

---

**The Enhancement of African American Existence in Suzanne Lori Park's  
The America Play.**

**Key words: Social Elevation, African American Literature, Culture  
heritage**

**Ikhlass Gorji Hussan**

**Ikhlassavatar@gmail.com**

**Prof. Nahidh Falih Sulaiman (PH. D  
Diyala University  
College Of Education For Humanities  
nahidhum@gmail.com**

**Abstract**

Social elevation, as the main concept of this study that is discussed by Suzanne Lori Parks in her play *The America play* (1993), is an attempt by the playwright to encourage her people to reconsider their history and their true place through the medium of theatre. This study explores the theme of social elevation by adopting the social identity theory of Henry Tajfel (1970s) promoting a sense of belonging to the African American experience. Parks also discusses the theme of digging and investigating the importance of the hole as a metaphor used by her to rewrite history through her distinct metaphorical style, which enables her to clearly highlight her ideas. According to Parks, African-American heritage has not been discussed fairly. As a result, she should trace her ancestors' existence through American history in order to improve their lives in society. This study also examines the social elevation of African American identity through the use of Abraham Lincoln as a symbol of American liberty. It portrays the character of the simple black gravedigger, or "Foundling Father," who abandoned his wife and son to impersonate Abraham Lincoln in a park known as the Great Hole of History. *The America Play* draws a strong parallel between the lesser-known Foundling Father and Abraham Lincoln, the president. It depicts Lincoln's role as the real American President in the lives of African Americans.

**Introduction**

Suzanne Lori Parks is a contemporary African-American playwright who received early critical honor and renown. She provides world literature with several dramatic contributions, fighting the exclusion of the African American experience from American history. Her plays are an embodiment of her strife toward resurrecting the past and saving the black community from ever existing in the margins of American society. The plays also highlight Parks' innovation and virtuosity in using the theatre as a medium for digging into the past and

---

reconstructing historical events. Furthermore, the recurring theme of digging and analyzing the importance of the hole as a metaphor is used by Parks as a device to fill in the missing gaps and rewrite history through her distinct style, the "Rep and Rev" technique, which enables her to clearly communicate her ideas. According to Parks, the African-American legacy has been overshadowed by dominant political systems. As a result, she should research her ancestors' lives throughout American history in order to change the general views of society. Parks urged African Americans to be proud of their roots. She also uses the president, Abraham Lincoln, as a symbol of African American liberty. Parks depicts the major dilemma in the life of African Americans: the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States. This leader changed the racial future of the country by freeing the slaves and accepting blacks into the army. He further suggested that recently emancipated slaves should have the right to vote and participate in shaping the country's political life.

American history has centered on the progress of man, particularly the white man, who exploited other races on his way to the top. Throughout American history, African Americans have been exploited and humiliated, and their place in history is frequently unrecognized, unless the topic at hand is either the Civil War or the Civil Rights Movement. The central theme which is presented in *The America Play* is the idea that Afro-Americans contributed to the history of the white man and that blacks have had to answer to whites since slavery began so long ago. Including Suzanne Parks, few appeared to be interested in Afro-American history. Parks thinks that the African American community's segregation prevents blacks from defining themselves in terms beyond their history as oppressed slaves. *The America Play* demonstrates that this does not have to be the case; rather, theater can tell a more complete, integrated, and accurate story of Afro-American identity; it shows how black history and white history are two sides of the same coin (Jiggetts, 1996, n.p).

