

African Americans and the Legacy of the American Dream in John Alfred Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am*

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Abstract: This paper deals with the legacy of the American dream and the disillusionment of African Americans as contextualized in John Alfred Williams' *The Man Who Cried I Am*. It purports to show that the American dream with all its implications, in terms of freedom, equality, and prosperity for all American residents, irrespective of racial considerations, remains a nightmare for African Americans. Since the issue of the American dream and the African Americans crosses reference to the history with the making of America and the colonial period, this study draws from the New Historicism which analyzes a literary text in its social, historical, and political context. The exploration of this narrative evidences aspects of the exclusion of the African Americans from the legacy of the American dream which promises freedom, equality and better life to every resident on the American soil, the prosperity of which their ancestors too, fought and shed blood for. Though being residents, these Blacks' descendants remain grossly frustrated as they still don't draw a full and satisfying benefit of the American dream as framed by the founders of the Nation. For they remain poor and are denied to blossom at the 'table of brotherhood,' African Americans are induced to have a look on their true freedom and identity. As a final assessment, this study posits *The Man Who Cried I Am* as an outcry of African Americans, and a magna opus in the struggle for the author to restore the memory of the African Americans in the United States.

Key- Words: American dream, disillusionment, African Americans, Struggle, Legacy, Identity.

Résumé:

Cette étude porte sur le rêve américain et la désillusion des africains américains tels que peints dans *The Man Who Cried I Am* de John Alfred Williams. Elle a pour objectif de montrer l'héritage du rêve américain avec toutes ces implications de liberté, d'égalité et de prospérité à tous égards sans discrimination raciale, demeure à ce jour une réalité illusoire pour les africains américains. Sachant que le thème du rêve américain et les africains américains est relié à l'histoire de la découverte de l'Amérique et l'époque coloniale, cette analyse se fait par le prisme du New Historicism qui appréhende le texte littéraire dans son contexte historique, social et politique sera utile pour la compréhension de cette étude. L'analyse de ce roman met en évidence les aspects de l'exclusion des africains américains de l'héritage du rêve américain qui, pourtant promet la liberté, égalité et la vie meilleure à tout résident sur le sol américain, dont la prospérité est tributaire de la lutte et du sang versé par leurs ancêtres. Bien que résidents, ces descendants noirs continuent à subir toutes sortes de frustrations car ne jouissant pas de toutes les prérogatives du rêve américain tel que voulu par les pères fondateurs. Etant donné qu'ils demeurent pauvres et ne peuvent s'épanouir, ces africains américains sont obligés de revenir sur leur vraie liberté et identité. Il ressort de cette étude que *The Man Who Cried I Am* est un cri d'indignation des africains américains, et un chef d'œuvre qui procède ainsi de la lutte pour la restauration de la mémoire des africains américains aux Etats Unies.

Mots-clés : Rêve américain, désillusion, africains américains, lutte, héritage, identité.

I. Introduction

The perspective of prosperity by getting richer is seen as an integral part of the American dream. Considered as 'the land of opportunity,' the United States of America have for ages been the target of immigrants from the whole world knowing that the possibility of any immigrant to succeed from nothing has been strengthened by the territorial space, natural resources, and the political and economic liberalism that characterize the United States of America. This idea is as old as the discovery of the new world. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/file>). The American dream is one of the topical issues not only among historians, but also dramatized in literary works. In *The Man Who Cried I Am*, first published in 1967, John A.

Williams gives a picture of black Americans who are unable to reach the 'American dream' but are obliged to struggle, being errands in the world, in order to survive. In this connection, some critics evidence that Williams' novel is a portrayal of the real life of black people and not only a simple fiction when they react:

The Man Who Cried I Am is a stunning chronicle of not only Williams's life but the lives of all black people who have refused to be victims: African-Americans who have had to leave their country to claim their individuality, intellectual independence, and rightful recognition, and who have always yearned to be 'home'.
(<https://vnigufujuxoq.Consumersnewhomeconstruction.Com>)

From this passage, authors bring readers back to have a look on this aspect of the American dream from the African Americans' sight. The confidential idea behind the term 'American dream' is

the belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for everyone. The American dream is believed to be achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work, rather than by chance. (Brian Barnier: online)

But this idea is not at all shared by some scholars who are pessimistic and think that the American dream is not at all real taking into account the way America is ruled in its melting pot. Adam Barome (online) thinks that:

Terming it a 'dream' also carries with it the notion that these ideals aren't necessarily what has played out in the lives of many actual Americans and those who hope to become Americans. The criticism that reality falls short of the American dream is at least as old as the idea itself. The spread of settlers into Native American lands, slavery, the limitation of the vote (originally) to white male landowners, and a long list of other injustices and challenges have undermined the realization of the dream for many who live in the United States.

