Chapter One

INTRODUCTION
African American literature often confronts with political oppression, societal racism, and economic exploitation. It is generally focused on themes such as the role of African Americans within the larger American society and what it means to be an American. As Professor Albert J. Reboteau says all African American studies speak to the deeper meaning of the African American presence in America. It is always a test case of the nation’s claims to freedom, democracy, equality and the inclusiveness of all. As such, it can be said African American literature explores the very issues of freedom and equality which were long denied to the African Americans in the United States.

Recently writers of African American texts like Gloria Naylor (1950) and others have broadened the parameters of their discursive world to explore history, culture, and spirituality. In the same way Naylor shows expression of individual and social subjectivity like her contemporary African American writers. Her writings project vision of future, and juxtapose heterogeneity of voices. She addresses the suppressed, neglected, and discriminated lives of her community. While doing so, she refashions self identity, without denying social expression.

Naylor’s first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* won the American Book Award for First Fiction in 1983. As Henry Louis Gates Jr., observes she is hailed as one of the most insightful and significant contemporary African American writers whose works are compared to Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison as she...
is recognized as a brilliant scribe like them. She is also accepted as a poetic historian of African American life in the United States. As a result, Naylor gained reputation associated with both critical and commercial success of her novels. She is respected in academic circles and is acknowledged in the world of popular culture.

Gates further comments that the literary success has come to Naylor as 'a dramatic launch' with the publication and success of her first novel The Women of Brewster Place. Like Alice Walker's The Color Purple, Naylor's first novel is also made into a successful movie. Both the novels challenge the course of women's rights and other social issues. In addition, Naylor is known for creating certain lofty male characters. They are significant for the growth and development of the themes. Also, they are relevant for the emancipation of female characters. The present work attempts to provide just another critical and cultural context for Naylor's novels to show her literary reputation as an African American woman writer in the widest possible context, but with a special reference to her male characters. Alternatively an attempt is made to study her novel in the perspective of the Post Feminist ideology.

Gloria Naylor was born in Harlem on January 25, 1950, a month after her parents Alberta Roosevelt Naylor arrived in New York City from the South. Her parents were sharecroppers from Robersonville, Mississippi, and her mother was determined that her children, Gloria and her two younger sisters, receive the best education that could be provided for them. Even as a farm worker Alberta Naylor
has used some of her meager wages to buy books that the segregated libraries of Mississippi denied her. When Gloria was old enough to sign her name, her mother began to take her to the library as a result of which Naylor became a fervent reader and began to write poems and stories even as a child.

Alberta Naylor worked as a telephone operator and Roosevelt Naylor, a motorman for the New York Transit. The family eventually moved to Queens. Naylor attended classes for the gifted and talented, and proved to be a good student. Naylor is often reminded of the parental encouragement:

They wanted us to be independent and trained us that way. Your race or your gender was no excuse for not succeeding. If you hit a roadblock, get up and bounce back if you hit a wall, jump higher. The world owed you nothing but chance, and even the slimmest chance was enough of an opening to somehow squeeze through and make your mark. We were raised to believe that no one was better than we were just because of skin color. Regardless of what the world may say, what you tell yourself is all that matters. And if you tell yourself that you are a failure, then that is what you are. (1996, 5)

After graduating from high school, Naylor decided to postpone college in order to serve as a Jehovah Witnesses missionary. This decision was greatly
influenced by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Naylor felt she needed to
work to change the world and the Witnesses' notion of a theocratic government
seemed a viable solutions to her. From 1968 to 1975 she proselytized in New York,
North Carolina, and Florida.

Troubled by the restrictions of the religion and spurred by the need to
develop her talents, Naylor matriculated at the Medgar Evers campus of Brooklyn
College. Working as a telephone operator in New York City Hotels, she pursued a
degree in nursing. However, when it became clear that she preferred her literature
classes, Naylor transferred to a major in English. As an avid reader from childhood
she already admired such writers as Austen, Dickens, the Brontes Faulkner, Ellison,
and Baldwin. She soon recognized that all of them were either male or white.

Naylor was fortunate to be introduced to Toni Morrison in a creative
writing class. It was an inspirational discovery although Naylor considered herself a
poet then; Morrison became a model for rendering one's own reality and for crafting
beautiful language. Naylor began to attend readings by Morrison and to hone her
own skills as a fiction writer. She credits Morrison's first novel The Bluest Eye as an
inspiration for her to begin writing novels. Much before this, Naylor's mother laid
the foundation for her literary career by offering her write down in a dairy the things
which she could not under stand and speak with others since Naylor was a shy
adolescent and introvert,: “a pattern has been set that shaped the rest of my life. If you can’t say it, write it.” (1996, 5)

In 1980 Naylor entered into a marriage that lasted for ten days. The same year the Essence magazine published two of her short stories, “Lucielia Louise Turner” and “Kiswana Browne” which were subsequently included in and published as *The Women of Brewster Place: A Novel in Seven Stories* (1982). It has interconnected stories of seven women who are from different backgrounds and live in a decrepit building on Brewster Place. It is a dreary place cut off from the rest of the city by a wall. The novel is significant for its women characters that are united by their inability to fulfill their dreams deferred by racism and sexism. Naylor’s presentation of feminism is queer. She is heterogeneous in her approach and closer to the Post Feminist ideology since the women characters in her novel blame none of their male counterparts for the ordeals they face. Also, they do not subscribe vengeance at their men as in the case of feminist writings.

The success of *The Women of Brewster Place* made the Red Book, a prestigious publication publish one of the chapters titled “Mattie Michael” separately in 1989. It was published in anticipation of television premier of the film version in March 1989 and was adjudged as the highly rated television adaptation of the year. It was produced by the King Phoenix Entertainment, directed by Donna Deitch, starring Oprah Winfrey, Cicely Jayson and others. Winfrey is an ardent
favourite of the novel and its author Gloria Naylor. The novel was adjudged as the mainstay by Oprah’s Book Club, and recently in 2007, it is adapted for stage musical performance.

In an interview with *Ebony* (in March 1989), Naylor emphasizes complexity of the characterization in *The Women of Brewster Place*. She feels that one character could not sufficiently reflect the black women’s situation in America. Therefore, she seems to be compelled to depict through different characters the various life situations of the black women. The seven women together focus the complexity, richness, and diversity of black women in American society although they vary from the skin colour down to religious, political and sexual preferences.