Parks presented her ideas through symbolic figures and ideas. The social elevation in *The America Play* is symbolized by the main protagonists of The Foundling Father and his son, Brazil. The Foundling Father is an African American man who was born in a small village to a poor, black family of gravediggers but was repeatedly told that he strongly resembled Abraham Lincoln. Even though he gains some renown as an excellent gravedigger, his prospects are unlimited and he dreams of becoming as historically important as Lincoln, or at least coming close to that glory as an African American man. He abandoned his family and moved to the west to pursue his dream of being a great man. The Foundling Father's obsession with Lincoln is a means of both honoring the "Great Man," a revolutionary figure who arguably united white and black Americans in the idea of a unified nation, and also expressing his own sense of alienation and loss as a black man in the United States. The Foundling Father has no real name, and his title is a clear reference to the presidents of American history, the "Founding Fathers" of American democracy, and his sense of abandonment, and perhaps the way that African Americans are largely erased in or marginalized by narratives of American history. The word "foundling," a term for orphaned or abandoned infants, suggests one who has no ties to a larger familial or cultural history.

Throughout Act Two, Brazil continues to struggle to elevate his own identity, both as an individual from the black community and in relation to the father who abandoned him. Brazil the son of the Foundling Father and Lucy, who accompanies his mother to the replica of the Great Hole of History in Act Two to give his father the "proper burial" he deserves, reclaims his legacy. He spends much of this act digging, looking for the buried "wonders" that his father has left behind. He has a close relationship with his mother, Lucy, who represents the African legacy. She, throughout the play, encourages him to be proud of his roots as a digger. Brazil is a professional funeral mourner, and his

mother is a "Confidence" who listens to dying people's secrets. Ultimately, he is able to gather his "Hall of Wonders," which comes to include his father and forefathers' bones, who are dead and their remains are declining in the hole of American history.

Through the use of powerful visual images and a unique use of language, *The America Play* highlights the absence of African American history and the search for their place in American documents. The plot revolves around a man who seeks his traces in his birth place, as well as his family's search for him and the pieces of themselves he took with him:

I can't stop digging until I find something. You dig that something up, brush it off, and put it in its proper place. It has its own location. In addition to thuh other discoveries, In thuh Hall of Marvels." (The America Play, Act One, 1995, p. 176.)

The "hole" is a symbol adopted by Parks that appears to be both a graveyard for the nameless African American victims who died alone due to not being properly buried and a large treasure chest of resources that can be used in her effort to revive American history. This image demonstrates Parks' concern for more than just racial issues, but for the overall well-being of Americans. That is, she intends to attend every theater production in America in order to stimulate her imagination. "Dig a hole" is Parks' golden strategy for continuing to write plays in order to elevate the true image of her forefathers and give self-confidence to new generations to find their real position in society (Anada,2015,p.31).

The characters in *The America Play* are referred to as Roles. Thus, "The Great Man" and "The Lesser Known" are titles given to American president Abraham Lincoln and the gravedigger in the play, but they also serve to represent blacks and whites in general. To imitate the great man, the Foundling

---

father paints his face white, wears a top hat and coat, and the visitors assassinate him for a small sum of money. He presents the historical event that occurred in the Ford Theater, when John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln while watching the play, *Our American Cousin*. The gravedigger tells the audience that he is skilled at digging graves, but no longer for graves to bury white corpses, but instead much like an archaeologist searching for treasures and glory from the past. The Foundling Father is looking for his origins and identity in the Great Hole of History. According to Malkin Jeanette R., his act of digging up on the stage represents the search for relics of African Americans' presence in American history and their past (Malkin, 2002,p. 175).

Brazil, the son, represents social elevation as he digs and digs for remains in order to honor the Foundling Father's legacy. He will search for his father's name, identity, or contributions to be proud of all his disappearing ancestors in this symbolic hole that may have contained the "whole". In addition to the whitewashing of history, one of the oppressive tactics of slavery was the deliberate and malicious erasure of African American culture and history, as well as the disruption of familial lines. Children were taken from their parents, and couples were separated. Slave owners forced slaves to be away from their culture and prohibited cultural customs, and most enslaved people were kept illiterate and forbidden from keeping written historical records. As a result, the play emphasizes the importance of alternative historical records, as much of black history was passed down orally.

