

## Chapter Six

### (Post)Colonial Scars: The Unfinished Cycle

O'Neill's unpublished works about the plights of Blacks in America cover the entire history of the African Americans in the United States from the Colonial period to the Progressive era—from the purchase of Blacks in Africa in the seventeenth century, through their repressive years during antebellum, to their post-emancipation survival during Prohibition period of the twentieth century. This suggests a cycle of experience that O'Neill intended to produce covering a wide spectrum of Black's existence in America, the effort for such a drive is quite unparalleled in American dramatic literature. The fact that these ideas were never materialized to be stage-productions by the playwright is the only reason why it could not create a history. Yet the ideas for these plays are models potent enough to assert that O'Neill, besides planning to write a lengthy cycle of eleven plays depicting the effects of acquisitiveness on Harford family entitled "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed," had similarly in mind an ambitious project aimed at portraying Whites' greed in America who used Blacks as profitable products like ivory. The ideas for black plays open up an avenue where readers will not only appreciate O'Neill's intention of exposing black race's antebellum and postbellum struggles in the US, but also will be able to envisage that had these been completed and staged, it would have given an ignoble picture of American slavery and its effect on modern America. These ideas for black plays will also reveal how America doled out inhuman, unchristian, and undemocratic cruelty and tyranny to its Black population merely to materialize its

capitalistic goal. To mention, the only source for these unpublished works is *Eugene O'Neill at Work: Newly Released Ideas for Plays*.<sup>1</sup>

O'Neill's "Bantu Boy" (1927) represents the period when millions of Africans were forced from their homes and transported to America as slaves. The "Runaway Slave" (1935) speaks of their ordeal and inhuman condition in America under their masters, most of whom were not only very possessive, strict, and wicked but also were busy in speculations and fathering Black children for earning more money. "Honest Honey Boy" (1921) characterizes the time when slavery was abolished in America and slaves were apparently freed; but the play suggests that Blacks were not economically, politically, and socially emancipated. For instance, Joe Smith, the "Honest Honey Boy," can conduct his business only in the Black section of New York City. To open his gambling business, he has to go through one of his White friends, who then gives him a recommendation paper to present to the boss for permission to operate. What O'Neill is alluding to in this play, and truly as was the case, is that although the African American is no longer a slave, he is economically, politically, and socially in bondage. Sophus Winther's observation about the modern American Black's wretched parable is quite apposite: "The American Negro is technically free, but psychologically he is still in bondage ... O'Neill has selected the material out of which the modern black's tragedy is perpetuated beyond the termination of his physical slavery ... In order to escape the opprobrium of an economic slavery, [modern American civilization] has changed the terms but kept the facts as they were" (199 and 201). In fact, these three ideas for plays, besides showing White avarice, oppression, and prejudice towards Blacks, projects the honesty, perseverance, sacrifice, and humanity of the victims for whom O'Neill felt from his

heart since as a member of minority group he himself experienced certain racist treatment in the hands of Yankee New Londoners.

*The Unknown O'Neill: Ideas for Black Plays*

O'Neill scholars, critics, and biographers often remark that the playwright had designed an eleven-play-cycle called "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed" which would have "trace[d] the saga of the Harford-Melody family's pursuit of wealth and power from their arrival in the New World in 1755 to the year 1932" (Bower 12). As part of the cycle, only *A Touch of the Poet* and *More Stately Mansions* were completed by the playwright that covered only three decades (1828-1842) of the nineteenth century. But it is usually overlooked that the playwright had also planned, as seen in these ideas for three Black plays, a similar cycle of plays about the Blacks from their uprooted state in the seventeenth century to the Prohibition era of the twentieth century.

This unknown or barely noticeable fact is further propelled by the exclusive finding that in both "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed" cycle (Irish-Yankee/Harford-Melody) and Black cycle (White-Black), O'Neill shows how flesh-trading has evolved exactly as the principal business in America where greed and hypocrisy corrupt the wisdom of the mind. White masters in "Bantu Boy" and "Runaway Slave," and Con Melody in *A Touch of the Poet* verify precisely such claim. To O'Neill, the American success-saga of accumulating wealth has given birth to unbridled materialism, leading to the disintegration of American soul. In both cycles, the major focus was on how America had, over the centuries, materialized the idea *élan* of making money and possessing property and in this process, been

committing crimes against humanity. Long after O'Neill had given up any hope of finishing both cycles due to deteriorating health condition, he talked about this problem:

Some day, this country is going to get it—really get it. We had everything to start with—everything—but there's bound to be retribution. We've followed the same selfish, greedy path as every other country in the world. We talk about the American Dream, but what is that dream, in most cases, but the dream of material things? I sometimes think that the United States, for this reason is the greatest failure the world has ever seen. We've been able to get a very good price for our souls in this country—the greatest price perhaps that has ever been paid—but you'd think that after all these years, and all that man has been through, we'd have sense enough—all of us—to understand the whole secret of human happiness is summed up in that same sentence [from the Bible] which also appears in the teachings Buddha, Lao-tse, and even Mohammed. (qtd. in Bowen 313)

Indeed, “the secret of human happiness” by which O'Neill is referring to the Biblical connotation of “what shall profit a man,” reverberates in almost all his plays dealing with the proclivities of acquisitiveness and desire. In his ideas for Black plays, his protagonists continuously undergo trauma under White men's avariciousness, being slaves or property, and at the end, suffer as victims. The playwright, however, portrays them “against the conventional Sambo image of the black slave,” as he “wrote of the black man's dignity and intelligence, his strength and endurance, even his capacity for autonomy within the confines of slavery” (Diggins 139). In O'Neill's “Bantu Boy,” the title character is an African clan leader who was tricked into a slave

ship and brought to America as a “property.” When his White master “offers to free him” later, the Bantu chief disdains the plantation owner proclaiming: “Freedom is God’s, white man. You cannot set me free. I am free” (Floyd 176). In the “Runaway Slave,” Henry, son of a speculator, while one the run, is very keen on paying his master-father off to earn his freedom knowing very well that he may be betrayed at the same time. With Such portraits, O’Neill is not only excavating the guilt-ridden history of American slavery but also providing the readers with a critique on America’s perpetuation of the original sin.

*“Honest Honey Boy”: Homage to Black Memory*

In 1921 O’Neill conceived an idea for “Honest Honey Boy,” whose hero is Joe Smith, and the play is about “the tragi-comic of Negro gambler (Joe Smith)—his decline.” This black play has eight scenes: four are set in “New York of his heyday,” and four in the “present New York of Prohibition times, and showing the hero’s decline” (Floyd 38). Joe Smith, a Black gambler, has been previously mentioned a few times in this study as one of the O’Neill’s favorite hangouts and close friends. In a footnote, Floyd comments that the playwright made “several attempts to dramatize the life of this friend he met in 1915 when both frequented the Hell Hole.” Floyd writes, “An entry in the Work Diary, dated May 25, 1932 states: ‘notes and outline Old Joe Smith idea play.’ Joe Smith emerges finally in 1939 as the black gambler, Joe Mott, in *The Iceman Cometh*” (38). The few facts we have about Joe Smith and his lasting friendship with O’Neill are furnished to us mainly by Floyd, Gelbs, and Sheaffer in their respective works.