After receiving B. A from the Brooklyn college in 1981, and using an advance from *The Women of Brewster Place* Naylor set off for Spain on a brief journey patterned after the expatriate adventures of Hemingway and Baldwin. As a single woman travelling alone she found herself approached often by men and began to resent the fact that she did not have the freedom to explore and enjoy like the male writers, white and black. As a result, she shut herself up in a boarding house in Cadiz and began to write *Linden Hills*, her second novel.

She also edited *Children of the Night the Best Short Stories by Black Writers, From 1967 To the Present* (1995) and adapted *Bailey’s Cafe* for the stage in 1994.

Naylor received a prestigious fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts (1985) and a Guggenheim fellowship (1988), and won The American Book Award for the first best novel (1982) for *The Women of Brewster Place* and the American Book Award (1998) for *The Men of Brewster Place*, in addition to a number of other awards. She was a cultural exchange lecturer for the United States Information Agency in India in 1985. She was a writer-in-residence and a visiting professor to a number of universities in America. At present, she is working on her seventh novel *Sapphire Wade*, a prequel to her third novel *Mama Day*. She has founded an independent film company, One Way Production and involved in the literary programmes which intend to present positive images of African American Community through various activities.

Naylor calls herself ‘a wordsmith’, a story teller. Her novels contain pieces of her personal life and familial past. It is found in the form of names, places, and even stories. The recurrence and the interconnectedness of the novels make the readers stay connected from the first novel to the last. Moreover, she draws extensively from the Bible which is influenced by her involvement with the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Her affinity to the organization makes her fluent in apocalyptic images and events that conceal morality in imagery. Hence, her works reflect moral
sensibility and overview her life in all its myriad complexity. Her experience in such analysis shaped her craft of writing. She makes use of aspects of black expressive culture and its tradition; the tradition mainly involves religion, speech, and music. Furthermore, much of her fiction involves her search for an authorial voice to tell or retell the stories of partially dispossessed characters across the Diaspora. Naylor expresses Toni Morrison her inexorable impulse to become a writer and explains how Morrison’s first novel *The Bluest Eye* served as a catalyst for her (Naylor’s) literary career:

I wrote because I had no choice, but that was a long road from gathering the authority within my-self to believe that I could actually be a writer. And who was I to argue that Ellison, Austen, Dickens, the Brontes, Baldwin and Faulkner weren’t masters? They were and are but inside there was still the faintest whisper: Was there no one telling my story? And since it appeared there was not, I could presume to. The presence of the work [*The Bluest Eye*] served [two] vital purposes at that movement in my life. It said to a young poet, struggling to break into prose, that the barriers were flexible; at the core of it all is language, and if you are skilled enough with that, you can create your own genres. And it said to a young black woman, struggling to find a mirror of her worth in this society, not only is your story worth in this society, not only is your story worth telling but it
Being inspired to become a writer, Naylor sets her work into motion initially dealing with the African American experience in America. No doubt, her novels study apocalypse, morality, transcendence and, redemption as the foci but it is racism, sexism, classicism and politics that hang about in the wings in her novels. According to Naylor to be an African American in the United States is a political construct, and as it took time to feel she had a voice. She says: “we have yet to feel within this country that we are at home”. It is for that reason she deals with racism at length. Hence her novels feature themes of ancestry, generational conflict, economic exploitation and lost dreams of the African American community. Her success lies in part in the intensity of her presentation of social issues, mainly poverty, discrimination against homosexuals, unequal treatment of women, sense of community, and social injustice. Furthermore, her novels depict the power of love as a force to bring peace, wholeness and healing. Black love is better presented in the novels of Naylor than almost nowhere. In sum, her novels emphasize the theory of survival as the most essential for the human existence.

Naylor’s subject of racism and sexism, like a magnet, draws explicit discussion of social and cultural themes in the reviews. Her works offer theoretical approach to literature which is a way to evaluate the reputation of any writer, and to
demonstrate the relevance their writings. Naylor’s writings are good enough to be meant to inclusion in course syllabi because through her works she gives an equal footing for African American women’s writings on par with others which is a new way to evaluate their value in the society.

African Americans are citizens or residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black population of Africa in the United States. The term is generally used for Americans with at least partial African ancestry. Most of African Americans are the direct descendents of captive Africans who survived the slavery era within the boundaries of the present United States. At present, African Americans constitute 40.7 million i.e. 13.5% of the total population in the U.S. Two million African Americans live in New York City only, the largest African American population in the United States. According to Walter E. Williams of George Mason University, the nationwide unemployment rate of the African American was 11.15 while the overall was 6.5% in October 2008. In 2005, the poverty rate among single parent African American families was 39.5% and among the married couple 9.9% against 24.4% and 6% of the whites. The poverty rate of the African Americans was reduced to 24.7% in 2004 from 26.5% of 1998. Most of them work for service industry, where the phrase – ‘Last hired and first fired’ reflect their job situation, satirically.
While African American families share many features with other U.S families, it has some distinctive features related to the timing and approach to marriage and family formation, gender roles, parenting styles, and strategy for coping with adversity. According to Oscar Barbarian of University of North Carolina, throughout the history the population of African American women outnumber that of African American men. By 1990, within the African American population, it is noted, only 88 men for every 100 women. In addition to this uneven ratio, a sizeable percentage of African American men are un-or-under-employed, addicted to drugs and alcohol, mentally ill, or otherwise undesirable. Therefore, the chances of finding a marriage mate for African American women are low.