When considering the situation of African Americans, John Alfred Williams highlights the plight of African Americans who are Africans deported from Africa to America to work and built this New World. These Africans, though becoming Americans, are disillusioned because the 'American dream' that they long for turns into an 'American nightmare'.

This paper deals with African Americans and the Legacy of the American as contextualized in John Alfred Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am*. It purports to show the extent to which the American dream can be perceived as a disillusionment for African Americans.

As this issue of the American dream crosses reference to the history with the making of America and the colonial period, this study draws from New Historicism as theoretical framework for it helps analyze a literary text in its social, historical, and political context. Accordingly, Evrim Dogan (2005: 80) asserts that "*The preliminary concern of new historicism is to refigure the relationship between texts and the cultural system in terms of new historicism, a literary text can be evaluated in its social, historical, and political context.*" This critical approach proves helpful to sort out some historical aspects contextualized in the novel under consideration in order to show the extent to which *The Man Who Cried I am* is not only fictitious but also a historical narrative, due to the social centrality.

Two main points will be considered in the completion of this paper. The first deals with the legacy of the American dream as a disillusionment for African Americans with regard to the history of the United States of America while the second focuses on the real African American dream.

1- The legacy of the American dream as a disillusionment for African Americans

The abundant natural resources of America have encouraged immigrants to settle and envision America as a land of opportunity where life is better for everybody, as Brian Barnier (online) writes:

The American dream was aided by a number of factors that gave the United States a competitive advantage over other countries. For starters, it is relatively isolated geographically, compared to many other countries, and enjoys a temperate climate. It has a culturally diverse population that businesses use to foster innovation in a global landscape. Abundant natural resources—including oil, arable land, and long coastlines—generate food and income for the country and its residents.

In the same way, James Truslow Adams, quoted by Brian Barnier (online), keeps on enlightening the idea behind the American dream and reveals that: "*that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.*" But African Americans, residents in America, still experience the illusion or the lie of the American dream because they are far from making profit of this land of opportunity.

This disillusionment can be justified by the fact that the equality of all men required by the American dream is not observed in the lives of African Americans. They work very hard not for themselves but for their

white masters. Max Reddick, an African American character in *The Man Who Cried I am* who, though a writer but is not at all satisfied of his pay because incapable of making a living with his art as he is exploited by his white editor, as it is written: “and he’d have to feel his way with Zutkin who’d already asked him to write articles for his magazine.” (p.23) This may be the reason why his friend Harry Ames, another African American writer, advises him:

When you have a book ready to come out, as you have in a couple of months, you should always have something in the oven, ‘cause they’ll forget you in a flash. They wash white writers right down the drain. You know what they’ll do for us! (p.63)

Similarly, Minister Q, another black character who is a great boxer, is exploited by his white coaches because after any box competition, money is given to his coaches and they are not obliged to give him the exact amount of money, as he says: “I had sense enough to know that I was being exploited.” (p.138) This confession by Minister Q can be seen as the way to stigmatize the social injustice he has been victim of.

Social discriminations are also noticeable through Harry Ames, who declines the Lyceum Grant because he is denied the Lykeion Fellowship in Athens after having been the unanimous choice of the Lyceum judges. Indeed, during the ceremonial, Northern Literary Masters maintain: “This is how we handle our niggers. Give a little, take much more.” (p.79) So, white people manage to handle black people by using them as instruments to earn money preventing them the privilege to live freely in the American soil and enjoy the fruit of their labor. That is to say, the white people “Give a little” to a black who has devoted his energy to work and “take much more” for themselves.

These words “Give a little, take much more” remind the readers about blacks who went to fight the World War II on behalf of the American nation in the sense that they risked life for a bitter reward once back home. This can be explained by the fact that blacks are unfortunately denied to be considered as worthy Americans. The risky experience of Max in deep water when going to fight on behalf of America is an illustration:

The ship, now in deep water, began to rumble and wallow, and Max, standing at the fantail, felt the salt water spray blowing in his face. There was no much back there, he thought, and nothing at all where we’re going. How in the hell did we get like this? In a time when we fight for the things we can’t have. (p.46)

Max’s words “we fight for the things we can’t have” epitomize the exploitation of black soldiers by white people.

Likewise, such exploitation of African Americans are noticeable in Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* with regard to Sorrow, a teen age and sick black young girl who is obliged to work hard. In fact, she has to work “without complaint,” (*A Mercy*, p. 120) because she is black, and deserves the drudgery as soon as she is transferred to Jacob Vaark’s. Indeed, living in a country that does not recognize them as human beings, Sorrow, like many other African Americans, realizes that she is in danger and helplessly pities on his fate: “I am not understanding anything except that I am in danger as the dog’s head shows...” (*A Mercy*, p.111) The ‘danger’ alluded here is twofold because despite the fact that African Americans have to work hard, they cannot enjoy the fruit of their labour and, on top of all this, they are not free to act as they bend under the yoke imposed by their masters.