The main scene of *The America Play*, when Brazil discovers his father's body (he is alive), he decides it is time to finally lay him to rest in peace. The Foundling Father sits quietly in his own coffin, refusing burial. During the nineteenth century, most blacks were not given memorial burials at the church; they were buried as animals, unlike whites. In *The America Play*, the Foundling Father's "lack of proper burial" symbolize the lives of many blacks. So that,

they dug the holes that held and honored the white men and women of their history. The grave digger moved to the west as part of his heavenly mission to dig his own hole to hold a black body and stories, but when it came time for him to die, no one was there to dig for him. His mission is revived by the second generation, led by his son Brazil, who attempts to climb a ladder out of the Hole of History. According to Parks, Brazil is attempting to enhance his legacy as a gravedigger in order to assert a new self-assertion or true identity to the rest of the world, something that the previous black man never achieved.

Parks believes that history is written by those in power, and as a result, much of African American history, particularly stories of historical strife, has been excluded from the canon and is widely ignored. The omission of African American history from the canon of American history represents the Great Hole of History. "He dug the hole, and it held him" (p.159). The Foundling Father is contained by the hole or the whole of Park's wordplay as he digs. As he digs deeper, the hole literally swallows him. Metaphorically, the entire history envelops him and confines him in a constructed historical narrative as he searches for the unremembered past. Because he comes from a family of "diggers," the Foundling Father has spent his entire life digging. Parks uses the term "digging" to refer to all black contributions and achievements on American land since they were laded from slavery ships; all deeds were undermined by white men. As African Americans, they must unearth their rights and legacy in order to advance their future as equal, legitimate sons of the American nation: "FOUNDLING FATHER AS ABRAHAM LINCOLN. The Lesser Known was a Digger by trade. From a family of Diggers. Digged graves. He was known in Small Town to dig his graves quickly and neatly. This brought him steady business". (p.160)

*The America play* is based on political events that occurred in Los Angeles in 1991 as an African American man was involved in a police chase.

When they finally caught him up, he was beaten and shot multiple times to death. Someone caught it on videotape on the same street, and this became direct evidence of a black man being mistreated by white cops. However, this inevitable evidence disappeared from the courtroom. Therefore, protesters massed for days, killing many African Americans people and injuring thousands more. Parks referred to such events in the play *Through some gunshot*. When the truth has been changed, Parks after two years raises a very important question about the whole American history and how many facts might be swallowed in the American hole. The great hole of history is that big old gaping hole in the history of minority groups, particularly African Americans, because American history has been written and documented by the "great white man." Parks suggests there is no accurate information on the true day-by-day lives of minority groups. So the writings before this play are absolutely distorted, like the Los Angeles event, so the purpose of the gunshots symbolizes all of the black men and women who have been attacked, beaten or killed by dominated power in the past and never documented. Every gunshot sound in the play is representative of the hundreds' lives of minority who have been completely excluded from history. That is why Parks made the main character without an identity or lesser-known versus the greater known. As a result, the well-known are all the people who have been written down in history, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and all the white people, and the gravedigger are all those about whom we know nothing, such as native Americans, African Americans, and their perceptions and strife in the early days of the American nation (Miller,2000,n.p).

Parks uses the poor black gravedigger in Abraham Lincoln's costume in a deeper and more complex symbolism. The term "Forefathers of America" refers to the country's founding fathers, but the country was not founded solely by white men. It was built on the shoulders of Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans. Other races were dominated by whites, who wrote a history about them. They had resources and political power as

chosen people by God. They excluded the others and their roles, like the protagonist the Foundling Father who was searching for his place in the Archives. He documented his daily actions, saving his most prized possessions for his stories for his people. He wanted to make his history in theatre. "To elevate best future you should have fair past"(Parks,1995,n.p).The Foundling Father, as a visitor to the Park, is exiled from his home and yearns for his own place in history. He is in touch with and negotiates both the present and the past, just like a gravedigger. Furthermore, he refuses to be buried and thus silenced until his version of historical truth is complete. Because the Black Lesser Known is stuck in a historical era (the Emancipation Proclamation), that refuses to recognize or liberate him from the Great Hole of History. Readers and audience alike get the impression that the Lesser Known's (African) identity is still waiting for an opportunity to declare and insert itself into history (Nabih,2016,p.76).