Since Cripus Attucks, the first martyr of the American Revolution, to the present Barrack Obama, the African American experience in America is non-oblitrate. In 2008, Democratic senator Barack Obama defeated Republican senator John Mc Cain to become the first African American elected to the Office of President of the United States. Ninety five percent of African Americans voted for Obama. He also received overwhelming support from young and educated whites, and a majority of Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Obama lost the overall white votes. The following year saw another development when Michael S. Steels is elected to the national Republican Party as Chairperson. Among many other prominent personalities Oprah Winfrey is the richest African American of the twentieth century United States and is a big name as a public figure and a philanthropist.
Feminist Criticism is a modern tradition of literary commentary and polemic devoted to the defense of women’s writings or of fictional female characters against the condescension of a predominantly male literary establishment. The beginning of this movement is to be found in the journalism of R. West from about 1910. Virginia Wolf’s, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) and Beauvoir’s translated work *The Second Sex* (1953) are more influential and the founding documents related to this movement. In the United States the movement was reborn amid the cultural ferment of the post-1968 period. The misogynist or belittling attitudes of male critics and novelists are subjected to ironic scrutiny in Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking about Women* (1968) and to iconoclastic rage in Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970). Millett berates D.H Lawrence and Arthur Mailer, in particular. Along with them, many feminists continued investigation into stereotyped representations of female characters, for example, as in, *Images of Women in Fiction* (1972) which is edited by S. Cornillon. Thus, 1970 gave way to women centered literature seeking to trace an autonomous tradition of women’s literature and to redeem neglected female authors. In the United States, Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of their Own* (1977) is one among many other works by women.

In the early 1980s, feminist criticism turned to be more self-critical and internally differentiated because the mainstream of American feminist criticism eschewed ‘male’ literary theory and saw its purpose as the affirmation of distinctly female ‘experience’ as reflected in writings. Whereas, the black- feminist and
lesbian feminist critics objected that their own experiences were being overlooked. As a result, the feminist criticism is allied to Marxist, psychoanalytical criticism and post-structuralism. Feminist criticism thus, become varied field of debate rather than an agreed position. Its substantial achievements are seen in the re-admission of temporarily forgotten women authors to the literary canon.

In the twentieth century, the African American women writers perceive an urgent need to show themselves in literature. Their writings are utilized so frequently to explore readers' feelings about feminism. Sometimes, they provide a forum for discussion on it. Most of them are seen highly potential to represent feminism. It is because of the nature of the things the protagonists do in their writings and their candid attitude towards female sexuality that makes them highly feministic. African American women writers do not mean, or even know what aesthetic appreciation is. It is the last thing they can think of showing in their writings. Literary critics opine that most of the African-American literature exists within the larger realm of post colonial literature. Even though scholars like Radhika Mohan Ram and Gita Rajan draw distinctive line between post colonial and African American literature, by stating: “African American literature differs from post colonial literature in that it is written by members of a minority community who reside within a nation of vast wealth and economic power”. It means to say that for geographical reasons the African American literature does not come under post colonial literary tradition.
In an effort to meet the needs of black women who felt that they were being racially oppressed in the Women’s Movement and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation Movement, compelled to start the Black Feminist Movement. Black women who participated in the Black Liberation Movement and the Women’s Movement were often sexually and racially discriminated. Although neither all the black men nor all the white women in their respective movements were sexists and racists, enough of those with powerful influence were able to make the lives of the black women in these groups almost unbearable. The black men and white women were not able to acknowledge and denounce their oppression of black women. Hence, in course of time, many black men in the movement were interested in controlling black women’s sexuality. As well, there was disregard for the humanity and equality of black women. Black men in the Black Liberation Movement often made sexist statements which were largely accepted without criticism. Amiri Baraka’s statement declared that the black woman was for her man and equality for woman, according to him, could never be possible since nature had not provided it. This is an attitude which he considers healthy and worthy of promotion to other black men and women.

In addition, Black women felt overwhelming frustration within the Women’s Movement because of the white feminists’ unwillingness to admit their racism. This unwillingness comes from the sentiment that those who are oppressed can not oppress others. Faced with the sexism of the black men and the racism of
white women, black women in their respective movements had two choices: they could remain in the movements and try to educate non-black and male comrades about their needs, or they could form a movement of their own. The first alternative, though noble in its intention proved as no viable option. While it is true that black men needed to be educated about the effects of sexism and white women about the effects of racism on black women’s lives, it was not solely the responsibility of black women to educate them. Therefore, building a black feminist movement became the best option.

Having decided to form a movement of their own, black women needed to decide the goals of The Black Feminist Movement and to determine its focus. 1973 marks its ‘birth’ with the founding of the National Black Feminist Organization in New York. Alice Walker coined the term “Womanist” to best describe The Black Feminist Movement. The movement affirms a woman’s stretching of her personal boundaries while at the same time calls on women to maintain their connections to the rest of the humanity. Walker’s essay “In search of our Mothers’ Gardens” is relatively simple to understand, and is made most explicit when she states how the creativity of the African American women kept alive from the time when it was punishable crime for them to read and write. Walker wants the readers to consider how the will to artistically create is ineluctably linked to the will to survive, especially for those in society who have historically been denied any and all expressions of freedom, including creativity. It is within this link between survival
and creativity Walker opens up a new way in which to think about artistry, specifically the artistry of African American women by considering the smallest efforts at preserving momentary “beauties” as herculean efforts at maintaining humanity. Under her perspective, survival itself becomes an act of artistry.

The Combahee River Collective Statement sets forth a political definition for the Black Feminism. It focuses on the logical and political combat to manifold oppressions that all black women face. Thus, the movement was formed to address the ways sexism, racism, and classicism that influence the lives of black women whose needs were ignored by the black men of the Black Liberation Movement and the white women in the Women’s Movement. However, in the black community the movement had not been much effective since several challenges failed to find the broader support among women and black men.

But in literature the African American women writers consider the fact that the eighties witnessed formation of the largest underclass and write about them. Quite a number of women writers put efforts to make the era a true renaissance in their writings. Most of the novels of Naylor appeared in the same period: from 1982 to 1998. At that time feminism has lost much of its impact. By then it had changed its trend, partly because it ran into firm opposition, and partly because many of its supporters and sympathizers came to believe that its goals have been achieved. As a result ‘post feminism’ appeared. It first appeared in the idea that feminism as a
political movement had its day. In 1982, when the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) failed, many viewed the defeat as a signal to the end of the active phase in feminism. The feminists also began to retreat from serious politics. They became less critical of men and more apt to find positive values in love. Further, they believed in family structure which had been dismissed earlier.