As it can be seen, the American dream is an illusion for African Americans because they live under of it and experience the American nightmare. In effect, efforts of African Americans are paid by deception and one can understand that they are not part of the American dream because it promises freedom and equality which are may be for white only. Rather, these ‘wretched of the earth’ are neither free nor equal to whites that they are handled by whites. Hence, they finally infer that they are simple intruders in the white society in which they are victims, as Harry Ames explains to Max:

In our society which is white-we are intruders they say-there has got to be something inherently horrible about having the sicknesses and weaknesses of that society described by a person who is a victim of them; for if he, the victim, is capable of describing what they have believed nonexistent, then they, the members of the majority, must choose between living the truth, which can be pretty grim, and the lie, which isn’t much better. (p.29)

While the American dream reveals the social order in which each man and woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (James Truslow Adams, quoted by Brian Barnier: online), African Americans’ efforts are not recognized by white Americans because of being born black. Harry Ames, a great black writer whose value is not enhanced in the American society is upset as the narrator explains:

... more and more time from the great man (and (Harry) had had times of greatness, but America pretended not to see them, and Harry wanted America to acknowledge his greatness. But America had said in essence: We may study you in freshman English

anthologies, and if we ever arrive at the point where we show our fear or admit that we are guilty and ignore that guilt, we will study you first, Harry Ames! (p.8)

American experts are unable to recognize the merit of an African American writer. Consequently, "Harry's books, which did not deal specifically in fiction or nonfiction form with Negroes, were not well received in the United States." (p.107) This is attested by Max Reddick's reaction, another writer of many books, who "knew that no book took off unless it was first catapulted by the publisher" as "the goddamn city was so filled with clichés" of discrimination not enhancing the image of an African American. (p.88) This attitude in front black people allows to understand that they live out of the American dream because, Harry is compelled to leave America for Europe or around the world where he is writing about Spanish mystique, the extent of police power, the lack of religious freedom, ... (p.107)

Similarly, Roger, another black writer, who "had written three novels, which he had been unable to sell" (p.15) in America, is compelled to load up a car with articles and drives around Europe selling them to papers and magazines. Indeed, as he seems excluded from the legacy of the American dream, Roger, like many other disillusioned African Americans, emigrates from America to other continents for better living conditions, as the narrator keeps on: "Roger had come to Europe. To be free. He'd returned to New York briefly then back to Europe for good." (p.15)

Through characters of Max Reddick, Harry Ames, and Roger Wilkinson, John A. Williams dramatizes African Americans' departure as they are disappointed and fed up to live in New York because "New York remained unchanged, a testimony to its strength against the minds of millions of people who leave it every year and expect that with their departure, something about it will change." (pp. 130-131) Max Reddick becomes an international immigrant seeking better life as Walter Mosley, in introduction to John A. Williams (2004: iii) writes:

Max Reddick has traveled to Europe to say his final good-byes to his friend and rival Harry Ames, who has died quite recently. There is no future here. Max travels from Amsterdam to Leiden in real time while in his mind drifts back to the forties in New York and then the war in Italy. He remembers his days among black people in Africa and Paris and the deep South.

Unfortunately, their life remains miserable in America and abroad for, "it was one thing to quit New York or Chicago or San Francisco because of discrimination, but the youngsters hadn't learned yet that Paris wasn't going to welcome them with open arms because they were discriminated against in the States." (p.125)

As the story unfolds, one realizes that Roger, for example, is never accepted neither in America nor in Europe as the narrator reports:

Max could never think of Dallas without thinking of Roger Wilkinson. (Roger had returned to New York, briefly, then gone again to Europe, for good, he had said. He hadn't sold any of the novels he had written, and spent a great deal of time putting together *Policiers* for French publishers, which in the end they never accepted. Max wondered how he was going to live. (p.142)

Hence, John A. Williams illustrates the misery of African Americans who fled America for good in Europe through the character of Roger who is starving in Europe and is obliged to beg a little bread from his father left in New York, as the narrator keeps on reporting:

During those days, the sky grayed quickly and heavy cold winds buffeted the city and the smell of snow wafted through the air. Roger Wilkinson was a frequent visitor. He sat drinking coffee or Genever while Max and Margrit packed and labeled. "Tell my father," Roger said one night, "as discreetly as you can, that I would appreciate a little bread whenever he can send it, dig?" (p.189)

