Afterword

O'Neill was the first major American dramatist to explore and focus on the problem of racism in the United States when virtually no author dared to bring this subject up in their works either for the fear of the Ku Klux Klan or for losing popularity with the majority formed by the whites. In the conservative twenties, when racial oppression, prejudice, and discrimination against Blacks were entrenched into the social fabric on one hand, and Harlem Renaissance Movement was gathering momentum on the other, O'Neill tried to instill vigor and credence into Black identity through the projections of some New York ghetto youths' dauntingly questioning White America's century-long belief in democratic gospel of liberty and equality. With his Black plays, the playwright seemed to resent the insinuation that White oppression against the Indians was merely replaced by the modern era's dehumanizing injustice upon the Black race. This was vividly seen in postbellum America's opening up a new chapter of black's social, political, and economic slavery in place of antebellum era's physical-psychological one. As a playwright, O'Neill showed adherence to the "oneness of mankind," staunchly asserted that "there is no superiority between races," and even went further to publicly state that he has "always been opposed to racial discrimination of any kind" (Gelbs 535, 552, 886). Understandably thus, O'Neill always formed, as seen in his plays, a softer stance for his "darker brother," depicted their wretched plights, positioned them qualitatively on equal footing as Whites, and showed their chances of survival shattered only due to White America's systematic way of inflicting scientific, institutional, cultural, and structural mores of racism.

O'Neill's critics, scholars, and biographers over the years have stressed the fact that the playwright's interest in and concern for Blacks and the African American history has evolved out of his and his family's own experience of deprivation and discrimination as descendents of Irish immigrants in the United States. Thus, Virginia Floyd rightly contends that "personal and social motives merge in [O'Neill's] creative efforts to show racial injustice" (*O'Neill at Work* 226). In fact, as history undrapes, having been denied political freedoms in their native countries, both the Africans and the Irish arrived in the US either as slaves to be sold or as laborers in flight from famine and penal laws. O'Neill's concern for the footed class was not confined to Blacks and the Irish only. According to Floyd, the playwright, besides planning to write cycles of plays depicting the Irish in America, Black slaves' miseries during antebellum period, and brutality against and eviction of the Indians, even endeavored to stage the pathetic survival story of French miners in "The Germinating." Floyd writes, "O'Neill abhorred the exploitation—economic, social, and political—of his fellow man. In 1934, he outlined "The Germinating," which intended to dramatize the tragic struggle of French miners to survive the brutality of their indifferent selfish bourgeois employers (xix). Therefore, it seems crystal clear that O'Neill's one of the major artistic objectives was fraught with dramatizing the "tragic struggle" of migrated, ethnic minority who did not have access to basic rights, and were frequently victimized by the White majority.

Importantly enough, in his both produced and unproduced Black plays, O'Neill delved deeply into the exploitations, discriminations, and oppressions of the African Americans. The playwright explored White America's culpability over the institution of slavery, fear of competition, three-century-long racial atrocities, etc. which culminated into forming a racist mind that became a part of American culture.

This, as per O'Neill's own interpretation, gave birth to an undeniable orgy that in modern era White cannot but perceive Black as the "other," "different," "primitive" or "heathen." But above all, the playwright saw, quite in agreement with Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx, that the residual greed in American soul which got ingrained through the enactment of the original sin of slave trade, thus giving preference to irascible over concupiscible in Plato's term, is the sole reason for America's plunge into blatant material acquisitiveness which eventually had shunned its path of liberty and equality for all human beings. O'Neill's plays dug deep to detect the root of American success saga called "capitalism" inspired by the induction of slavery in the seventeenth century US where profits earned in human trafficking, selling, speculating, and treating the Blacks as "property," etc. led to, in playwright's own words, "the sickness of today." As early as in nineteenth century, Tocqueville expressed awe at the extreme and unusual "love of money in America," and wrote in *Democracy in America* that Americans are "constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls" (537-38). Calling money "the common whore, the common pimp of people and nations," Marx, in his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," regarded money as the "alienated ability of mankind" that bred more inequity where capitalism is the economic system (133-35).

With the advent of Darwinism, i.e., scientific racism—four years before the Emancipation Proclamation and six years before outlawing slavery through Thirteenth Amendment—it was literary impossible for Blacks to survive, let alone having any hope to "possess all human capacities" or "glut their souls" like the privileged White. Thus, O'Neill's Black protagonists wonder about like slum dogs on the Lower Manhattan streets of New York, frustrated with life; yet, they do go down demanding

equity: Abe, who killed a white man over a brawl in self-defense, vows not to be taken alive by the law-enforcers when, although tailed by police, he comes to pay last visit to his dying grandmother; Jones, the Caribbean Emperor, threatens to remind Smithers by saying "Talk polite, white man .. I'm boss heah now," when White Smithers tries to remind Jones' lower position in the past; Jim goes hard, with Black Irishman-like utter dismay, at social system and at God telling that he flunked in Bar exam since a Black man's "passing" would have been tantamount to breaching "all human right and justice" in the US; Joe replies to white sledging by saying that anyone who calls him "nigger," used to "wakes up in de hospital." They all are hell-bent on making thumping presence in American society to reshape their identity, and establish their dignity through due recognition.

Drawing upon racism in a challenging post-World War I "era of phenomenal race consciousness and assertion" (Huggins 83)—exemplified by the Klan, the American Legion, Justice Benedict, and the New Negro, the organizations and individuals who were busy either to "eradicate" or to "celebrate" the racial difference (Kaplan 151-153)—O'Neill showed his Black protagonists' complex stands conforming, on the one hand, to the Hegelian or Du Boisian view of "deepest [desirable] desire" (Diggins 241 and 143), and on the other, to the White supremacist writer Lothrop Stoddard's and overtly racially committed Black intellectual Alain Locke's revelations of "undesirable desire" (Kaplan 158 and 165). In either way, O'Neill shows his Black portraits want to be heard and heeded, provided with opportunity and environment to flourish, and be given social recognition and justice, because herein lies the true spirit of democracy.

O'Neill's was the first voice heard in American theater for Black race's racial equity starting with *Thirst* (1913) and ending with *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), and

during this span of three decades, he not only brought the audience from commercial to artistic theater nearly single-handedly with his *avant-garde* approach but also emerged as a strong critic of American conscience, a fearless spokesman for the poor, the outcasts, the discriminated against, and the *scum* of the society.