The title of the play, “Honest Honey Boy,” underscores to some extent the direction of the play would have taken had the dramatist completed it: a play that would have praised the heroism and humanity of his dear black friend Joe Smith. In fact, O’Neill and Joe Smith had years of unbroken rapport and understanding between them. “Throughout 1920s O’Neill retains a genuine affection for Joe Smith, providing financial help and corresponding with him even after the flight to France in 1928” (Floyd 176). Also, Arthur and Barbara Gelb attest that when the playwright went through bad patches after fallout with his father, “O’Neill had for some time been supplementing Joe Smith’s income—a small company that had once employed him as a night watchman”; and when in turn Joe Smith had hard times and the playwright was well established, O’Neill sometimes sent checks to Joe Smith to which the latter jovially referred to as “my royalties” (Gelbs 657).

In order to understand and appreciate the humanity and courage of O’Neill in mixing freely and closely with his Black friends, one needs only to put oneself in the early twentieth century, a period when racial line between Whites and Blacks was still sharply drawn. O’Neill dealt with racial intolerance by flagrantly crossing the racial proscriptions, such as eating and drinking with Blacks, even before he started attacking racism in his works. According to Floyd:

O’Neill’s numerous attempts in 1920s and 1930s to depict the plight of blacks in America reveal his deep concern and compassion for those victimized by society and their fellowmen. Personal and social motives merge in his creative efforts to show racial injustice. The rejection of his Irish family by Yankee New Londoners forever sears his memory. The close association with Joe Smith, the black gambler with whom he

roomed at the Hell Hole, reinforces his determination to combat racial discrimination. (176)

Thus it can be easily said that the playwright's defiant attitude and his disregard of these racial boundaries underscored his condemnation of bigotry and racial discrimination.

Joe Smith, according to Gelbs' testimony, married a White woman which, it can be presumed, was a possible indication that he was, to a degree, a man of consequence, a successful man. As Sheaffer noted, Joe Smith, "once the owner of a gambling house was an authority on the Negro community of Greenwich Village, an aspect of the New York scene that was dwindling as Black Harlem developed" (*Son and Playwright* 425). Joe's hospitable and generous disposition endeared him to many people, White and Black. As time rolled by, however, he ran into bad luck and never recovered from his financial disasters. As summarized by biographers,

Joe was married to a white woman, known as Miss Viola—a big blonde who blazed with supposedly "hot" diamonds; whenever she and Joe were hard up she would pawn her jewelry. Joe was a watchman for an auction company and, it was rumored, supplemented his income with a pair of loaded dice ... After his wife died, Joe moved into a second-floor flat on an old frame building on Cornelia Street. His friends knew he was at home if they saw a bottle of gin in the window—his signal of welcome. (Gelbs 347)

Joe furnished the playwright with invaluable raw materials for nearly all of his Black plays. According to O'Neill's wife Agnes Boulton, "[the playwright] got the idea for the one-acter [*The Dreamy Kid*] during a conversation with Joe Smith, his old friend at the Hell Hole" (Gelbs 135). As discussed in previous chapters, Joe also supplied

O'Neill with some ideas for *The Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. While living in the Hell Hole, Joe apprised the dramatist of the prosaic and pathetic plight of the blacks in America—racial intolerance and injustice, years of oppression and lack of opportunities: “O'Neill, who felt that he heard about ‘real’ life from Smith and Croak, the ‘old circus man,’ would use them both as models for characters in *The Iceman Cometh*” (Sheaffer 425). Indeed, some of the unjust situations faced by the Blacks in America, as explained by Joe to O'Neill and dramatized to some extent in *The Dreamy Kid* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* in the 1920s, echo in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) nearly two decades later. This justifies how O'Neill's projection of the African American ghetto youths was absolutely in tune with the milieu—thanks to playwright's vision and his true friendship with Joe Smith. In Wright's novel, the hero, Bigger Thomas is in fact a Dreamy Kid reincarnate who kills a white girl as a protest against his people's intolerable situation. Bigger Thomas knew what he wanted—to “belong,” but no one would listen: He wanted “to merge himself with others and be part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black” (226). But why, one may ask, did Bigger Thomas kill the White girl? He narrates, “Well, I acted toward her only as I knew how. She was rich. She and her kind own the earth. She and her kind say black folks are dogs. They don't let you do nothing but what they want” (324). Joe Smith and almost all the Black people in America felt the same way as Bigger Thomas. The mores of racism: scientific, institutional, structural, and cultural that Wright probes in his novel, had been dealt with by O'Neill years ago on stage.

O'Neill knew well that these injustices and bigotry were prevalent in the United States because he and his family, among other minorities, were victims of a



similar fate. As a young boy he discovered to his chagrin and exasperation that success and wealth in America were not sufficient for social acceptance and respectability. James O'Neill, for example, was quite famous, successful, and wealthy as an actor, but because he was Irish he was treated as an outsider and was snubbed by Yankee New Londoners. As cited earlier from the work of Frederic Carpenter, "James O'Neill ... had become universally loved and admired in the world of the theatre to which he 'belonged.' Nevertheless ... he and his wife had never been fully accepted by the class-conscious society of New London" (25-26). In the same vein, Joe Smith was a lovable man, popular in his own way, friendly and affable, and as O'Neill intimates in his ideas for plays, Joe has had his "heyday in New York" before his decline. Yet, loveable and successful as he may be, Joe Smith as a black man would never be assimilated into the mainstream of America's social life, and hence his fall was just a matter of time.

However, although the Irish immigrants were initially treated as social pariahs, or at best as second-class citizens, in course of time, they were assimilated into the American society; they became part of the structure. It was not so for the Black. John Henry Raleigh comments in his *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*:

If the Yankee-Irish class could finally end in the twentieth century in triumph and comedy, the other racial class that interested O'Neill, White vs. Colored, could not so end, for obvious reasons. O'Neill himself had had just enough insight into racial intolerance to have some sense of what the much more deeply best Negro was up against. In a rough and general way in his Negro plays the Negroes are to the Whites what the Irish were to the Yankees in the Irish plays. This analogy is suggested in various ways in different plays. (107)

Whether he was successful, honest, or intellectually unique, the Black was compelled to keep only to his kind.