The epigraph that begins *The America Play* which is from John Locke, an English philosopher and Enlightenment thinker of the fifteenth century, who stated that "In the beginning, all the world was America" (p.159). Parks explains her thoughts behind this epigraph. Putting it at the beginning of the play and also in the program notes everyone has been filling it with "tshatshks" since the beginning, which refers to whatever someone brings of their culture, religion, or way of life. This empty land called "America" belongs to no one; it belongs to all who have lived here (Pearce,p. 26).

In *The America Play*, Parks reimagines this complicated relationship with the land/soil, with a black gravedigger dressed as Lincoln working in the dirt. Parks exposes the social elevation through a black man disguised as the great emancipator arrives in the land to unearth the stories that have been left out of history. His work as a gravedigger honours the slaves who worked the land, while his aesthetic embodiment of Lincoln creates a new history, even a liberated past. He reveals his quest for the stories of those whose lives and



identities were buried in the earth, those who were considered the lowest of the low in class ranks, the victims who died on plantations.

There is a similarity between The Great Hole of History and the Foundling Father, both of whom are empty of their own contents and waiting to be filled with others'. The Foundling Father's own identity is never mentioned in the text because he is a vacuum being filled with the properties of lost events and the unknown black identities who lost in the history space. He is The Great Hole of History's human version, which is being filled with one-sided and incomplete personas of individuals and events. The impersonation of Lincoln is the first ring of the long chain. Parks wrote this play to "complete the holes and the lost rings in the chain " because all history is biased. She attempts to give a true glorified image of Afro-Americans to the new generation about their past by challenging the typical pose of Afro-Americans shaped over time (p.14).

David Savran discusses the statement "Be Your Own Person, Write Your Own Story" in an interview with Parks (Savran, 2014, p.71). Parks never gave the main character a name . The protagonist was always known as the Foundling Father or the gravedigger . What she was attempting to demonstrate here was that in the play, he was not supposed to be given a name because he was living as a shadow of someone else (Abraham Lincoln). Throughout the play, all he did was the star as Abraham Lincoln, which brought him fame and fortune. Except when he was a gravedigger with his wife and son, he was never his own person. One of Parks' points in writing this play was that she was able to create her people's own history, to be proud of her roots and relate to the main character, because he could have created his own story if he had spent his life digging graves with his family. Parks encourages African Americans to be confident in themselves and maintain their identities, remembering that they have their own roots and traditions on their ancestral continent, even if they were forced to board slave ships. Previously, dominant men came from different countries to

---

America as prisoners, outcasts, or religious persecutors. Therefore, Parks contends that African Americans, like the rest of society, have contributed equally to the formation of the nation. Parks tended to demonstrate that if the Foundling Father had lived his own life rather than trying to live someone else's, he could have been the "Great Man" of his own story.

Act two starts, when Lucy and Brazil, the Foundling Father's wife and son, hear the echo of the gunshot. Lucy re-starts the digging, revealing that the Foundling Father died alone and without a proper burial. The continuing gunshot in Act Two is clear victimization of African Americans in the United States today.

As the action advances, Lucy prepares Brazil for "the Hole of Wonders" (p.176). The son, having absorbed his mother's teachings, is led to say: "This Hole is sort of our treasures. When my father died, he left everything to me and my mother. And when she leaves, she's going to give me everything!!" (p.185). The phrases "our sort of inheritance" and "all to me" show Lucy's success in instilling in her son a love of truth, self-confidence and participation in resurrecting the past. The verbs "died," "left," emphasize the son's understanding that the "Hole of Wonders" is a transitory possession. Brazil, like his parents, will leave it to his children along with the African heritage one day. Some critics regard Lucy as the mother, or in other words, the African American legacy. She teaches and encourages her new generation to follow her to elevate their position as black people have their history and roots that will come down from one generation to the next in this society.