The sentence "I would appreciate a little bread" represents the disillusionment about the legacy of the American dream that promises better life to all Americans. For, the better life in America is not at all part of African Americans who are compelled to escape America for Europe where they are starving to death asking again for a little bread from New York. The author also dramatizes the faintness to be a black in the world where the black color is seen as a curse not only by Europeans, particularly the Germans who are said to be "racist in reverse," (p.159) but also by fellow Americans who exclude African Americans from the benefits of the American dream which is normally the heirloom given to all residents in America. In effect, the American system is as severe toward African Americans in preventing them from inheriting America as "their color had forced them out of America and they were not looking to the day when it would force back; they didn't think that would ever come." (p. 146-147)

Thus, when having a look on the way these African American characters are depicted in the novel as hard workers, great writers of many books and articles but are denied to flower head, one may understand the extent

in which the American system is so tied up that black people could not prosper as John A. Williams in an interview (online), testifies:

I don't foresee in the immediate future any high-level black editors on powerful American newspapers or magazines. By that I mean decision-making levels. I don't see black people getting into that in my lifetime. The system's so tied up that we almost have to forget it for now.

The author keeps expressing his indignant outcry against the American system when he says: "*Yet if we throw television in with newspapers, you see that we're in a totally untenable position. The black press is as nothing, and it's very difficult to speak to a brother or sister through the white press.*" When declaring: "*We're in a totally untenable position,*" Williams means that black Americans are in an unfavorable position which is not allowing them to act freely like true Americans. It is to say that, African Americans experience disillusionment of the American dream because they are not considered as any resident in America. This is undoubtedly impossible for them to aspire to bigger and better things and the possibility of achieving them on the American soil as what the American dream promises.

Freedom and equality. It offers the freedom to make both the large and small decisions that affect one's life, the freedom to aspire to bigger and better things and the possibility of achieving them, the freedom to accumulate wealth, the opportunity to lead a dignified life, and the freedom to live in accordance with one's values—even if those values are not widely held or accepted. (Brian Barnier: online)

Successful is part of the American dream and Wealth is a measure of the value of all of the assets of worth owned by a person, community, company, or country. (Brian Barnier: online) But the life of the African Americans is without success because they live under the weight of the American system. The character Max Reddick, a hard worker and a great writer is always poor because he is black, as the narrator reports:

New liberalism? Look at Max.

Max Reddick was trudging across the street head down.

Max Reddick, a good, competent writer, Harry thought. Ideas to be worked out, a style to be cleaned up and set free. Best reporter *the Democrat* ever had. New liberalism? Look at him. Poor black bastard. (p.60)

As a black American, Max Reddick is starving to death despite the fact that he works very hard. Thus, the life of African Americans is without progress that one can report that it is a real American nightmare because all conditions are fulfilled for them not to benefit the American dream. This is what is observed in the life of another character named Roger in a conversation between Max and his girlfriend Margerit:

"I guess I was always tired. Tired when I was born, maybe."

"That's what you said."

"See? Nothing new. How's Roger?"

"Roger? Roger is still Roger, what else?"

"Still macking in his own intellectual way?"

"Still what-?"

"Macking. Macking. Oh, Margrit, you know what macking is."

"But no, I don't."

"We talked about it," he insisted. Shut your mouth, he told himself.

"Okay, okay. Roger's still the same that means he's macking."

"Have it your way."

"Thanks." (p.10)

Roger is 'still the same' and there is no progress in his life. The black life is so difficult that the black community thinks that:

It must be pretty awful for a white man to learn that one of the things wrong with this society is that it is not based on dollars directly or alone, but dollars denied men who are black so dollars can go into the pockets of men who are white. (p.29)

This quotation shows the heart cry of African Americans who are experiencing the harsh time in the land of opportunity where everybody is allowed to be rich except black people. They are working very hard for better life as required by the American dream, unfortunately, they remain poor and realize that it is difficult to hope for a change as Max Reddick approves: "*We are all getting old and sick and dropping dead, with everything still a mess.*" (p.83)

The American dream also includes owning your own house, starting a family, and having a stable job, or owning your own business. (Brian Barnier, online) "*A stable job*" which is the starting point for a better life is denied to black people. African American characters Max Reddick and Harry Ames who bear the sin to have the black skin, are considered as stupid people and are not welcomed in job places: "*Stupid people. Time would run out and turn upon itself. One of these days assassins might have to be sent after people like Reddick and Ames because some jerk didn't want to give them a job they could do with one hand because they were black.*" (p.68)

As can be seen, it is difficult for a black man to get a job in the American soil because the American system is so severe in front of blacks that they manage to maintain them out of the American dream. Harry Ames, despite the fact that after the interview for the work, “*had been chosen, selected, preferred; there had been congratulations*” and he is selected “*the best*,” (p.73) he has been replaced by another candidate. A letter has been sent to inform Harry, as the narrator tells the event:

Harry passed a hand over his forehead and carefully broke open the flap of envelop. His eyes raced down the short paragraph.

