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**Focus On Intra-Racial Issues Highlighted in The Works of Dorothy West**

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Dorothy West was a novelist, short story writer, journalist and magazine editor associated with the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement in the 1920s and 1930s that celebrated black art, literature and music. In her novel 'The Living Is Easy' highlighted the life of upper class black people and how they ill treated lower class black people. She also explored the complexities of the black experience in the United States in short stories and essays that challenged stereotypes and explored themes such as race, class, and gender. Her work paved the way for future generations of African-American writers, and her legacy continues to inspire and influence writers today. Intra-Racial Prejudice is defined as: discrimination from within a particular racial/cultural group against those of the same group (online source). In her novel 'The Living Is Easy' Dorothy West mentioned the mindset of upper class people through the character Cleo: *'She had no intention of sending her to school in the South End. Whenever she passed these schools at recess time, she would hustle Judy out of sight and sound. "Little knotty-head niggers," she would mutter unkindly, while Judy looked shocked because "nigger" was a bad-word. (10)'* Dorothy West's father Isaac Christopher was a successful businessman. At the age of seven he was redeemed from slavery and earned some money and started his own business at the age of ten. Isaac owned a whole sale fruit company and was known as black banana king of Boston. By the time Dorothy was born they were the wealthiest black family in Boston. Her formal education began at age two under the tutelage of Bessie Trotter, sister of Monroe Nathan Trotter, then editor of the *Boston Guardian*. Dorothy West began writing short stories at the tender age of seven. After graduating from Girl's Latin High School in 1923, West continued her education at Boston University and later the Columbia University School of Journalism. The projected characters in the novel 'The living Is Easy', 'Judy' represent Dorothy West and Cleo represents her mother.

Some African-Americans attained bourgeois status and others did not grow socially and economically. The pervasive attitudes and behaviors of African-Americans towards some of their own people are predominating in the United States of America.

Prejudice is a pervasive concept that has been used at different times to hold those who are different from us at bay. In American culture, it has been revisited time after time as each new wave of immigrants arrives on American soil. For the African-American however, it has been a concept and social construct that continues to plague the culture and community. African-Americans have experienced a difficult and very tumultuous existence in American society. At the onset of their arrival into this country, African-Americans had to adapt to subservient roles as slaves. Upon emancipation from slavery, African-Americans had to struggle to find their place within a society that did not accept them as equals and worthy of respect. Continuing today, African-Americans still search for respect as a racial and ethnic group. Many African-Americans, once given the opportunity, have demonstrated the ability to work diligently and attain prominent positions as well as affluence. Despite the growth in the population of educated African-Americans, their increase in economic power, the acquisition of high-level law enforcement positions, and their attainment of political positions, African-Americans continue to come under negative scrutiny as an ethnic group. It appears that as a race the negative actions of a part of a whole are being amplified and the culture in its entirety is judged based on this characterization. Education disparities within the Black community persist as a critical issue with far-reaching consequences. Factors such as underfunded schools, lack of access to resources, and systemic inequities continue to affect the educational opportunities and outcomes for Black students. These disparities manifest in lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and limited access to advanced courses and college-preparatory programs.

Dorothy West highlighted attitudes of black people living in the northern parts of America towards the people living in the South. She states *“For years these northern Negroes had lived next door to white neighbors and taken pride in proximity. They viewed their southern brothers with alarm, and scattered all over the city and its suburbs to escape this plague of their own locusts (10)”*.

At the time of great migration six million African Americans moved from Southern United States to the Northern parts of the United States (The Great Migration, 2021). It was substantially caused by poor economic and social conditions due to prevalent racial segregation and discrimination in the Southern states where Jim Crow laws were upheld (The Great Migration, 2019). For Black people, the migration meant leaving what had always been their economic and social base in America and finding a new one (1922). The black community that attained bourgeois class status shows aversion to their own people. The irrational behavior of rich black community towards their own people is not a good sign to show forth their integrity and fight against prevailing racism. Many northern blacks working in the skilled and semi skilled industries, earning more and having more freedom may have felt superior to southern blacks who were likely agricultural workers in

the dawn of the 1900's. As a nation's worth of people migrated from southern states riddled with poverty, Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan to the promise of a better life. Those who stayed behind were looked at as unfortunate or inferior. Many who grew up in the North had a different outlook on societal norms in interactions with Caucasian people. Where in the south, avoidance of eye contact, submissive body language and timidity is taught as how to properly interact with Caucasians is not only common but expected by many Caucasians with the old mentality and failing to so may be dangerous to their health. Northern blacks fully reject this as they feel more powerful as they are a dominant cultural, political and physical influence in many northern cities such as Detroit, Chicago, New York, Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland and Philadelphia. Many northern blacks are variously hostile to the "southern" mindset of "go along to get along" where you allow harassment of yourself, women and children without challenge or allow yourself or community to be publicly humiliated to avoid the likely beating or murder that may be trumped up based on your unwillingness to cooperate with unlawful acts. African Americans tend to have a tribal mindset and separate themselves from other African Americans based on differences in regional slang, style, food, accent and dialect.