The term “Post feminism” appeared for the first time in 1982. Susan Bolotin made use of the term in an article “Voices of the Post Feminist Generation” published in The New York Times Magazine on October 7, 1982. The article is based on a number of interviews with women in which most of them agreed with the goals of feminism but did not identify themselves as feminists. The article reads:

Feminism had become a dirty word. Feminism is a radical theory of separation, a special identification with women of those things that are distinctly feminine. Some make explicit association between feminism and lesbianism. Some viewed it as a promotion of women as men’s equals. But there is a general agreement among the successful women in many ways the beneficiaries of the movement of the 1970s that careers are open to the talented.

At present it is the responsibility of an individual woman to prove her worth for a successful career and a substantial salary. Younger women have no
problem in combining a career and family. As such, in America where belief in individualism has always been a strong ideology, young women prove themselves easily.

Naylor, thus, belongs to an era of post feminism. As a result of it, the thematic approach to her novels is based on post feminist perspective. Her novels try hard to resolve the gender conflict that has been there for generations. She depicts male characters from the true experiences of African American life in America. Her treatment of male – female relationship is worth to be admired with due significance attached to her male characters. She attributes equal significance to her male characters along with the women’s. Willie Mason and Lester in Linden Hills, George Andrews in Mama Day, Bailey, Gabriel, and Stanley in Bailey’s Café are the most impressive and interesting male characters of Naylor. In both, Women and Men of Brewster Place her treatment of fatherly janitor Ben is another instance of her admiration for male characters. In this way, Naylor’s conception of heterogeneity in presenting the male – female characters gives her novels a reflection of post feminist perspective. Her approach to her male characters is convincing and laudable.

Toni Morrison, to whom Gloria Naylor attached herself in carrying forward the literary legacy, does not identify herself as a feminist. Most of her novels typically concentrate on (African American) women’s issues. Yet, she denies being a feminist. She states:
In order to be as free as I possibly can, in my own imagination I can’t take positions that are closed. Every thing I’ve ever done, in the writing world has been to expand articulation, rather than to close it, to open doors, sometimes not even closing the book-leaving the ending open for reinterpretation, revisitation, a little ambiguity I detest and loath [these categories] I think it. It’s an off-putting to some readers, who may feel that I’m involved in writings of some kind of feminist track. I don’t subscribe to patriarchy and I don’t think it would be substituted with matriarchy. I think it is a question of equitable access and opening doors to all sorts of things. 5

When Naylor started her career in 1980s, the African American writers tend to achieve the best selling and award winning status. The academia also accepted them as a legitimate genre of America Literature. However, Toni Morrison plays a major role in promoting African American literature while working as an editor for the Random House. Subsequently, she emerges herself as one of the most popular African American writers of the twentieth century with the publication of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. Her other novel *Beloved* won the Pulitzer prize in 1988. Her writings include *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1922), *Paradise* (1998). She is the first African American woman writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature and in her Nobel lecture on 7 December 1993 in
Stockholm, she eloquently demonstrated how her novels reflect her view of the world and emphasized how the language shaped the human reality.

During 1970s, Alice Walker, a novelist and a poet wrote a famous essay that brought Zora Neale Hurston and her classic novel *Their Eyes were Watching God* got back to the attention of the literary world. In 1982, she won, both, the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for her novel *The Color Purple*. *Roots: the Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley was the first in the list of best sellers. It also won the Pulitzer Prize and became a popular television mini serial. Haley also wrote *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in 1965. Among the poets during the same individual woman’s period, we have Maya Angelou, who read a poem at Bill Clinton’s inauguration. Rita Dove won the Pulitzer Prize and served as poet Laureate of the United States from 1993 – 95. Most recently, Edward P. Jones won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for his Fiction *The Known World*. It is about a black slave holder in the antebellum South. African American literature gained added attention through the work of a talk show host, Oprah Winfry who promoted African American Literature through the medium of her Oprah’s Book Club. At times she brought African American writers far broader audience than they otherwise might have received.

African American literature is well accepted in the United States, but opinions vary regarding its significance, tradition and theories. Some feel that African American literature evolves out of the experience of blacks in the United
States. Consequently, it arises mainly from their confrontation with racism and discrimination. It is an attempt to refute the dominant culture's literature and power. In fact, African American writers do not just try to prove their worth in literature. They attempt to subvert literary power and tradition of the United States since writing has been commonly viewed as white man's work. In the American society literary acceptance has been linked to the power dynamics. The power dynamics perpetuate evils such as racial discrimination, sexism etc.

Moreover, African American literature constitutes as a vital branch of literature of the African Diaspora that has been influenced by the great African Diasporic heritage. In return, it influences African Diasporic writings in many countries. African Diaspora is a movement of Africans and their descendents to places throughout the world. The term is applied to African Americans who are enslaved and shipped to America by way of the Atlantic Slave Trade. For many, African American is more than a name; an expressive of cultural and historical roots. The term expresses pride in Africa and a sense of kinship and solidarity with others of the African Diaspora. Through the writings of prominent African thinkers such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B.Du Bois and George Padmore, African Diaspora has embraced Pan Africanism.

After confronting with the mainstream feminist criticism, the African American literary movement is noted for the depiction of the black feminist
movement. It is also isolated from the ‘male’ African American literary criticism since it grew out of, and in response to the Black Liberation Movement and the Feminist criticism of the Women’s Movement.

African American oral culture is rich in poetry including spiritual gospel music, blues and rap. The same appears in African American tradition of Christian sermons, which make use of deliberate repetition, cadence and alliteration. African American literature has a strong tradition of incorporating all of these forms of oral culture.

However, while these characteristics and themes exist on many levels of African American literature, they are not the exclusive definition of the genre and do not exist within any particular genre. In addition, there is resistance to using African American literary theory to analyze its literature. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., one of the most important African American literary scholars, says: “My desire has been to allow the black tradition to speak for itself, about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it or analyze it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions appropriated from without.”