“We regret to inform you that another candidate, also recommended by the American Lyceum of letters, was awarded the fellowship in creative writing...”

There was more, but Harry's eyes swept back to:

“We regret to inform you that...”

We regret to...”(p.73)

Through this American plot against black people, one may understand that African Americans live is at the margin of the American society and they are not considered as men at the same level with other residents in America. The notice is that, the American dream that is promising that “all men are created equal,” is not taking into account black people because, being blacks, they are victims of discrimination of all kinds. This is what an American journalist Alan Friedman (<https://indianexpress.com/agency/express-news-service>) dramatizes in his book entitled *This is not America* when he writes : “*l'Amérique d'aujourd'hui était une nation profondément divisée où 13 pour cent de la population vivait en dessous du seuil de pauvreté et a été détruite par le racisme*,” and he asserts that “*l'image de l'Amérique en tant que société juste n'existait pas* ” because he continues saying that “*Si vous êtes une femme, un individu noir ou un pauvre blanc, le rêve américain n'existe pas pour vous*.” So, there are some categories of persons that cannot benefit the American dream like African Americans. Alan Friedman's notice finds echoes to the reaction of the character of Moses Boatwright who, after realizing that he is an abomination, ugly, black, and his life is always bad, declares that: “*This world is an illusion, but it can be real*.” (p.34) That is to say, the American dream is a disillusionment for African Americans.

John A. Williams succeeds to paint the American society through the character of Max Reddick who embodies the black community in America, after doing an examination of the life of a black American, in an exchange with his girlfriend Margerit, he declares that:

Dear Margerit. I had hope you'd understand by now. There's us and there's them. Us means me because I'm black... I am sorry. ... The law in this country, just like in most countries, is for the privileged and if you're white in America, you are privileged. (p.194)

As the American society is divided privileging the white man, the black American is far to benefit the legacy of the American dream even if one of the United States Representative Ted Yoho (online), says that

The American dream comes from opportunity. The opportunity comes from our founding principles, our core values that's held together and protected by the Constitution. Those ideas are neither Republican, Democrat, conservative, liberal, white, or black. Those are American ideologies.

According to Ted Yoho, those ideas from the American dream are not for a privileged group or race, but are for American ideologies. But African Americans have to see the reality on the way the American society is ruled with too much discrimination against them as the narrator writes talking about Max Reddick who is a man but is denied to own the house, start a family, and have a stable job, or own his own business:

... But he was black. Of course he was black, but negro men, they had a way of starting out with a bang, with the long, long dream, but ending with less than a whisper, so beaten were they simply because they had dared to dream in the first place. Max, ... was a man with dreams, but he had to see the hard reality of the present. (pp. 58-59)

The phrase “*to dare to dream in the first place*” means to dream as a privileged who is a white American. But, as Max is a black, the dream ends with less than a whisper. Max, as a man wanted to own a house, start a family, and have a stable job. Unfortunately, the hard reality in the American soil hurts him. In facing difficulties to express himself because they keep blacks “*off balance*,” (p.63) Max Reddick is upset and falls on a monologue wondering: “*Get a job? Man, wasn't that like the American dream? Boy meets girl, gets good job and everything's all reet. “Wow, honey.”*” (p.58) These questions show a disillusionment of Max who is an American and is refused all privileges of a man and of an American resident because he is black and is not deserved to get a job. His girlfriend Lillian chooses abortion as he is moneyless:

Lillian wanted an abortion because, she said, she did not want to push Max into anything he wasn't ready for. Max, on the other hand, was willing to marry and settle for the *Democrat* and write nights. Or was he? Wasn't he going to ask Harry this morning for the name of a doctor who could do the abortion-if they both finally agreed on it? C'mon, Harry, open the goddamn door! Now, he was even getting pissed off at Kermit Shea. Hell, he was white, why not? Aw, crap. (p.62)

It is to say that, the American dream is “a nightmare” as says the United States Senator Bernie Sanders (online) for African American. Knowing that the job sets the man free in getting married and having a family, Max who is devoid of the right to be a man in America “is still hurting for that girl and a good job.Marriage.”(p.61) Max Reddick realizes that as a man and a black, he is not concerned with the American dream and he is feeling sorry for having lost his girlfriend after the abortion and thinks that white Americans have killed both of them when he falls in a monologue in front of the mirror:

And God knows, you don't have to worry about me having a decent job so we can live the way you thought we ought to – according to their way, which is, my darling, as pitiable as it is, the only way now. Look what you've gone and done. They have killed both of us. God, Lillian, I'm mad, I am so mad, baby, and sorry for them, for me, for you. How did we get down here? We should have been out of here by now. Are we going to have to explode out? (pp.66-67)

This excerpt expresses the disappointment of Max Reddick in the way which is “pitiable” of treating black Americans in the society built by their fathers' fathers. It is difficult to understand the United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development's words, Julian Castro (online), who thinks that “in the end, the American dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay. Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation. But each generation passes on to the next the fruits of their labor.” There is not a “relay” between past black generations and new black ones because they are refused to benefit the fruits of their late fathers. That is why, “Max moved away from the mirror and all he could do was to shake his head very, very slowly” (p. 67) as the way to comprehend that they are not privileged to inherit the American dream.

