopolitanism and modernity are both examples as the outputs of socio-
cultural meaning of global brand. Cosmopolitan refers to consumer willingness to
engage with global brand, otherness or plurality and openness toward diverse
cultural experience. Consumers also consume global brand as broader cultural
strategies for self-definition and self-maintenance. Consumers always seek desire
for status as well as prestige and aspiring to be perceived as modern, cosmopolitan
and sharing global image manifested by global brand.

Despite all of what mentioned above, to some extent, there is also consumer
resistance and divergence culture based on values and social rules. Consumers
sometime reject certain product or brand during their decision making process.
Hence, it is important to emphasis on consumer value because consumers may use social rules in order to judge brand or global product.

Benjamin Barber says that the old masters were visible tyrants. Today’s masters are invisible and “sing a siren song of markets in which the name of liberty is invoked in every chorus.”(91) The new masters tell us that oppression is liberty, war is peace, and tyranny is stability. The liberty of McWorld may be good for consumption, says Barber, but it may not be of much use to civic liberty.

In America even as late as 1961, the government welcomed every infant as a potential customer. While the population was still growing, the chronic unemployment had become a persisting source of anxiety. On the other hand, there is a continuous race between consumers and products: consumers must buy or the economy will suffer, and there must always be enough products to satisfy consumer demand. There must always be enough workers to man the machines, and there must always be just enough machines turning to absorb enough workers. The New York Times illustrates the American preoccupation with creating new wants. The first commandments of the new era: “Create More Desire!” For in America, as elsewhere in industrialized cultures, it is only the deliberate creation of needs that permits the culture to continue. This is the first phase of the psychic revolution of contemporary life. As well as the spectacular increase in cars, telephones, the number of families with a radio, annual sales of vacuum cleaners, and refrigeration equipment marked the high consumption in American society and social and cultural change. Estimated expenditure on recreation also doubled with mass entertainment such as movies and records showing a great increase. Everyday personal and social life was taking place as American society truly became consumption-oriented.(92)

Hence, the importance of the study lies in showing how cultural mutation happens and affects the American society as a result of some deadly historical events happened in America. The thesis aims to examine how the American drama portrays the cultural mutation. It also aims to critically examine the selected plays
of three prominent American playwrights—Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Sam Shepard; and how literally their plays portray the cultural mutation and its effects on the American society in the further chapters.
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