*The Signifying Monkey* (1988) by Gates explores the relation of the black vernacular tradition to the Afro-American literary tradition. The book attempts to identify a theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular tradition.
and that in turn informs the shape of the Afro-American literary tradition which is isolated from the Euro-centric literary tradition:

"I have tried to define a theory of Afro-American criticism not to mystify black literature, or obscure its several delightful modes of creating meaning, but to begin to suggest how richly textured and layered that black literary artistry indeed is . . . If anything, my desire here has been to demystify the curious notion that theory is province of the Western tradition, something alien or removed from a so-called non-canonical tradition such as that of the Afro-American."7

During the same period, Barbara T. Christian, an influential black feminist literary scholar and critic was acclaimed for her landmark critical works, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition* (1980) and *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985). A champion of the contemporary black writers, including Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, and Toni Morrison, she also spearheaded the rediscovery of earlier writers like Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen. She examines from a black feminist perspective such issues as the importance of motherhood and the mother child relationships within the works of both African American and Native African writers; and the black women novelists' efforts to transcend the prevailing racial and sexual stereotypes of their
age, and their attempts to destroy the image of the domineering black matriarch in modern African American literature.

In spite of range and ascendance of Christian's writing on African American literature and culture, she is known as the author of *The Race for Theory*, an essay that sparked polarizing controversy among the African American literary critics in the late 1980s and reverberated into the next decade. Some deemed her incapable of producing a comprehensive black feminist literary theory, but she makes it clear that this is, in fact, a refusal of a demand from the reigning critical establishment. In *The Race for Theory* she writes:

I, for one, am tired of being asked to produce a black feminist literary theory as if I were a mechanical man . . . since I can count on one hand the number of people attempting to be black feminist literary critics in the world today; I consider it presumptuous of me to invent a theory of how we ought to read.⁸

And yet, Christian produced one of the most substantial and influential collections of black feminist literary theories that we have, in addition to nurturing dozens of new black feminist literary critics. African American literature gained existence within the framework of the American literature and on its own entity, as well. At the same time, it is criticized for
splitting literature into groups that leads to the issue of identity politics in the United States and the other parts of the world. It is backslashed because it would mean to say: “Only women could write about women and for women and only Blacks about Blacks, and for Blacks”⁹.

People who are critical about group based approach to writing say that it limits the ability of literature. The ability of literature is to explore the overall human condition. Moreover, it judges the ethnic writers merely on the basis of their race. Like in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the main character is seen nothing more than a black man. As such, Robert Hayden, the first African American poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress denies special treatment of ethnic based genre of literature. At a black writers’ conference held in Fisk in 1966, some young poets attacked Hayden for his ideals, and refusal to be categorized as a “black poet”. He insists that his work is to be judged by all the critical and historical standards brought to bear upon any other English poetry. He says in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, “There is no such thing as black literature. There’s good literature and bad. And that’s all”⁰.

Where as, proponents counter such views. They believe that the exploration of group and ethnic dynamics in literature deepens human understanding of that particular group which has been ignored or neglected previously. Therefore, the general view point appears to be that the American literature increases its
diversity with new genres like the African American literature. It is evident that it has been well received. It is also evident that the literature by the minority groups like African Americans consistently tops the best seller lists. Had their literature appealed only to individual ethnic group it would not have been possible.

However, Naylor is also critical to be labelled as an African American writer, at times. While taking pride in being a black female writer on one side, she is unhappy on the other side for it would often result in a kind of literary segregation. Naylor, like Robert Hayden opines that literature is at its best when it is recognized by all people. She is unhappy to see how her own identity often used to keep her works in a niche that is separated from the mainstream literature. In this case, Naylor is worried if African American literature is isolated within America.

Another issue of great confrontation in African American literary circles is that it does not portray black people in a positive light. Within the African American community itself, some are unhappy about how their own literature, sometimes, showcases their own people. Fighting against stereotypes of black women shown in literature at one side, the African American women writers are subjected to hostile criticism by their male counterparts for negative portrayal of black men in their writings. Often, they blame each other, argue and counter argue rising curtain for serious discussion. Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, an award winning novel is being criticized for its unfair attack on black men. Naylor’s *The
Women of Brewster Place also falls under the same category. Charles R. Johnson, an African American writer, in the introduction of his updated version of Oxherding Tale published in 1995, engendered a political firestorm by his criticism of Walker’s The Color Purple for its negative portrayal of African American men: “I leave it to readers to decide which book pushes harder at the boundaries of convention and inhabits most confidently the space where fiction and philosophy meets” \(^{11}\).

Such criticism by Johnson comes as a shock to some in academia. They feel that he violates an unspoken taboo against another writer of color. Walker refutes the same by stating that her characters are from the real world experience, therefore, realistic. She said that she knew certain men like Brownfields, a character from her novel The Color Purple. She makes it clear in an interview:

\[
\text{I know many Brownfields, and it’s a shame that there are so many. I will not ignore people like Brownfields. I want you to know I know they exist. I want to tell you about them and there is no way you are going to avoid them.}^{12}
\]

Mel Walker also offers similar opinion of African American women writers. For him it seems to be a domestic issue between the men and women writers from the same community. In his much discussed article “Sexism, Racism and Black
Women Writers”, which appeared on June 15, 1986 issue of The New York Times Book Review he blames the women writers for targeting the black men in their writings. In doing so, he says that they have set themselves outside a tradition that is nearly as old as black American literature itself.

Naylor responds to such criticism of her first novel The Women of Brewster Place:

It goes back to Aristotle who said there were three themes in all of drama; man against man, man against fate, man against God. Therefore, there has to be some obstacle that your protagonists climb over. Now, because of the kind of women they were – who weren’t going out to General Motors or to Congress, they were staying on that street on Brewster Place in their homes- nine times out of ten my conflict bearers were the men in their lives.

In order to escape the animus criticism for depicting the male characters as negative forces in her first novel, and also out of her love, admiration and sympathy for the men of her community, Naylor creates certain worthy male characters right from her second novel: Linden Hills (1985). With the similar realization she writes a sequel The Men of Brewster Place in 1998, fifteen years after the publication of The Women of Brewster Place With the publication of The Men of
Brewster Place she tries to convey the intelligent message of fighting the racial oppression. It means to say that to fight against racial oppression, men and women must join together, but never divided in the fact that no community achieves the goals set, unless united.