Consequently, life of black Americans is in “one way or another, a deal” (p.137) because they have to survive in America. Max Reddick is rejected in the American society. But as a black, he has to survive in Harlem as the narrator explains: “Outside, downtown, they had rejected him completely and he had crawled back into his hole. Not to die, but to begin to live any way he could. Survival, Harlem style: when the wagon comes, every swinging goes. Morals in an immoral society? Later for them.” (p.86)

The American society is considered as an “immoral society” for ill-treating sons of those who shed their blood to build America. John A. Williams, as a black writer, do not hesitate to depict the poor life of black Americans in America through these black characters. Harry Ames, a great black writer, doesnot live in good conditions as it is mentioned: “The Ames home wasn't so great. The dishes were chipped, the chairs didn't match, the kid was a mess.” (p.58)As for Max Reddick, a girl friend will bring him “a steak” because his diet is too poor: “Regina (Max remembered) had been in a quietly belligerent mood. ‘Beans and hocks again,’ she said. Then she sighed. ‘If I were coming again I'd bring you a steak.’ (p.87)

It is unbelievable to notice that there are some Americans who are starving on the land of opportunity and Max wonders for the fate of a black American as the narrator puts: “Luxuriously, he gorged himself on the beans and bread with thick slabs of butter. He wondered if he had not been Negro if he could have survived so well in a place like New York.” (p.86) “New York” is the city where any resident has the opportunity to enjoy good life, but the astonishment appears in the sense that starvation can exist in that richest city of the world in the year of 1947. (p.85) That is why Max Reddick, in observing the way he lives in New York, says: “This city is killing me” (p.88) because, he

Had already given himself a name; he was a pimp without briefcase. When you pimped without briefcase, you borrowed money from the girl and the girl knew you'd never pay it back, and chances were, every time you met you'd borrow more money. Sometimes you apologized for not being able to pay the money back and if you did this right, not only would the girl not become middle class and bitchy and dun you for the money, she might even lend you more. Later, in Europe, they would call it macking. (p.87)

This extract shows that the legacy of the American dream that promises equality and better life to all residents on the American soil is a disillusionment for African Americans because the clue behind the American system is to maintainblack descendants under the American dream. It is evidenced by Mr. kierzek, a white character, who insists when talking to Mr. C'mon Mabel, one of the white publishers: “We'll give those bastards hell.” (p.75)

After talking about the American dream with a focus on all privileges white Americans are granted to the detriment of African Americans,the coming point analyses the anxiety of latterafter being repulsed to enjoy the legacy of the American dream.

2- The African Americans' Dream

The invisible chains imposed by the American system not only to maintain African Americans under the white man, but also to deny them the legacy of the American dream urged them to struggle in order to gain full citizenship rights and achieve racial equality by challenging segregation, the Jim Crow system which separates Blacks and Whites, and the habit to always have control over blacks even after the end of slavery.

John A. Williams, as a writer, in an interview with Dennis Williams (online) denounces the wrong of whites against blacks through fiction being a corrective force on an angle of the truth to claim justice when he declares: I don't have a fixed audience. I hope the audience, like metal scraps to a magnet, become attracted to it, but I am just really disgusted with publishing in general, the quality of editors, the whole who-struck-john that makes the writing of fiction not anything I want to do anymore. I've always looked at fiction as being a corrective force, an enabling art form focused on an angle of truth.

That is why, in *The Man Who Cried I Am*, John A. Williams evokes the harsh era of segregation in America and puts the stress on black liberation movement through fictitious characters like Max Reddick, Harry Ames, and others in the memory of real characters like James Baldwin, Richards Wright,... In this regard, some critics consider *The Man Who Cried I Am* as:

A militant novel that was published during a decade of militancy and urgent questioning of the direction that should be taken by the movement for black liberation. Malcolm X, who represented the position that black Americans should defend and free themselves "by any means necessary," had recently been assassinated by black gunmen who might have been directed by the federal government. Martin Luther King, Jr., who represented nonviolent mass action for redress of grievances, had achieved remarkable early successes but appeared to be losing effectiveness as the backlash by white supremacists gathered momentum. (<https://www.enotes.com/topics/man-who-cried-i-am/characters>)

Thus, in that struggle of black liberation, as America is more a nightmare than a dream for African Americans, they have created a black dream which is withdrawn from the deepest significance of the American dream that promises freedom and equality for all men that Martin Luther King expresses in his speech: "I have a dream." Till now, the Black dream is not at all to work hard in order to enjoy better life, but to fight for true freedom, true equality between blacks and whites, and their identity.