In “Honest Honey Boy,” the playwright is merely calling the attention of his audience to the struggles, successes, and disappointments of his dear friend Joe Smith in a racially intolerant society. O’Neill here shows how Joe manages to keep his spirits high until the end. O’Neil, as it were, invites his audience to appreciate Joe for what he is worth—his humaneness, his assiduity and determination which led to his success, coupled with his friendly disposition. As noted earlier, “on several occasions, when O’Neill had drunk himself insensible, Joe took him home to his sister’s house and saw that he was nursed back to health; more than once Joe fed him during a lean period” (Gelbs 347). As one good turn deserves another, so when Joe Smith fell from grace, when he became financially strapped and disoriented, O’Neill stood by him, giving him moral and financial support. The dramatist kept corresponding with Joe even after he himself had left for France. One of O’Neill’s letters to him from overseas reveals a great deal about their deep friendship and compassion for each other. It also reveals Joe’s undaunted courage and determination in the face of difficulties; O’Neill wrote:

I was damn glad to hear from you again! But damned sorry to learn the breaks are not coming your way. I sure hope the luck will soon change for you and you’ll get on your feet again. You know you’ve always got my best wishes and that I am your friend and will always do anything I can to help you. I haven’t forgotten the old days and your loyal friendship for me. I’m enclosing a check to give you a boost over this rough spot you’ve run into ... Buck up, Joe! You’re not going to confess the game has licked you, are you? That isn’t like you! Get a

new grip on yourself and you can knock it dead yet! Write me a long letter soon and tell me all your news. (Floyd 176)

However, Floyd notes that while the author “makes notes and an outline for his ‘Old Joe Smith idea’ ... on May 20, 1932,” it was not until 1939 that Joe Smith would “emerge as Joe Mott, the black gambler in *The Iceman Cometh*” (176). O’Neill describes Joe Mott in *The Iceman Cometh* as “brown-skinned, stocky ... [who] still manages to preserve an atmosphere of nattiness and there is nothing dirty about his appearance” (1.566). Gelbs describe Joe in real life as a “light-skinned Negro with Caucasian features, broad shoulders and a slim waist” (347). In fact, in almost all his black plays, the central characters are found repulsive to polite society. They are either murderers or victimizers like the Mulatto Sailor in *Thirst*, Abe Saunders in *The Dreamy Kid*, Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones*; or are disgustingly obsequious, suffering from an inferiority complex, internalized racism, and struggling to become white like Jones in *The Emperor Jones*, and Jim Harris in *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*. But the African American in *The Iceman Cometh* is different from this lot where he seems to be sure of himself and claims equality with the white comrades. He is conscious of his dignity and proud of his race, and he never hesitates to lash back when he is insulted: “But I don’t stand for ‘nigger’ from nobody. Never did. In de old days, people calls me ‘nigger’ wakes up in de hospital. I was de leader ob de Dirty Half-Dozen Gang. All six of us colored boys, we was tough and I was de toughest” (1.589). Throughout the action of the play, Joe never accepts a subservient or inferior role among the inmates of Harry Hope’s bar. He jokes, drinks, and quarrels just like any other inmate. When Joe Mott is compared with the other black protagonists of these four plays, he alone wins audience’s respect and admiration. He cautions his white comrades: “Listen to me, you white boys! Don’t you get it in your heads I’s

pretendin' to be what I ain't, or dat I ain't proud to be what I is, get me? Or you and me's goin' to have trouble! (*He picks up his drink and walks left as far away from them as he can get and slumps down on the piano stool*)" (2.625 ).

"Honest Honey Boy" is conceived in eight scenes where four of these scenes trace the glory days of Joe Smith when he is in his heydays, i.e., "passes for white," much like his prototype Joe Mott who used to "pass" as a "white": "Yes, suh, white folks always said I was white. In de days when I was flush, Joe Mott's de only colored man dey allows in de white gamblin' houses. 'You're all right, Joe, you're white,' dey says" (1.590). Joe Smith is also unique in society because he is married to a White woman, socially a daring venture for both. The last four scenes of "Honest Honey Boy" trace the decline of Joe Smith. What we know about such plunge or turn of fortune comes to us through Sheaffer according to whom Joe, "A quiet good-natured Negro gambler ... was once the owner of a gambling house, until the dice and cards ran against him" (425). The last four scenes of the play which show the "decline" of Joe are set in the "present New York of prohibition times" (Floyd 38), suggest that since during those years (1920-33) it was prohibited by law to make and sell alcoholic drinks nationwide, Joe's business collapsed, and hence, life took a downward slide. Later his wife died, and in fact, he never recovered from this until he passed away. The conceived play is a tragi-comedy delineating the rise and fall of Joe Smith and his close association with the playwright. O'Neill admired Joe for his daring efforts, and for him Joe is a hero because, despite the oppression on his people and many restrictions imposed on them, and despite the injustices and discriminations, he managed through sheer adroitness, friendliness, patience, and determination to rise to wealth and prominence. When he hit misfortune, he braved it as a man.

Joe's struggle, his rise and fall, is what can be perceived as a trait of a true modern tragic hero: one who never gives up the struggle even though he knows he will be defeated in the end. As early as in 1917, as found in Raymond Williams' seminal work *Modern Tragedy*, O'Neill wrote of such traits:

The tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant thing about him. What I am after is to get an audience leaving the theatre with exultant feeling from seeing somebody on the stage—life, fighting against the eternal odds, not conquering, but perhaps inevitably being conquered. The individual life is made significant just by the struggle. The struggle of man to dominate life, to assert and insist that life has no meaning outside himself where he comes in contact with life, which he does at every turn; and his attempt to adapt life to his own needs, in which he does not succeed, is what I mean when I say that man is the hero. (qtd. in Williams 116)

As late as in 1949, Arthur Miller literally reiterates this view when he says, “the commonest of men may take that [tragic] stature to the extent of his willingness to throw all he has into the contest, the battle to secure his rightful place in his world” (qtd. in Kennedy “Tragedy and the Common Man” 1728). Joe Smith struggled and battled against the limitations inflicted on his race. He fought the battle with courage and dignity until the end. In the play, the dramatist traces Joe's rise and fall. He sees Joe as a daring, honest, jovial, and hardworking black man who is able to rise above the limitations of a White society. Although racially discriminated against and proscribed to use the many opportunities open to his white counterparts, Joe manages, through hard work, perseverance, and endurance, to climb a bit on the ladder of

success. Although his business collapses and he dies a poor man, he is seen as heroic, given the oppressive, tight, and restricted conditions under which he has operated.

However, in “Honest Honey Boy,” a conceived yet not a completed play, the playwright not only pays tribute to his honest and trusted friend Joe but also looks back with nostalgia to those days at the Hell Hole when Joe, according to O’Neill, maintained his “loyal friendship” with him.