There after, Naylor treats the experiences of (black) males and females with equal importance in her novels. Both of them experience isolation and ignorance. She addresses them with a solid decisiveness, vigour, and compassion. They are introduced to the world as those who can never see the ‘American Dream’ fulfilled since survival itself is their victory. She does not want to oversimplify her themes by treating them as just male-female relationships. Hence, she creates men capable of emancipating their women and community from their problems; the saviour figures. The present work after analyzing Naylor's characters, tries to study the significant roles played by the male characters in each of her novel. Further, an attempt is made to realize the worth of her female characters, as well.

Keeping the literary preoccupation and prerogatives of Naylor in view an attempt has been made in the succeeding chapters to highlight how Naylor condones her male characters of their wrongs and glorifies their contribution. The second, third, fourth and fifth chapters study Naylor's five novels. The final sixth chapter attempts to study the worth of Naylor's male characters in emancipating the women characters, and Naylor a Post-feminist writer. A comparative study of the
protagonists from the works of the alltime literary masters; Richards Wright’s Bigger Thomas from his *Native Son* (1940) and Ralph Ellison’s the narrator from his only famous novel *Invisible Man* (1952) is made in the appropriate context.

Since the fifth novel *The Men of Brewster Place* is a sequel to the first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* they are studied together in the second chapter. The first novel is noted for its portrayal of black women sisterhood and their search for identity. The male characters in this novel are deplorable, and fail to work hard. They deny protection and support to their families and the community. Naylor addresses a legitimate problem of not being able to rely on black men for love and support. For instance in the chapter “Lucielia Louise Turner” Eugene wants to run away from his wife Ciel, inspite of her love for him. She begins:

She grabbed the handle of the case. “No, you can’t go.”

“Why?”

... “Because I love you”

“Well, that ain’t good enough” (*WBP*, 100)

It would have been unnatural and factually erroneous to portray the male characters in women’s stories as virtuous and noble, and, is also out of question to write from the male and female perspectives simultaneously in a single work. As
such, Naylor conveniently tries to redeem the male characters of *The Women of Brewster Place* in a separate work. While doing so, the female characters who appear in *The Women of Brewster Place* take a backseat in *The Men of Brewster Place*. A few of them are shown as negative forces in the lives of their men, as the case of men in women’s stories.

Naylor uses significant prologues in both the novels. They are taken from Langston Hughes’ poems. In *The Women of Brewster Place* the final emphasis is on dreams postponed as in Hughes’ poem “*What Happens to a Dream Deferred?*.” Hughes evokes the fate of a dream unfulfilled through a series of similes such as they ‘dry up like raisins in the sun’ ‘fester like sore’, ‘stink like rotten meat’, ‘crust over like syrupy sweets’. Further, they become burdensome or possibly explosive. The poem suggests that to defer one’s dreams and hopes is life denying.

The dream motif is a typical American phenomenon. It is most appropriate for people who live in slavery, separation, deracination and dehumanization. The dreams in the life of African American are transformed into nightmares. Hence, nightmares of slavery and racism in a proclaimed paradise are more relevant to African Americans. Naylor aptly uses the poem for prologue because Langston Hughes, more than any other African American writers, describes the nightmarish experience of the dream while insisting upon the African Americans determination to fulfill it.
The Men of Brewster Place has two poems of Langston Hughes, tilted "Tell Me" and "A Christian Country" as prologues. The first part of the prologue casts doubt upon why the black man's dream should be deferred for long. It is a poser, and Naylor sees it as a relevant question often asked by the African American men. The second prologue is an alert to God. It has an implication that men have to fight their lives battles while God is resting. Thus, the prologue has a mysterious question which no one can answer or give a valid explanation. Also, it shows castigation of the existence, particularly of black men.

Naylor induces deferred dreams in the stories of both men and women. Etta Mae Johnson dreams of status and settlement with the minister. Kiswana, as her mother says, lives in fantasy world where everything is good for her community. Mattie at the end of the novel, in the section "Block Party" dreams of women's solidarity. In the men's story, Basil dreams to be a father he never had. Abshu wants to see the Brewster Place, exist. Eugene dreams to be a good family man. All of them experience deferred dreams. Michael Awkward calls the dream motif as Naylor's theme of her first novel which she continues in the sequel also. Naylor in the concluding section "Dusk" refers to Brewster Place's residents' dreams as their hope for future:

(But) the colored daughters of Brewster, spread over the canvas of time, still wake up with their dreams misted on the edge of a yawn. They get up and pin those
dreams to wet laundry hung out to dry, they’re mixed with a pinch of salt and thrown into pots of soup, and they’re diapered around babies. They ebb and flow, but never disappear. So Brewster Place still waits to die. (WBP, 192)

Jill L Matus evokes evidences from the historical context of Reverend Martin Luther king, Jr.,’s famous speech “I have a Dream” in Naylor’s works. She says that Naylor analyses both Hughes’ poem and King’s speech:

Naylor’s epilogue avoids: “I still have a dream today that one day every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill will be made low . . . , and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed . . .” Hughes’s poem and King’s sermon can thus be seen as two poles between which Naylor steers. The novel recognizes the precise political and social consequences of the cracked dream in the community it deals with, but asserts the vitality and life that persist even when faith to Dr. King’s sermon in the recognition of blasted hopes and dreams the dream of harmony and equality: It stops short of apocalypse in its content of the dream should be capable of flexibility and may change in response to changing
Matus considers the way in which Naylor rethinks of Hughes' poems their implication of her vision in terms of the novels' sensitivity to history and social context. The end of the novel raises questions about the relation of dreams to the persistence of life, since the capacity of Brewster's women to dream on is identified as their capacity to live on. The street continues to exist marginally, on the edge of death; it is the 'end of the line' for most of its inhabitants. Like the street, the novel hovers, moving toward the end of its line, but deferring. What prolongs both the text and the lives of Brewster's inhabitants is dream; in the same way that Mattie's dream of destruction postpones the end of the novel, the narrator's last words identify dream as that which affirms and perpetuates the life of the street.