Parks has focused on the social elevation in Act Two through a strong black woman who enforces her son for a better future than his ancestors. Lucy's strong historical enthusiasm resound as she frequently addresses her son: "You're stopped" and "Dig on, Brazil. Can not stop diggin till you dig up somethin. Your Daddy's name was a Digger" (p.174).

She wants her son to take the responsibility seriously and without delay, as indicated by the phrases “Dig on” and “Cant stop diggin” While “till you dig up somethin” is an attempt to encourage the son by stirring his curiosity, reference to his father’s trade reminds the son of a familiar example to him. The strong woman like Lucy follows this strategy, leaving no possibility for Brazil to choose otherwise. As Lucy enforces her son’s love for the past, she teaches him how to deal with their rich archives: "You dig that something up, you brush that something off, you give that something a designated place. It’s our place. Along with their other discoveries, In the Hall of Wonders, Uh, place in the Hall of Wonders right along with the rest of the Wonders, hear? " (p.176). Here are a series of instructions reflecting Lucy’s strong commitment to the supreme goal of correcting and elevating the image of black people and their place in America. It is a sense she is now trying to transmit to her son with the same degree of intensity and enthusiasm. Once a thing related to their history is discovered, it will very soon be brushed by so many brown hands to be given a "designated place" in world of literature and history. It is a duty that assigned to every Foundling Father, every Lucy, and every Brazil in society.

In an interview with David Sarvan, Parks explains the recurring idea of digging. She says that writing, like archaeology, is like digging, and Brazil is digging because she is digging. Archaeologists try to collect valuable items such as gold or treasures from our ancient ancestors, as she is doing on her stage. Brazil, digging into the nation's past to revive and elevate his father's place in history (Sarvan, 1999, p.161). As a result, this performance can be interpreted as Parks' reference to the Great Hole of history's search for African Americans' true identity. Since birth, black youth have developed their identities as a reaction to external social and political forces that limit their role in the school, the street, or the workplace. Parks insists on building African American existence according to their role as brown hands that cultivate American land. Their real identity is

the fruit of hundreds of years of serving and protecting the nation. Parks is certain that as an African American woman, she must benefit from the treasures of their forefathers, which are buried deep in history. They have treasures and should be proud of themselves for being important and influential in American society.

Parks criticizes the reasons why African Americans have been imprisoned in a specific historical image which have been shaped by others; this stereotypical image must be broken. Parks' characters consciously expose their identity, either to compensate for a missing part or to reflect on their present experience of an earlier situation. To correct the image of black people, *The America Play* reconstructs historical events by repeating the American drama with black characters at its center, which explains why "the historically 'white' incident of the assassination of Lincoln is played in blackface" (Schmidt,2005, p.199). In other words, the missing part of this history is the strategy enables black actors to emerge, advance in their search for identity, and finally improve their social and political existence.

The Foundling Father, for example, goes "out West" to make his fortune, followed by his wife Lucy and son Brazil. This is a direct reference to the significance of westward migration in American history, particularly during Lincoln's presidency, when white settlers colonized Native American land in the western United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Because "Manifest Destiny" was a white supremacist ideology, the official church ignored the other races when it called for the white man to conquer the West as a heavenly mission. The Foundling Fathers' westward migration is clearly ironic, but it also demonstrates how migration, whether as pioneers, immigrants, refugees, or slaves, unites Americans. Similarly, while Brazil and Lucy are looking for the Foundling Father, Lucy exclaims, "Sweet land of?" but then appears to forget what comes next, to which Brazil responds, "Of liberty!" Their rather unfortunate circumstances suggest they are joking, and Lucy strategically

forgets the punch line: the promise of "liberty" is central to American democracy, but it has always applied unequally to people of different races. Clearly, liberty has played a small, even forgettable, role in Lucy's life as a black woman.