Despite their Emancipation of 1863, black people are not at all free because they are bound to live out of the legacy of the American dream and they know that they are not "free to act" (p. 161) on their own. This is what John A. Williams underlines in *The Man Who Cried I Am* through the character of Max Reddick, a black writer, who states that he never has been free in America when talking to his publisher Mr. Zutkin: "And I also know that I am not free and never have been." (p. 161)

The reaction of Max can be justified by the fact that the white man manages to maintain blacks down preventing them from inheriting the America that their fathers' fathers shed blood for. Minister Q another character recalls the hidden black history to his black fellows as the way to urge them to claim their citizenship rights, their true freedom in these terms:

Those white devils took away our history. They hid the records and lied to us. We have a history, but no white man is going to reveal it. We have to dig it out ourselves and the work is not hard, brothers. That work is sweet! (p. 138)

When he insists "We have to dig it out ourselves," Minister Q alludes to the struggle for the true freedom in order to act as true Americans. Accordingly, Harry Ames shouts to Max saying: "I plead freedom of speech. I'll speak my mind wherever I am and whenever I choose to" (p. 12) as the way to tell white people that blacks need true freedom which is their everyday dream. A position in tandem with what some critics who, scrutinizing *The Man Who Cried I Am*, conclude that this novel is

A stunning chronicle of not only Williams's life but the lives of all black people who have refused to be victims: African-Americans who have had to leave their country to claim their individuality, intellectual independence, and rightful recognition, and who have always yearned to be 'home' but struggled to find such. (Quality Paperback Book Club)

From the forgoing, one may infer that black people in America are still claiming their true freedom which is denied to them.

Apart from freedom, the African Americans' dream is to be considered not only as Americans but also equal to white Americans. This can be checked in what Martin Luther King (online) declares during one of his speeches to his black fellows:

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

The equality claimed by black Americans is withdrawn from the philosophy of the American dream as Sarah Churchwell (online) writes: "the American Dream was of democracy-of equality of opportunity, of justice for all." Unfortunately, this equality is far to be the truth when observing the life of black Americans in the American soil. In *The Man Who Cried I Am*, Max Reddick, as a black American, does not hide his disappointment when he goes to Washington D.C. to meet the white president to appeal for equal opportunities between whites and blacks:

While I am honored that my friends thought enough of me to recommend me, and that you want me to be here, and while I believe in your program, staking what future I may have on

someone else's four years is not the kind of gambling that I, as a Negro, can afford. That's the heritage of the lack of equal opportunity you've pledged to improve.(p.163)

This claim from a black American expresses what they have hungered for ages. It is the real dream of black Americans who are appealing for the equality between whites and blacks as inscribed in the American dream. It is the black dream that allows blacks to act like whites regardless the color of skin in following the American dream that advocates the equal opportunity for all Americans in the American soil. This black dream is what the white woman Charlotte, one of Harry Ames' girlfriends deduces: "*They wanted them to be just like white men in terms of success, which meant, of course, the gracious acceptance of responsibility, the desk of job where you bossed instead of being bossed, the lawn you mowed reluctantly when the leaves you raked half-heartedly were not on it.*" (p.69)

This deduction of Charlotte matches with the purpose of the party created by black people to claim their rights in America because the party's creed which is the total equality between whites and blacks lies on the "*maximum integration*"(p.68) of blacks in the American society. Black Americans are not free to act in United States of America; their actions are limited because of the color of their skin and they are considered as sub-men. Consequently, they are denied the privilege to act as white men and they seem to be at the margin of the American society.

As one can understand, instead of experiencing the American dream that allows all American residents to equal opportunity, blacks in their side dream to be equal to whites and struggle for their maximum integration in America.