Naylor's desire to write the experience of African American women was born from impatience with the critical establishment's assumptions that black writers should provide "definitive" reflections of black experience. The emphasis on the definitive, she argues, denies the vast complexity of African American experience. In a conversation with Toni Morrison, she speaks of her struggle to realize the dream of writing the lives of black women without falsification and sentimentality, making visible those whom society keeps invisible. She dedicates the novel to those who 'gave me the dream, believed in it... nurtured it... applauded it.'
Naylor's cannon shows her recurring concerns such as the impact of community or place, the complexity of characters, signification upon biblical texts, influence of canonical texts in both the Western and black literary traditions. She is eloquent in the use of residual native of black folk culture. All her works show a rich coalescence of oral and written modes as it has been observed by many critics like Maxine Lavon Montgomery, Margaret Early Whitt, Virginia Fowler, Sharon Felton, Margot Anne Kelley et al. Critics plumb the depths of Naylor's novels and find evidences to her use of different narrative strategies and techniques. They also suggest how each book maybe read through a particular theoretical lens.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., points to Naylor's use of lyrical naturalism in the plot development in *The Women of Brewster Place*. The term naturalism has very precise meaning in contemporary literary philosophy. Naturalism allies philosophy that is closer to science. It means reality is exhausted by nature, containing nothing supernatural and that the scientific method should be used to investigate all means of reality, including the human spirit. Science is a possible route to important truths about the human spirit. The Naturalists are influenced by the evaluation theory of Charles Darwin. They believe that one's heredity and environment decide one's character:

Naturalism is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than is realism. But naturalism is not only, like realism, a special selection
of subject matter and a special way of rendering those materials; it is distinctively a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a particular philosophical thesis. This thesis, a product of post-Darwinian biology in the nineteenth century, held that a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul nor any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond nature; and therefore, that such a being is merely a higher-order animal whose character and behavior are entirely determined by two kinds of forces, heredity and environment. A person inherits compulsive instincts—especially hunger, the accumulative drive and sexuality—and is then subject to the social and economic forces in the family. The class and the milieu into which that person is born.  

Naylor's characters, especially in *The Women of Brewster Place* are the victims of race, class, economic and social environment. Like a Naturalist she is frank about sexuality, but not pessimistic in her conclusions. She exposes the harshness of life including poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, prostitution, filth and blunt, but unlike a Naturalist she is optimistic. In one of the interviews, she declares that she has concluded both, her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* and its sequel *The Men of Brewster Place* in a note of hope. James Robert Saunders
quotes critics like Kathryn Palumbo's view regarding the concluding part of the novel as pessimistic:

Kathryn Palumbo is pessimistic in her article, "The Uses of Female Imagery in Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place,*** where she maintains that Naylor "offers her characters no hope and no power beyond daily survival." But in actuality the final section of the novel serves notice that a new way of life may be on the horizon. At first conceived as a means of raising money to pay for a tenants' association lawyer, a well-planned block party takes on even greater significance [as]... That wall was the place where C.C. had led five others in rape. It was where a dazed Lorraine had killed Ben. This was the wall that separated all project residents from the rest of society, and now in the drenching rain while "all of the men and children... stood huddled in the doorways," the women dismantled this wall of seclusion and opened the way for possibility.16

Naylor, like a Naturalist gives no scope for romanticism and supernaturalism. Naylor's use of lyrical naturalism in *The Women of Brewster Place,* as Gates points to, is an influence of Richard Wrights, James Baldwin on one side, and the Black women's fiction on the other side. He concludes:
(But) even within her practice of naturalism, Naylor refuses to paint completely diminished lives. The seven-part structure of the novel allows for a rendering of a range of sensibilities with a subtlety not commonly found in such fiction. Hers is a lyrical naturalism, with its roots in James Baldwin’s gospel-inspired riffs and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. What’s more, Naylor demonstrated a powerful manner of depicting sexuality — in its varied permutations — linking her again to Baldwin, but also registering a more open and complex way to depict the vagaries of desire in Black fiction. These pioneering efforts have helped to make the decade of eighties a new era, indeed, a renaissance in black women’s writings.17

The second novel *Linden Hills* (1985) is Naylor’s thesis at Yale. It is allegorical in structure and is an elaborated novel upon Dante’s *Inferno*. It deals with women’s issue of procreativity within a masculine tradition of paternal self-duplication. Hence, along with the theme of assimilated blacks and their losing of inner self for the white world, the concept of patriarchy is also the central theme of *Linden Hills*. It is also viewed as an instance of Black American gothic novel. Naylor explains how *Linden Hills* patterns after Dante’s *Inferno*:

At Brooklyn while taking course on ‘Great works of literature’.........we had read the *Inferno* and
was overwhelmed by the philosophic underpinning of the poem as well as the characters that Dante created. Here is the emotional involvement. I have the idea and I'm going to go for it.” 18

Further, Margaret Homan acknowledges it as a work of visionary feminism. Visionary feminism explains the necessity of converting men because if men remain sexists, women’s lives would diminish. So, visionary feminism argues that men must be made comrades in the feminist struggle. They must challenge patriarchy and work to end sexism. Such work can be started at home with the loved ones. Visionary feminism emphasizes on mutuality and interdependency. In *Linden Hills*, Naylor’s character Willa anticipates her place as a good wife and mother. She is seen as a tolerant woman looking forward for a mutual love and care. But Naylor forces to end her in a ghostly incident, otherwise she would have been well adjusted and waited till such time her husband joins her in:

And while she [Willa] was doing all that, she was also being a wife. She cleaned his home, cooked his meals. His clothes were arranged, his social engagements organized. When he chose to talk about his work, she listened. And she was careful not to bring him petty household problems that might overburden him more than he already was. She accepted without complaint their separate bedrooms and the fact that she spent all
those nights alone, that he could be distant and distracted at times, that so much of his life just couldn’t include her. Once again, with that evidence, she could be tried by any court in this galaxy or the next and be acquitted as a good wife. (*LN*, 279)

Bell Hooks is very direct in her ideals of visionary feminism: “In a universe where mutuality is the norm there may be times when all is not equal, but the consequences of that inequality will not be subordination, colonization, and dehumanization.” 19 Visionary feminism, unlike the radical feminism encourages love between men and women where as, radical feminism views it as a trap. Anne Carol Douglas discusses Hooks’ concept which says that visionary feminism analyses and answers those who desire love. She says: “Many heterosexual women were turned off to feminism because they feel it did not answer their desire for love.” 20 Willa is denied of such pleasure in love, but ‘succeeds in giving miraculous birth to her and to a revolutionary intention.’