In fact, O’Neill, as testified by some of his biographers, and especially his third wife Carlotta, had very few close friends. He was by nature a recluse, taciturn, and to some extent, shy person, and because he was acutely discerning and discreet, he had very few close friends. But that one of these few friends was a black corroborates O’Neill’s belief in racial equity and brotherhood, and his respect for the dignity of every human being. Also, O’Neill was very sensitive to the feeling of others, especially those whom the society despised, or those who were down on their luck. For instance, once Carlotta bought him a “minklined, black overcoat” and O’Neill was so excited over this jacket that he “displayed this item of sartorial splendor to a number of friends.” But when one day he went to visit Joe Smith (this was the time Joe was down on his luck), he removed the coat and hung it on a hook near the basement door, lest perhaps his friend should feel out of kilter with the company. Winston, another friend of the playwright, recalled that moment:

Gene didn’t have the nerve to appear before Joe in that coat. He was truly too embarrassed to display it. He stopped in the dark passageway leading to Joe’s apartment, which was in an old house in Greenwich Village, and found a hook near the basement door. He hung his coat there before knocking on Joe’s door and retrieved it after the visit.

(Gelbs 657)

This incident, obviously, was illuminating of O'Neill's concern for the feelings for others. Nonetheless, by maintaining to the end his friendship with Joe Smith, at a time when the United States restricted racial intermixture or close relationship between Whites and Blacks, O'Neill was giving a clarion call to his White Mother America to rise above bigotry and racial intolerance in order to truly ensure that America was a land of freedom and liberty, a land where each citizen was given the opportunity to pursue his dreams and realize his potentials.

*“Bantu Boy”: The Projection of “Original Sin”*

In his review of Toni Morrison's new novel *A Mercy* (2008) in *The New York Times* on 28 November 2008, David Gates rightly contends, reiterating numerous critics' and scholars' views over the years, that in the New World or American Eden, “two original sins” had been committed: “the near extermination of the native population and the importation of slaves from Africa” (Gates). Indeed, both “sins” involved force and fury from White Americans who were chiefly driven by greed, possessive mentalities, and mercantile gains. Virginia Floyd's *Eugene O'Neill at Work: Newly Released Ideas for Plays* shows that O'Neill had scripted to write on this issue of the “original sins” well before any author in American literature ventured to do so. He not only tried to stage “Bantu Boy” to exhume the reprehensible act of the seventeenth century human flesh trading, but also projected a couple of plays on oppression against the Indians. Floyd finds two references indicating O'Neill's plan to dramatize the repression on American Indians: the 1929 idea, “‘The House—‘a play of ghosts from Indians down’—and the 1934 ‘Life of Sturgo Nacimbin’—a historical

drama set in the early nineteenth century in lower California, when ‘Indians by tens of thousands were perishing from hunger’” (xiii).

However, although O’Neill could never complete the black play “Bantu Boy,” what he drafted should serve to convince the reader that in no other black play did he set out so openly to denounce the early slave-trading and those who trafficked in it. Using as his protagonist the chief of the Bantu, a set of tribes located in Central and Southern Africa, the dramatist traces his tragedy: his capture by White slave traders, his forceful separation from his wife and children, his transportation to America, his heroic feats as a slave, and how he rejects Christianity because it is a White man’s religion. The play, which is set in the 1800s—“depicting a period in American history from 1840s to the post civil war years” (Floyd 176), concludes with the chief’s escape back to Africa and his death while fighting to free Africa from White occupation.

Composed in 1927, “Bantu Boy” has ten scenes depicting the struggle of this Chief and how he refuses to make America his home or be converted to Christianity because of his strong loyalty to the African pagan gods and the land of his birth. The play begins in the Chief’s palace at Bantu. Here the white trader, whom he has trusted, tricks him by pandering to his royalty and honor, and it is during this process that he drugs the Chief, then seizes him and his wife, and forces them into a slave-ship bound for America. By describing the forceful separation of husband and wife, and their children, the likes of which were seen on stage during antebellum period in such abolitionist plays as *The Gladiator* (1831), *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), and *The Octoroon* (1859), O’Neill seems to ask his audience to contemplate on this as a crime against nature, and the Black race, perpetrated by slave traders whose monomania was sheer material acquisition. Katherine mentions in her *The Industrial History of the United States*: “A Slave purchased for one hundred gallons of rum worth ten pounds



brought twenty pounds to fifty pounds when offered for sale in America” (78).

O’Neill condemns such acts of human beings’ purchases and sales, and through his plays confronts the deplorable mercantile mentality of White American traders.

“Bantu Boy” is the chief of his tribes, and thus wields a big influence in his pagan community. He is revered as a god there, and hence to capture or manhandle him is considered a sacrilegious or unforgivable crime. In fact, through such act, the whole structure of his clan of which he is the ruler is going to be totally dislodged and destroyed. When the chief is made a slave, all his subjects are powerless to resist. The playwright alludes to the fact that these slave traders refused to heed to the voice of conscience let alone respect other people’s religious belief because the profit to be gained here was enormous. According to David Walker, a leading Black intellectual in Boston in the 1830s, “The fact is, the labor of slaves comes so cheap to the avaricious usurpers, and is ... of such high utility to the country where it exists, that those who are actuated by sordid avarice only, overlook the evils, which will ... follow after the good” (13). Virginia Floyd, while pointing out predicaments of Blacks in America that frequently found its place in O’Neill’s works, and particularly in “Bantu Boy,” delineates: “O’Neill made many attempts in the 1920s and 1930s to depict the plight of Blacks in America—‘dramatized examples of white oppression’ ... the sale of human beings as slaves, the forced voyage in slave ships of innocent people uprooted from their African homes. O’Neill elaborates on all of these details in a projected work in 1927, ‘Bantu Boy,’ the full-length study of the life of one such victim” (*The Plays* 208). In fact, O’Neill was abhorrent towards the human-trafficking, was very concerned about the evil consequences of slavery, and he made several attempts to depict the impediments of Blacks who had been forcefully moved out from their land.