The dream of the African Americans is also to be recognized as belonging to uniquely Black people, to be accepted as Blacks in the American society. They fight to be distinguished from other races. The search for Black identity is proved by the feeling to be useful and act as any other American citizen living in the American soil. The character of Harry Ames as a black writer, in a conversation with his black fellow Max Reddick is obliged to claim his identity as a black writer and a man to be considered when he says:

Somewhere you know this and you're thinking twice about starting to work. Your job is to tell those people to stop lying, not only to us, but to themselves. You've written and in the process, somewhere in that African body of yours, something said: 'I am – a writer, a man, something, but here for today. Here for right now .(pp.29-30)

Thus, as a black writer, an inner voice is convincing Harry Ames that he must be proud to be black and writer and those white people must stop lying themselves considering them as outcasts in America. When he says: "*I am – a writer, a man,*" it is a way not only to claim the Black identity because when saying "*I am*" meaning "*I am Black,*" but also to claim the Black humanity because when saying "*a man*" meaning a person like any human being regardless the skin color, Harry Ames is recalling that Blacks are also humans at the same level as all human beings. Being considered as a human is also what Max Reddick is claiming because he is denied the privilege to be a worthy man capable of working and of having a family:

Max watched her enter the house. (...) She didn't even turn around to wave goodbye. She was up to do something. Fuck around now and get killed, he thought in a grim panic. C'mon, Shea, he thought; C'mon, Zutkin, one of you goodie-goodie bastards. Can't you see I'm hurting, hurting, and my girl, my woman is hurting? My whole motherfucking life is a gaping, stinking hurt! Give my share! I am a man. Don't make me take it in this anger! Hot tears poured from his eyes and blinded him along with his anger. (pp. 64-65)

In fact, Max Reddick, instead of his intellectual capacities, is refused to be given a job by C'mon, Shea, and Zutkin because he is black. That is why he declares: "*Can't you see I'm hurting, hurting, and my girl, my woman is hurting.*" Because his girlfriend Lillian got killed as he is jobless and unable to hold a family. In other words, as Max is black, he is denied the privilege not only to inherit the philosophy behind the American dream, but also to live a worthy life of any living man who can have a wife and children or who takes care of a whole family. Thus, the fact of being black, Max is prevented from acting like a living man and regrets shouting "*Give my share! I am a man,*" when he is unable to save his girlfriend who is dying. It means that, Max Reddick is claiming his identity as a black man because he wants to be considered as a useful black man capable to act as a man in the American soil as he keeps on saying: "*I am – a writer, a man.*" (p.30)

The issue of the identity of black people is not at all clear because they are not considered as persons at the same level like white people. They live as outcasts in the American soil. It is what Ralph Ellison (online) says in an interview in the Paris Review that the search for identity is, "*the American theme. The nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are.*" It means that, the black identity is not accepted in America and black people have to suffer no matter their intellectual and physical capacities. But here, one may notice that these black characters are refusing to be considered as nothing because when Max says: "*I am,*" it means: "*I am black and proud.*" "*A writer*" means he is not an empty brain; he is an intellectual. "*A man*" means he is able to act as a living man on the earth. So, why to prevent them from recognizing who they are?

As can be seen, the reaction of black characters is seen as a kind of rebellion challenging the white man telling him that black people are proud to be black and live as blacks. This leads Max to insist talking with his black fellow: "I'm the way I am, and you may be too, because I'm a black man; therefore, we're in rebellion; we've got to be. We have no other function as valid as that one." (p.29) This means that, black people have a dream to be recognized by their identity as blacks at the same level with whites. In other words, black people are proud to be born blacks, to live as blacks, and to die as blacks because, when saying: "I'm the way I am, and you may be too, because I'm a black man," Max Reddick is claiming his identity as a black man. The fact of treating them as outcasts in the American soil led them into in a kind of rebellion because "it's a question of dignity." (p.192) The dignity of black people cannot be sold in front of the white's threat.

So, black people are more positive of their identity that they do not share the philosophy behind the American dream but rather have a dream to be recognized with the identity of black people equal to other people. In other words, black people have a vision to be accepted with their differences as blacks at the same level as white people are accepted.

II. Conclusion

This research work about "the African Americans and the Legacy of the American Dream in John Alfred Williams' *The Man Who Cried I Am*" has answered the question about the extent to which the legacy of the American dream is a disillusionment for African Americans. It has been shown throughout this work that the legacy of the American dream as framed by the founders of the Nation with all its ensuing holistic welfare for all American residents remains a disillusion for African Americans. The fact of being blacks, African Americans are denied to experience the American dream in preventing them to blossom in the American soil by not treating them at the same level as white people. The exclusion of these latter from the legacy of the American dream has led them to have a look on their situation in America. Consequently, the African dream is no longer to enjoy the American dream living a prosperous life but rather searching for true freedom and black identity by considering them equal to white people.

As a final assessment, *The Man Who Cried I Am* is an indignant outcry of African Americans in the American soil for it contextualizes the issue of the African Americans still claiming not only their social integration and, above all, the legacy of the American dream. Though being residents, these Blacks' descendants remain grossly frustrated as they still don't draw a full and satisfying benefit of the American dream as framed by the founders of the Nation.

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