Naylor induces magical realism in *Mama Day* (1988). It also offers the pleasure of classical novel and the folk tale. The plot has been intricately structured with doublings and foreshadowing. Foreshadowing is to hint at theme and events that will gradually become more explicit and meaningful in the story. In addition to this technique, *Mama Day* exemplifies oral rhythm, supernatural events of magical elements and the illogical scenario appear in a very realistic and normal setting.
Peter Trachtenberg briefs magical realism as: “The elements of dreams, fairy tales and mythology are combined with recognizable every day reality.”

Luis Leal, the Mexican critic, explains magical realism and says:

Without thinking of the concept magical realism each writer gives expression to a reality he observes in people. To me magical realism is an attitude on the part of the characters in the novel towards the world, or towards nature.......If you can explain it, then it’s not magical realism.

Naylor in creating Willow Springs in *Mama Day* makes use of folklore and tradition to better convey its unique heritage. The place is depicted with magic and supernatural power which Mama Day commands and Cocoa confronts. Naylor believes in such magical realism: “It’s about the fact that the basic magic is the unfolding of the human potentials and that if we search inside ourselves we can create miracles.”

Further, Charles E. Wilson, Jr., signifies *Mama Day* as a psychological novel by applying psychoanalytical technique to interpret the theme. A psychological novel is a prose fiction which gives more than usual amount of emphasis on interior characterization. It stresses on the motives, circumstances which lead to external action. It is not content to state what happens, but goes on to
explain the reason. In *Mama Day* the lengthy conversations between Cocoa and George give scope for psychoanalysis. Characters and characterization are more important than anything in such writings.

Naylor organizes two of her novels, *Mama Day* and *Bailey's Café* around tropes of spiritual power and Biblical revision. African American community has an established spiritual realm and respect for spirituality. Naylor no longer belongs to a formalized religion, but believes in the supreme power which can be called God. In *Bailey's Café* (1992) she identifies the Judeo-Christian women from the Bible to better suit her theme of female sexuality. She goes from Eve on up from the Bible. Wilson calls the technique as psychological fragmentation since all the characters in the novel are to be healed from psychological and neurotic disturbances.

Charles E. Wilson Jr., observes *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998) as a post colonial writing. Margaret Whitt interprets his view of *The Men of Brewster Place* as:

(Finally), in *The Men of Brewster Place*, Wilson chooses a post colonial reading, suggesting that Naylor’s men must first see themselves not as inferior objects, but instead as agents in their own lives who can initiate change. ²⁴

Naylor’s latest work *1996* (2004) is a fictionalized memoir because it is both autobiographical and fictional. It offers some difficulty to see it through a
particular theoretical lens. It is a work of dystopia which addresses the world as a 'bad place' to live in. It represents a very unpleasant world, in which ominous tendencies of technological order are projected.

Critics are of the opinion that Naylor creates a canon of related novels with elements and characters that reoccur from book to book. They are symbolically related to one another, but are unique. Michael D. Sharp explains the interconnectedness of Naylor's novels, by saying:

Despite the variety of perspectives, themes, places, formats, and plots within the novelistic quintet, Naylor employs common characters to create a unified fictional landscape. Kiswana Browne, who narrates a chapter in *The Women of Brewster Place* grew up in *Linden Hills*. Mama Day makes a brief appearance in *Linden Hills*, only to appear as the protagonist of *Mama Day*. George, who marries Mama Day's grandniece, was born in Bailey's Café. His birth features prominently in the novel of the same name as a metaphor for regeneration. Finally, and most obviously, the seven male voices of *The Men of Brewster Place* belong to characters found in the first novel. With these bridges between the novels, Naylor emphasizes the interconnectedness that exist in multicultural America.
Peter Erickson explains the two unique ways Naylor uses to create a sense of linkage from one novel to the other: “She first develops a character or situation referred to in a previous novel; the second is to continue pattern of allusions to Shakespeare”. Paula Barnes notices the common elements in Naylor’s first four novels, but is critical in of them. All her novels commonly deal with American racism, allegorical commentary, controversy between epic and the nature, but finally, they suspend the reality, according to Barnes.

Naylor presents her novels from the white, female, male, and all socio economic strata which Sharp calls as Naylor’s use of ‘sides’ in the structure of her novels. She allows the characters to tell a story instead of relying on a singular point of view. As the omniscient narrator explains in Mama Day: “Everything got four sides, his side, her side, an out side and an in side. All of it is truth.” (MD, 230) All these diverse “sides” constitute the experiences of African Americans characters whether interact within the novel’s plot or as chapter within the novel, they drive the theme. For instance, The Women of Brewster Place and The Men of Brewster Place are isolated short stories, but make up as two novels. Bailey’s Café relies on the structure of a musical composition. Bailey introduces seven characters, each of whom performs a song or tells a story. But all the songs together add up to form the entire score. Mama Day, in contrast, functions more like a traditional novel where many characters narrate the story, using flashbacks as well as observations, but the novel moves in one smooth plot, from the beginning to the middle, and to the end.
Naylor's novels can be placed in the tradition of bridging the European conventions and the African art. To name the obvious Dante's *Inferno* and *Linden Hills*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *Hamlet* and *Mama Day*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and *Bailey's Cafe*. Her use of Shakespeare concerns many critics like Peter Erickson. They point to her contact between the English and European Renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the Renaissance of the contemporary black women writers. Of course, Naylor's appreciation for Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God* and Anne Petry's *The Street* are also evident. It is also obvious that Naylor finds resources for her works from the triumvirate Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin especially in depicting the male characters. This Wilson confirms taking *The Men of Brewster Place*’s instance:

Naylor confronts the social reality in *The Men of Brewster Place*, and in doing so she contributes to a genre that has also focused on black manhood, always reminding the reader that whatever affects black manhood affects the larger black community. The two classical American (African American) works that broached this issue rather comprehensively are Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. These novels chart the lives of quite different protagonists, but both ponder the same essential questions regarding black male
survival. Is it, in fact, possible for the black man to thrive in a society that has predicated its very survival on the subjugation of this same black man? 27

Naylor's success as a contemporary African American woman writer lies in her effort to portray the male characters beyond single dimensional approach. The secret behind her success is her pattern of 'the male adoption of female pain.'
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