What is remarkable and heroic about the Bantu Chief is his apparently serene and dignified demeanor while being ill-treated by the white captors: the chief is “proud, sure of his integrity, [and] he baffles his different owners who chain and beat him” (Floyd *O’Neill at Work* 178). The Chief knows he has done nothing contrary to any law; he is just enjoying peace and respect in his kingdom when the white trader he has trusted tricks him and ships him and his subjects to slavery. This is why he behaves disdainfully toward the captors. As Floyd Comments, “In the ‘Bantu Boy’ a noble African chief who is drugged and transported to the United States as a slave proves to be more superior to his White Captors” (*The Plays* 181). During the slave auction, when he notices his wife crying as the white buyers begin to separate his children and wife, he warns her never to show any grief before the White man. This reminds the audience of Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The Gladiator* (1831), a slave-revolt play, where its protagonist, the captured leader of the revolution, Spartacus, admonishes the traders as they put him, his kid, and his wife on auction by saying, “Villains, do you put them up for sale, like beasts? Look at them: they are human.” Finding his wife crying, he, like Bantu chief, asks her to dry her eyes (1.182-83). Yet unlike the title characters or slave-protagonists of leading abolitionist plays, Tom in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and Zoe in *The Octoroon* (1859), Bantu Boy here purposefully exhibits his disdainful and defiant attitude in order to annoy and mortify his White captors. In devising this plot, O’Neill wants to underscore his belief, in Floyd’s words, that “the representatives of a particular ethnic group, usually deprived, exploited social class, are superior physically, morally, or both, to the possessors of wealth, position, and power” (*The Plays* 34).

First three scenes of “Bantu Boy” are located in Africa, especially in the Chief’s palace in Bantu. Scene four describes the Chief’s resistance to his degrading

situation, and his curses and anger directed against the auctioneers, how he is finally bought by “Carter White” who, nonetheless, treats him with respect and consideration. The “Bantu Boy” strives to keep his spirits high and to eschew any trace of obsequiousness and irresponsibility. Although a captive and a slave, he still manages to retain those royal qualities which separate him from the common breed of men, qualities which can easily persuade anyone to notice him as a man of consequence, a man who has seen better days.

However, Winthrop Jordan, in his *White over Back: American Attitudes toward the Negro*, views that:

Within every White American who stood confronted by the Negro, there had arisen a perpetual dual between his higher and lower natures. His cultural conscience—his Christianity, his humanitarianism, his ideology of liberty and equality—demanded that he regard and treat the Negro as his brother and his countryman, as his equal. At the same moment, however, many of his most profound urges, especially his yearning to maintain the identity of his folk, his passion for domination, his sheer avarice, and his sexual desire, impelled him toward conceiving and treating the Negro as inferior to himself, as an American leper. (581)

Propelled by the “higher” nature, the like of which Jordan speaks of, and thus impressed by the Chief’s demeanor, assiduity, and productiveness, his slave master now “offers to free him.” Here lies one of the highlights of this only partially conceived play; in response to his master Carter White and the latter’s intended gesture of good will, the Chief says to him, “Freedom is God’s, white man. You cannot set me free. I am free” (Floyd *O’Neill at Work* 178). This statement reveals the

playwright's personal feelings—that by right everyone is free, but because of greed, pride, presumptuousness, and senseless wielding of power, certain groups or individuals enslave others and suppress their God-given rights and freedom. In one of his interviews, O'Neill excoriates his country for following such appalling pursuits:

If we taught history and told the truth, we'd tell children that the United States has followed the same greedy rut as every other country. We would tell who's guilty. The list of the guilty ones responsible would include some of our great national heroes ... The big business leaders in this country! Why do we produce such stupendous, colossal egomaniacs? They go on doing the most monstrous things, always using the excuse that if we don't the other person will. It's impossible to satirize them, if you wanted to. (qtd. in Bowen 314 and 316)

Following this thought-pattern, O'Neill devised a play known as "The Last Conquest" in 1940 about which Floyd explains:

It is a "spiritual propaganda play" showing a futuristic world ruled by the forces of evil, personified by a Hitler-like "Divine Tyrant Redeemer," symbol of the "modern world spirit." The "propaganda" is obviously designed for America; for in O'Neill's totalitarian "brave new world" godlessness, indifference, and avarice cause the "death of democracy—men grew tired of the responsibility of living free with no higher law than the criminal code to define the use of freedom."

*(O'Neill at Work xx)*

Since freedom is considered the bottom line of American democracy, by consciously enslaving some men and women and treating them as inferior beings, America has shied away from its entrenched, traditional belief and code, that all men are created

free and equal, and that liberty is one of the cherished gifts of everybody, one of man's "unalienable rights": "The Quakers ... insisted that slavery violated both human dignity and divine law. Not until the Revolution, however, did many Americans become sensitive to the discrepancy between slavery and their professed ideals as embodied in the Declaration of Independence" (Franklin and Starr 49). In writing about the injustice against the Africans, or to be more specific, against "Bantu Boy" and his fellow blacks, O'Neill was also thinking about the injustices committed against the Irish in their native country by the British, and here in the United States as immigrants by White Anglo-Saxon-Protestants. Because he was interested and proud of his Irish roots, the dramatist read history books about Ireland, and found how the Irish were treated as aliens and virtual slaves (especially between 1855-1881) even in their own country by the English. Speaking as Coalition Prime Minister of England, David Lloyd George once declared:

Centuries of brutal and often ruthless injustice, and, what is worse, centuries of insolence and insult, have driven hatred of British rule into the very marrow of the Irish race. The long records of oppression, proscription and expatriation, have formed the greatest blot on the British fame of equity and eminence in the realm of government. There remains the invincible fact that today she (Ireland) is no more reconciled to British rule than she was in the days of Cromwell.

(Hogan 191)

Thus, the way O'Neill's forebears suffered terribly both in Ireland and in the New World, Blacks, the playwright might have felt, suffered as slaves in US. O'Neill was aware of their unremitting agony, their alienation, discrimination, and injustice; hence he made efforts to reveal their plight on the stage.

However, in the sixth scene, the Bantu Chief, now reunited with his wife and happy for this reunion which helps him to cope a bit better with his lot as a slave, finds out to his utter disappointment that his wife is now a Christian. When the “Christian Preacher” makes an attempt, through the Chief’s wife, to convert him, he bluntly refuses. The reason given for his denial reflects the views of many Blacks, that the Christians have made Christ a White man and have made his religion reflect the views and prejudices of the White man; they have not put into practice any evidence that they are Christians, and as an African, he has strong loyalty to the Black pagan gods of Africa. According to the play, “They try to convert him to Christianity, but he cannot accept an all-white Christ the Christians have made him—let them give some evidence that his teachings live in White man’s hearts” (Floyd 175). In real life, the playwright also abhorred the hypocrisy of many followers of Christ who profess to know Him and to preach the Gospel of love and brotherhood, but whose actions hardly justify or conform to their teachings. O’Neill very much espoused the views of Carl Jung though expressed in somewhat exaggerated terms about modern man’s spiritual dilemma:

Christian civilization has proved hollow to a terrifying degree: it is all veneer, but, the inner man has remained untouched and therefore unchanged. His soul is out of key with his external beliefs; in his soul the Christian has not kept pace with external developments. Yes, everything is to be found outside—in image and in wood, in church and Bible—but never inside. (Jung 8)

It seems apparent that for the above reasons the Chief refuses to be converted. Following Jung, O’Neill, himself a Black Irishman, shares the views of the Chief about the hypocrisy of many Christians. O’Neill knew from history that a good

number of those Christians trafficked in human trade, and in so doing, inflicted some of the most intense, most shocking brutalities on human beings that man could ever conceive. It was some of this pharisaical practice among Christians that prejudiced O'Neill's minds against the Church and its adherents. According to Winther, "O'Neill has no quarrel with Jesus as a social teacher . . . what [he] does quarrel with is the idea of a professed religion that on Sunday preaches [love; and] on Monday is translated [by the flock] into the doctrine of rugged individualism" (56-57).