Metaphorically, Parks regard America as the sweet land of liberty, in which the American democracy for liberty discriminated between the people and divided them into groups according to their races. Lucy is portrayed as a black mother in search of liberty in the American wasteland. And Brazil, the heir to history whose liberty was trapped in the footsteps of his founding Father, who worshipped the Father of Liberty, Abraham Lincoln, Therefore, Brazil has hope of finding true liberty in the future. Parks inspired her concept of liberty from Nelson Mandela, the revolutionary political leader and the first president of South Africa (1913-2013), who stated that:

liberty is born within the human self, which breaks the strongest outside chains. There is no easy road to freedom. Black people should have the freedom to achieve success. We must therefore act together, for national liberty, nation building, and the birth of a new world. Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace and liberty for all.(Mandela,2018,n.p)

Parks believes that they must have liberty on American soil. That is why Brazil responds confidently to his mother, who has forgotten her right in her country. He asserts the "sweet land of liberty." In other words, America belongs to all. For that, a new generation must be able to exercise liberty in all fields of social life.

Brazil represents a turning point in the gravedigger's family, considering the African American legacy his inheritance to recreate the history of his forefathers, the gravediggers. Parks is referring to the new generation's independent identity, tracing his ancestor s contributions to American land,

which are symbolized by Parks in the term "grave digging," the contribution that is buried by the dominant systems in the heart of the nation's history. The question is whether Brazil will ever be able to develop his father's legacy, as he admits near the end of the play: "We could say I just may follow in thuh footsteps of my foefather" (p.110).

In the final scene, Brazil appears capable of finding his own identity by dealing with the past, as he starts a business called "The Hall of Wonders," in which he displays all the treasures he discovered in the Great Hole of History and inherited from his father. After reciting all of the historical objects in his possession, Brazil presents the audience with his newest legend: "One of the Greats Himself!" Here he refers to his new wonder, his father's corpse with a wound in his head: "Take note of the top hat and frock coat, just like the greats. Take note of the death wound: thuh great black hole in that great head. And look at how this great head is bleedin. Take note of thuh last words. And thy final sighs.—And how thut nation mourns. "(p.111). Brazil has displayed his nameless father's corpse to allude to his own myth. His father, the Lesser Known to represent the black people who lost their identity, their victimization, and blood in American records. One could argue that in Brazil's digging, Lincoln and the Lesser Known finally merge, two sides of the same coin, both of them a symbol of black freedom who are buried on American land. The act of digging can be interpreted as an act of remembering, or in Brazil's case, an attempt to place his father on the historical map. Unfortunately, both the Lesser Known and Lincoln will be remembered only for their artifacts and their constructed speeches.

Parks encourages black youth to elevate their identity as African Americans. According to Parks, individuals and communities participate in elevating their self-ego when they love themselves to the point of exercising their true role to correct wrongs, misinformation, exploitation, and distortions in their possibilities as citizens. Parks expresses the realities of racialized

---

intergenerational trauma and its legacy while striving for greater human respect and dignity, as well as a higher quality of life and social elevation. As a result, the most political racial/ethnic identity ascribed to people of African descent is a black identity, and the word "Black" must be capitalized to demonstrate their humanity and right to self-naming and self-definition. In her book, *Critical Perspectives on Bell Hooks, Loving Blackness as Political Resistance*, Bell Hooks, an American author, professor, feminist, and social activist, states:

Collectively, black people and our allies in struggle are empowered when we practice self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines practices of domination. Loving blackness as political resistance transforms our ways of looking and being, and thus creates the conditions necessary for us to move against the forces of domination and death and reclaim black life. (Hooks,2009,p.155)