Dorothy west focused on how rich northern African Americans can send their children to the private schools and give the best education to their children. She states in the novel 'The Living Is Easy' like this:

*"The prospect of Judy entering school in Brookline filled her with awe. There she would rub shoulders with children whose parents took pride in sending them to public school to learn how a democracy functions. This moral obligation discharged, they were then sent to private school to fulfill their social obligation to themselves. (11)*

It is a very well-known fact that social class and education seem to play a larger role in life experiences of children these days. Upper middle class Black families look and act a lot more like upper middle class white families than lower middle class or lower class Black families. Same with white family divides these days. It's a recent phenomenon, though, and we don't know a lot about how things will play out in future generations.

Poor people have more in common with other poor people, regardless of race, than with rich people. To take as an example, OJ Simpson's peers are not poor black people but the rich people of the country clubs he used to go to, regardless of color (Ellie Bulkin and Becky Thompson, 2023). Depends highly on how you choose to live as a Middle Class Black. You should be aware of something unlike Middle Class everybody else. Middle Class Blacks actually have a choice. Live among your fellow Middle Class Blacks or exodus to try and join the rest of the American Middle Class. As for being poor your

options are severely limited. But even then you almost never find mixed poor neighborhoods in America. The poor even practice segregation in these United States. Black Americans and Black immigrant parents shared that they wanted their children to have peers who were Whites, Black, Latinx, and Asian. Mrs. Evans believed that her daughter's exposure to non- Blacks gave her a competitive edge. Cascades parents are conscious of the complexities of New York's color line and choosing the 'right' schools is one of the strategies they use to help their teenagers become socially successful in a racially unequal world (Only Clerge, page 352-367).

Parents who selected private high schools articulated socio-cultural rationales for their selections. Specifically, they cited interracial contact with affluent white students as a key advantage of private high schools. These parents were invested in their children building cross-racial skill sets to help them become more competitive candidates in the college application process, in college, and the job market. Parents believed that knowing the language, culture, values, and behaviors of white gatekeepers, gave their children a competitive advantage over other students who operated in only Black spaces. Parents defined the 'real world' as a place where Blacks and Whites interacted in everyday life. Despite living in a predominately Black middle class place, strategies for their children's socialization were shaped by parent's desires to expose their children to the practices of the dominant white world.

Dorothy West, the last leaf of Harlem Renaissance, mentioned in her first novel 'The Living is Easy' how rich middle class people could arrange private teachers to teach their children:

*Miss Althea Binney, Judy's private teacher, who for the past three years had been coming four mornings weekly to give Judy the benefit of her accent and genteel breeding, and to get a substantial lunch that would serve as her principal meal of the day, had told Cleo of a house for rent to colored on a street abutting the River way, a boulevard which touched the storied Fens and the arteries of sacred Brookline. (11)*

Dividing American land into towns was foundational to shaping the United States into classed communities. These "towns" maintain inequality in public education that specifically disadvantages poor Black and brown students while providing state-funded advantages to rich white students. By 1830, Massachusetts passed laws to provide free public education to all children, including the first public high school, and fourteen years later the state would legalize segregated schools ahead of Black emancipation, though more than five percent of enslaved people would still learn to read at the risk of severe physical punishment or death. A combination of state and local funding racial public schooling because neighborhoods and, thus, neighborhood home values are in part decided by the racial

makeup of the area. Redlining was the primary tool local governments used to create “white” and “Black” neighborhoods and install “good” and “bad” schools within their borders. Fifty years of constricted mortgage approvals in predominantly Black neighborhoods led to white flight from integrating neighborhoods as Black people took on predatory loans to access home ownership in which the values of their homes would never appreciate. Today, modern gentrification continues to displace Black folks in areas where home prices are low because of government subsidies on local property taxes. This doesn’t improve the funding scenarios in the same neighborhoods, leaving Black people living in predominantly Black communities gutted by poverty and therefore without access to quality public education compared to their white peers in well-funded neighborhoods. A combination of state and local funding racial public schooling because neighborhoods and, thus, neighborhood home values are in part decided by the racial makeup of the area. Redlining was the primary tool local governments used to create “white” and “Black” neighborhoods and install “good” and “bad” schools within their borders.

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Dorothy west in her novel ‘The Living is Easy’ highlighted how some rich African Americans select their residential localities and try to avoid to live close to their fellow black community.