Interestingly enough, the Bantu Chief accepts Christianity only during the Civil War because "he believes in the North's ideal freedom for slaves" (Floyd 175). It is when he has seen the people of the Northern part of the United States not only condemning slavery but also fighting a war with the South in an effort to emancipate slaves, that he escapes and joins the Northern army in order to fight for freedom. It is during this time that he converts to Christianity because he now sees the White man's effort to give up evil of slavery as a reflection of practical Christianity. Unfortunately, the White man who has made use of him during the Civil War now shuns him again at the end of the War. In New York, when he enters into a house of worship on Sunday with his fellow Christians, O'Neill has him told to leave the church. Since he is rejected and cannot worship with those Whites who have converted him to their religion, he then rejects such a religion which discriminates. He now clings more strongly to his Black Gods of Africa.

In the United States the Bantu Chief sees himself as a social pariah, an unappreciated and inferior creature, he who once was almost worshipped by his subjects in Africa. Understandably thus, he secretly makes his way back to Africa where he "belongs." His attempt to go back to his roots parallels that of Brutus Jones, who was forced by circumstances, though of a different kind, to retrace his route to

Africa: Bantu Boy, “the central figure, like Jones, would endure harrowing treatment in America and finally make his way back to his roots, in Africa, at the end” (Floyd *The Plays* 208). The Chief’s obsession with his home where he “belongs,” his pertinacious eagerness to be free, and to live his life as he wants, underscores O’Neill’s unremitting gospel against oppression, discrimination, and injustice. Thus Sinha comments, “In O’Neill, a common man suffers ... because of his failure to realize his ideal, to fulfill his dream, to live a life as he wants to live or because he is just an outsider, an unbelonging unit in this world of miseries” (i).

“Bantu Boy” serves as a perfect paradigm of the denunciation of alleged American greed—America’s “original sin”—the flesh-trading of human beings. The playwright, who based much of his writings on the past events that took place in America, seems to ask the simple question: why did America involve herself in this nefarious slave trade, and then find it hard to give it up? The overriding motive, as O’Neill saw it, was financial profit. As history affirms:

The average cost of a healthy male was \$60 in merchandise; a woman could be bought for \$15 less. Before completing the transaction, the buyer invariably took the precaution of having the slaves examined by his physician ... The profits were great. After taking out all expenses, including insurance payment and sales commissions, a slaving voyage was expected to make a profit of thirty cents on the dollar. Such a lucrative trade was an outgrowth of the insatiable demand for “black ivory” in the New World. (Quarles 22-23)

Thus, using “Bantu Boy” as a springboard, O’Neill excoriated and condemned his country for selling its soul in a hurried effort for material acquisition. Virginia Floyd views:



As O'Neill perceives and records the phenomenon, the drive to attain wealth and to maintain the aura of respectability and morality distorts and dichotomizes the American nation and character. On the national level, the capitalist system ... created two diametrically opposite classes: the wealthy, rapacious exploiters, and the poor, downtrodden exploited ... Throughout the 1920s and 1930s O'Neill was constantly rewriting the 'Modern Faust Play,' an idea for a drama he had in 1927, depicting the American character as having sold its soul for material prosperity. (*The Plays* xviii)

In an interview he granted at Guild Offices in November 1946, the last time he ever talked to a group of reporters, the dramatist voiced out all his strong feelings against the United States—her exploitation of Indians, Blacks, immigrants and other disadvantaged races. According to him:

America is due for retribution. There ought to be a page in the history books of the United States of all the unprovoked, criminal, unjust crimes, committed and sanctioned by our government since the beginning of our history ... There is hardly one thing our government has done that isn't some treachery—against the Indians, against the people of the Northwest, against the small farmers. (qtd. in Bowen 315)

Thus, through the play "Bantu Boy," which delineates African Americans' whole experience in modern times *vis-à-vis* White America's enactment of the original sin, O'Neill calls attention once again, as he does in all his Black plays, to the indelible crime and injustice committed against the Black race, a crime that was actuated by greed and material acquisition. By pursuing this prosaic goal, the dramatist seems to

contend that the United States has cast a disreputable veil over her innocence and democratic codes—the belief in the dignity, freedom, and liberty of the human beings. Furthermore, she had compromised her spirituality for a mere pot of porridge—material profit and possession: “I feel, in that sense,” says the playwright, “that ... we’ve squandered our soul by trying to possess something outside it, and we’ll end as that game usually does, by losing our soul and the thing outside it, too” (qtd. in Bowen 313). In “Bantu Boy,” O’Neill categorically denounces his country’s insatiable material proclivities and grabbing tendencies at the cost of innocent lives.

*“Runaway Slave”: Getting Further to the Bottom*

In his last projected play about the Black in “Ideas for Plays,” O’Neill acknowledges the source as Thoreau’s Journal (“The Heart of Thoreau’s Journal,” 91). The story is about the plight of a runaway slave who wants to have his freedom at any cost, but to realize his dream he must pay his slave master, interestingly enough, his father, the sum of \$600. As the play opens, he is shown to have succeeded in raising \$500, hence is short of \$100. Meanwhile his name has appeared in the newspaper as a fugitive, and a wanted slave. He flees from Boston to Concord, and is still determined to complete the sum of \$600 in order to effect his release and freedom. With this amount completed afterwards, an effort is made to buy a ticket to dispatch this slave to Burlington where he will buy his freedom from his master. The story ends with the Boston police still determined to apprehend him before he pays a ransom for his freedom.

The play is another chapter corroborating O’Neill’s concern for his Black brothers. In the “Bantu Boy,” the playwright demonstrates his strong aversion to

slavery and its suppression of one's freedom and liberty. Here in the "Runaway Slave," O'Neill shows how, having uprooted one generation of blacks from Africa against their will, and having treated them as a piece of property, the slaves are still milked to make more money through propagation and speculation where buying freedom seems to be a utopian dream turned into nightmare for them.