*Northern blacks took pride in not living in a segregated society. They were, however, an insular group, a black village, a world apart in a white city. Whites controlled their destinies but hardly knew them; blacks were physically visible*

*but*

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*socially invisible. On their part, blacks knew little beyond their psycho-social village boundaries and even less beyond their actual city limits ( 266)*

Dorothy West, an exception to this insularity, chronicled the secret city. It was a vivid and proud world, not characterized by a search for African roots or survivals or Pentecostal churches. It was as American as apple pie—made of the best apples. She understood the values of this world. There were places blacks wanted to live, for example—Brookline or hardly discovered Roxbury rather than the South End. (Cambridge was acceptable, no doubt because of the smaller number of blacks living there). Blacks in this Boston understood the complexity of status within white society. They viewed Jews, Irish, and Italians according to ethnicity and class, not color—in contrast to the way they viewed Brahmins. And Dorothy West knew the scandals or events that could upset the black village insularity—a gambling house run by a black woman, illegal abortions, the marriages of white (especially Irish) women to black men, business failures, unsuccessful professional practices, drinking, broken marriages—and marred the expectation of easy living in Boston.

Dorothy West's novel, *The Wedding* is a tale set in the Martha's Vineyard, which satirized middle class values and explored social and racial issues, to enthusiastic reviews. This novel also depicted the futility and tragedy of elitism, which characterizes her earlier work *The Living Is Easy*. As in *The Living Is Easy*, the southern past represents the foundations of African American culture and community. Individuals who elevate bourgeois values over their folk heritage suffer. West's crowning achievement in negotiating the wealth, triangularity of heritage, and power of the African American experience. West's interweaving of past and present in '*The Wedding*' reveals the power of coming to understand the traingularity. Clark's union with Corinne represents the marriage of two socially prominent individuals, who on the surface seem to be the ideal of African American family, but the foundation upon which the marriage rests reflects more on superficial connections than passion or love.

*When Clark met Corinne, then, it was a meeting of two perfect people. She was the daughter of a college president, and he could never hope to marry better than that. But neither of them was interested. In Sabina, Corinne's brown classmate, Clark had found the perfect girl-woman, and he wanted to marry her. He had not had time for love before, and until he met Sabina he had never experienced the emotion that is blind to color lines and racial bars and class divisions and religious prejudices and all the other imposed criteria that have nothing to do with love but have so much to do with marriage. (105)*

Clark never married Sabina, the woman he most loved in college because of her dark

skin color and low social class. His daughter Shelby's wedding stirs ambivalent feelings in him. His long term affair with the dark skinned Rachel reflects his regret over allowing his bourgeois aspirations to dominate his existence. When Clark decides to exchange a bourgeois wife with the proper social cachet for a true love in Rachel, he had already waited too late.

The white people live in the North are sophisticated and didn't persecute Negroes to that extent, rather they have encouraged them to grow socially and economically, however, the Negroes who work in the South used to face problems by their masters. Therefore there is influx of Negroes from the South to the North. Nativity proved less important to status than occupation in the Negro class structure. A recently arrived southern-born immigrant who obtained a good economic position would find little to bar him from acceptance in the Negro upper or middle classes, but the fact that so many of the newcomers had neither education nor skill and comprised "the most numerous in those crowded streets and alleys where the destruction and wretchedness is most intense and infectious" resulted in some hostility between the northern-born free Negro and the escaped or emancipated southern slave. Upper and middle class northern Negroes often held aloof from the new immigrants and complained that they threatened to besmirch the reputation of the community (155). There is constant contempt among the black people who belong to different categories of black people. Upper class black people have aversion towards the lower class black people. Dorothy West has projected these issues in her works. Regarding this, she states like this:

*Cleo looked startled and felt humiliated. Were there colored people next door? Was that why Mr. Van Ryper was moving away? Should her pride make her rise and exit with dignity, or should she take the insult in exchange for this lovely house? Who were the people next door? If they were anybody, Miss Binney would have known them. They must be old second class niggers from way down South, whom she wouldn't want to live next door to herself.*  
(45)

When Cleo questioned about discrimination within the black community, Mr. Van Ryper's facial expressions changed and tried to prove that he doesn't have such feelings. He claims that his father was a leader in the Underground Movement and he was brought up in an Abolitionist household. He emphasizes that he believes in man's inalienable right to liberty. This way he defended himself.

Rakesh Kochhar and Mohamad Moslimani in their article 'Wealth gaps across racial and ethnic groups' stated that only 45% of Black households were in either the middle or upper wealth tiers in 2021, the lowest share among the groups examined. The majority of Black households (55%) were in the lower wealth tier in 2021 – that is, they had less

than \$41,700 in wealth. A somewhat greater share of Hispanic households (52%) was in the middle or upper wealth tier, and 48% were in the lower wealth tier.

Dorothy West in her novels and short stories highlighted the intra-racial issues within the African Americans. The wealthy black people undermine the poor black people on the basis of economic status, light skin color and dark skin color, residential area and mainly whether they are from southern parts of America or northern parts of America.

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