Thus, further to aver and stress the injustice against the blacks, O'Neill devised the plot to show the "Runaway Slave," Henry Williams, as the progeny of the slave master. Indeed, the device was to underscore a common practice that was rampant during slavery when many slave masters raised children with their slave women. As Gary Nash, in his *Red, White, and Black: The People of Early America*, views, "Black women were not needed by White males in a demographic sense. But sexual relations with them went on ... White power was also served by sexually exploiting black women outside of marriage—a way of acting out the concept of white domination" (287-288). In fact, Nash's claim of White race's "acting out the concept of white domination" through sexual intercourse with the dominated class is what the American history mirrors with its first voyagers' inauguration in Virginia. James Nelson Barker's *The Indian Princess* (1808) is the first stage production of Pocahontas legend based on Captain John Smith's *General Historie of Virginia* (1624) where White Rolfe's overtly-sexual encounters with Princess Pocahontas is seen not as white-red assimilation but, complying with Smith's vision, a thrust down of "imperial justification" through white domination over the "savage" Indians (Richards 110). Thus, "the only good Indian, the play announces, is a whitened, acculturated one."

IA Richard further notes in his *Early America Drama*: "The savage must die or retreat before European might or else face the erotic conversion of Native woman

into love objects and symbols of European possession of the land” (111). It makes clear that deception has been at the core of White travelers’ hearts landing at the Shore of Pawhatan River who eventually founded Jamestown as seen in Barker’s play. When Captain Smith is encountered by the Indian Price who is overwhelmed by Smith’s complexion and declares him God-like, Smith tells of his intention to tread on the land of the Native Indians: “I left my country to be red man’s friend” and adds that the “king” has sent him to “make the red men wise and happy” (1.125-26). But later history shows how he and his compatriots killed, raped, burnt, and drove the Indians away that virtually led to the near wiping out of the red men’s existence in America.

In the “Runaway Slave,” O’Neill digs out another chapter of White race’s hypocrisy: although the White traders regarded the black as inferior and filthy, they nonetheless slept with her in the same bed and raised children with her. Here “white domination” is indeed being acted out where Henry Williams, the “tragic mulatto,” is found to be one of such products of these illicit unions. As a result of being an offspring of such union between a White man and a Black woman, Henry Williams is despised by both: he is a victim of double-misfortunes—the misfortune of being a slave, and also a mulatto. On top of this, the society knows, by the color he carries, that he is a product of such copulation outside wedlock, a slave-child, and hence he is doomed to carry out the wishes of the White father. Gary Nash views, “In a variety of public statements and in laws, the offspring of white-black copulation were being described as “spurious” or “mongrel” ... Desire could not be legislated out of the White psyche and if the laws and public pronouncements did not correspond with private urges, there was little harm done so long as the domination of Whites was preserved by disowning children of mixed racial inheritance” (285). Thus, like a

modern-day Yank of *The Hairy Ape*, Henry is “the eternal outsider and alien” who “stand[s] on the sidewalks of the world, desolate, abandoned, even hated and despised for being something [he] did not ask to be” (Winther 192). In fact, Edmund’s words in *Long Day’s Journey into Night* may also be applied to him: “As it is, I will always be a stranger who never feels at home, who does not really want and is not really wanted, who can never belong, who must always be a little in love with death” (4.812).

However, Henry’s plight is much similar to the mulatto George’s in Aiken’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, an adaptation of Stowe’s novel; both O’Neill’s and Aiken’s plays share the same setting of late antebellum. As Henry apprises that his father, the White trader, treats him more harshly than he treats other slaves because his presence and pigmentation intensifies his White father’s guilt and shame, so George in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* complains, while having conversation with his wife Eliza at play’s beginning that his master “puts [him] to just the hardest, meanest and dirtiest work, on purpose” to the extent that his “flesh and blood can’t bear it any longer” (1.376). This unbearable and inhuman work pressure, continuous insults, hurled abuses, and the overall grinding of slavery were what preliminarily prompted both the antebellum mulatto slaves to become runaway slaves, to take resort to the last-ditch-effort to flee to survive or die instead.

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, propagating children through slave women, and later speculating them were considered common businesses for White traders up to the Civil War era. Hence, we find in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, two Black kids, Harry and Topsy, as invaluable “articles” to their White keepers. Haley cannot take his eyes off lucrative son of Eliza and George, and thus offers Shelby to “fling in” Harry to “settle the business,” as according to him, the kid would “come down pretty handsomely” if “raise[d] for the market” (1.379). Similarly, we find the Yankee

speculator, Cute, frequenting Ophelia's place to hunt down and strike a deal over the "darkey," Topsy. He regards little girl Topsy as "the juvenile specimen of Day & Martin"—a blackface minstrel act of the period, and lures little Topsy towards sharing "half the receipts" of earning with her from minstrel shows; he declares his business dream: "Barnum made his money by exhibiting a *woolly* horse; now wouldn't it be an all-fired speculation to show you as the woolly gal" (5.424-426)? Understandably thus, Henry Williams has to pay a descent price for his freedom since he is an "article," a profitable commodity "raised" so far to be cashed in. As the playwright comments on this intended play, Henry Williams "had been corresponding through an agent with his master, who is his father, about buying himself, his master asking \$600, but he having been able to raise only \$500" (*O'Neill at Work* 250).

Nevertheless, in delineating the plight of this "Runaway Slave," O'Neill once again emphasizes the unremitting struggles of his characters' searching for freedom, and trying to realize their dreams. Their heroism lies in their struggle against the unseen forces, the wickedness, and the chicanery of the human powers which hold them captive. The central character of this projected play arouses our curiosity and sympathy because of his undaunted effort to raise the \$600 to effect his release. His situation is quite crucial: to raise the whole sum, he has to go to public to his friends who in turn appeal to their friends for help. But at the same time, ironically, he is a hunted fugitive. Already his name has flashed in the newspapers, "and was informed by his fellow-servants and employer that Auger-hole Burns and others of the police called for him when he was out" (Floyd 250). One need really to understand the strict law against runaway slaves to appreciate the big risk Henry Williams is taking; as Benjamin Brawley, in his *A Social History of the American Negro: Being a History of the Negro Problem in the United States*, informs:

A master had the right to recover a fugitive slave by proving his ownership before a magistrate without a jury or any other of the ordinary forms of law. A human being was thus placed at the disposal of the lowest of courts and subjected to procedure as was not allowed even in petty property suits. A great field for the bribery of magistrates was opened up, and opportunity was given for commuting to slavery Negro men about whose freedom there should have been no question. (79-80)

When Henry learns from his friends that the Boston police are tailing him, he takes refuge in Concord on foot, and still shows strong resolve to complete the stipulated sum for his freedom. In the last paragraph of this unfinished script, O'Neill leaves us with ambivalent feelings, of admiration and revulsion, just as he did in the conclusion of *The Dreamy Kid*. On one hand, we admire and applaud the battle waged by this mulatto slave to procure his freedom—already the \$600 has been accomplished; yet, on the other hand, the obstacle lies in his buying a transport ticket for reaching his destination. This is where our displeasure comes in: we are averse to the attitude of these Boston policemen, the epitome of institutional racism in America, whose overriding concern is to capture the fugitive slave and put him back in perpetual bondage. In fact, Robert Blauner views that historically the “police department” was consisted of the “the highest of individual racists” whose prime objective was to “enforce the culturally repressive aspects of middle-class American values against the distinctive ethnic orientations of Afro-American and other minority subcultures” (98). Therefore, their company implies a bad omen for Henry at play's end. Hence, by portraying the presence of the police, as he did in *The Dreamy Kid*, the playwright underscores the general belief, especially among Blacks and other minorities, that the

police force not only helps to foster racial bias against blacks but also plays proactive role to limit their movement across racial lines.

*Saying What Happened: Intended Slave-Narratives*

In his ideas for these two Black plays, the “Bantu Boy,” and “Runaway Slave,” O’Neill excavates the harrowing tales of slavery era’s physically and mentally traumatized black slaves. Here the playwright emphasizes, before any black or white writers of any genres of American literature, the importance of slave narratives that in the later part of twentieth century would gain serious importance among intellectuals and writers—Paul Gilroy in England and Toni Morrison in US—regarding the “complicated relationship between home, origins and identity in the [Black] texts” (Kenneh 66-67). Toni Morrison regards slave narratives as essential “emotional memory” and key texts for tracing out the Black self-identity. She writes, “A very large part of my own literary heritage is the autobiography. In this country the print origins of Black literature (as distinguished from the oral origins) were slave narratives. These book-length narratives (autobiographies, recollections, memoirs), of which well over a hundred were published, are familiar texts to historians and students of Black history” (Morrison “The Site of Memory” 299). Importantly enough, the slave narrative which forms the plotline of Morrison’s *Beloved*, her 1987 novel that *The New York Times* on 21 May 2006 acclaimed as the best work of American fiction of past twenty-five years, is the same one that O’Neill used in his ideas for “Bantu Boy” in 1927—the 1856 murder by Margaret Garner of her children to prevent them from burdening the curse of slavery. Therefore, the playwright understood the importance of slave-narratives in shaping up Black’s future in the US,



and also questioned the White consciousness for the disorientation of the Black through two-century long oppression. O'Neill's aversion to the inhuman life of the slave is dramatized in the second part of the "Bantu Boy" where the Bantu chief forces his wife "to let two of his children be killed by poison his mother prepares soon after birth so they will not be born slaves" (Floyd 178-79). By devising this plot, therefore, the playwright is insinuating sixty years before Tony Morrison's *Beloved* that it is better to die at birth or not be born at all than to be born a slave.

Thus, well before Toni Morrison, O'Neill underscored the importance of slave-narratives in conjuring up a true picture of Blacks' survival saga during slavery era. What Toni Morrison probes with *A Mercy* through Jacob Vaark, her 2008 novel and a prequel to *Beloved*, that even the better White souls could not stay out of, and were rather lured into, human flesh trading due to the greedy and mercantile social structure, O'Neill had already explored the subject through his both finished and unfinished works. The masters of Bantu chief and Henry Williams further serve for O'Neill's mouthpieces to delineate Blacks' parables of bitter experiences in America. In fact, in his "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," Rev. Henry Garnet, US Minister Resident and Consul-General to Liberia in 1881, reminded all, and particularly entire White World, of what the Black had gone through:

Two hundred and twenty-seven years ago, the first of our injured race were brought to the shores of America. They came not with their own consent, to find an unmolested enjoyment of the blessings of this fruitful soil. Their first dealings which they had with men calling themselves Christians, exhibited to them the worst features of corrupt and sordid hearts; and convinced them that no cruelty is too great, no

villainy, and no robbery too abhorrent for even enlightened men to perform, when influenced by avarice, and lust. (Walker 90)

The only dramatist in the early twentieth century to use racism as a subject-matter on stage, O'Neill drew upon slave-narratives to denounce the slavery-era crimes and atrocities against the Black race. In fact, none, except August Wilson, mainly through his *The Piano Lesson* (1987), even ventured to deal with slave tales on American stage. This, nonetheless, gives O'Neill a distinct place among American authors.

However, it should be borne in mind that O'Neill's concerns were not only the injustices, discriminations, and violence against the American-Indians, African Americans, Irish Americans, and other minorities, but also were that these evils would precipitate more violence and retribution in society. In fact, his fears are shared by many:

In the United States we have lived with four-hundred years of violence. It is a history that tells us to kill Indians, take their property, put them on reservations, and then by film and folklore continue to tell our children that they are savages. We have a history of three-hundred years of Negro slavery and another one-hundred years of segregating the Negro into second-class citizenry. The cultural addiction to violence is part of the reason why more violence is probable.  
(McSorley 71)

O'Neill intended to lay bare on stage, as an artist would, the historical facts and decisions of the American forefathers as they took the nation from its inception on strict Christian principles through to its emergence as a capitalist superpower. The playwright was simply saying what happened, and tried to decipher why it happened.

*O'Neill—A Campaigner of Racial Equity*

O'Neill's intention in all his plays about Blacks, both in produced and unproduced ones, was to call the attention of his audience to the plight of their "Darker Brother." The playwright has given his black characters status in his plays, and often excuses their petulant and violent actions in the play, blaming the White man rather as the cause of black man's deprivation, frustration, and his psychological as well as sociological scars. In his book, *Playwrights of the New American Theater*, Thomas Dickinson comments that O'Neill "makes a document of the first value" by "revealing the strivings of the Negroes to raise themselves by means of an honest application of the white man's abstract morality, against the treason of the white man to his own standards" (117). Obviously, the playwright felt strongly that in judging his Black characters, both in the produced and unproduced plays, one should take into consideration their years of slavery, the discrimination and the racial prejudice, injustice, and violence which were their lot. O'Neill's "Ideas for Negro Plays" serve as the springboard to carry his viewpoint further to reiterate his campaign for racial equity on American stage.

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<sup>1</sup> The manuscripts for these unfinished Black plays: "Honest Honey Boy," "Bantu Boy," and "Runaway Slave" are found at the Yale University Library. Virginia Floyd first brought these to general readers by annotating and editing these plays and other unpublished works through her publication *Eugene O'Neill at Work: Newly Released Ideas for Plays* in 1981. This book has been providing the readers with the necessary facts and information on these and other unpublished works of O'Neill over the years, particularly taking into account the playwright's own notes and sketches that he penned with a view to staging them sometime later. All further references in this chapter are from this publication.