Parks believes that her people should use all of the discrimination factors of their roots and skin color to improve their position in American society. *The America Play* presents an "act that will go into history," according to Michel Foucault's term "counter – memory or counter history" that developed in 1970, which refers to the kind of remembering that alters our relations to the past and changes our present understanding of truth. Foucault offers a critical approach to the practice of remembering and forgetting, which is central for resisting oppression and dominant ideologies. The absence of white bodies on stage is critical to the success of this project (Pickett, 2005, n.p). Parks offers one idea for *The America Play*: "Well, one meaning or reading from the hidden part , is the fact that there are all black people in the play. And that's something I feel very strongly about repeating: the past event will change the current view"(Paul,2014,p.n). She wants the Americans world presented through blacks . Parks claims that Lincoln, as a great freedom father, and her black gravedigger are two sides of the American nation, both products of the land and the harsh circumstances that have existed since America's independence .Therefore, Parks shows to her audience that, her people should go on to get

---

higher positions in all levels.

As previously stated, the gravedigger, who has witnessed great historical events, aspires to be a part of American mythology. In Act One, The Foundling Father says, "Much later, when the Lesser Known had made a name for himself, he began to record his own movements. He hoped he'd be remembered by future generations. As if following in the footsteps of the Great Man" ( p.162). The Foundling Father was inspired by American mythology and decided to establish a place for African American mythology in order to empower African Americans in future. The Big Hole is a chasm or a metaphorical discrimination between people due to their race. It is a third space where one can create one's own existence, identity, and glory. The Hole is a place where history is rewritten and revised. S.E.Wilmer, claims in his book *Restaging the Nation: Suzan-Lori Parks' Works* (2000) that "in *The America Play*, Parks stages 'the great hole of history' as a symbol for an absence, particularly the absence of African American history." (Wilmer, 2000, p.443) and he adds, "Lucy and Brazil stand like two homeless pilgrims in the great hole of history, digging for family memories and a sense of heritage" (p.445). Parks' attempt to give the Lesser Known a distinct identity, language, and culture. Thus, the Lesser Known acts as a Black adopted son for Abraham Lincoln, who is estranged from his true nature as a result of lack of belonging ( Reese,2015,p.65). Parks replaces the white and historical character in her play with a black character because the black character's identity is only represented by the white's perception. She wants to elevate the African Americans to a higher level than all other people in the country, and she also wants to elevate the history of the dead black people who were victimized in order to build a nation only for whites .Accordingly, Parks provides a new perspective for the next generation.

Parks focuses on searching for true identity clues for African Americans by attending to language, utilizing African-American dialects and the black



---

vernacular tradition as well as her technique of repetition and revision. She is a lover of "words, sounds, and styles of language," an aspect that Amy S. Green highlights when she describes Suzan-Lori Parks, as black writer that Conscious that hers is no easy task, Parks rises to the challenge and fights, through language, western denial of the centrality of the Africanist presence in western culture. She provides world literature with several dramatic contributions, fighting the exclusion of the African-American experience from American history. Therefore, *The America Play* is an embodiment of her strife toward resurrecting the past and saving the black community from ever existing on the margins of American society.

The final speech concludes both the act and the play, leaving the audience with the image of the dead Foundling Father sitting in a chair as the mastermind of his fate. Some critics, including Kara Riley, who recently shed light on the intersection of literature and reality. She claims that Barack Obama's election (2008) will be remembered as a watershed moment in history and the strongest motivation for African American social elevation. For the first time in American history, an African American has been elected as a President of the USA. The absence of a strong leader, in general, creates a need for change and a search for identity. As president, Barack Obama has invoked Lincoln's presidency and his legacy for African political culture. Like Martin Luther King and Jesse Jackson before him, Obama takes up Lincoln's place in a collective black imagination. Obama continued to revalue the relationship of his race to politics in his speech "A More Perfect Union" that he presenting it in Philadelphia, and in so doing, he made the Constitution the symbol of the national unity he sought to achieve. In it, Obama mapped his genetic heritage onto the nation to resolve in himself the country's tensions between black demands and attitudes that at times made him "cringe" This confession allowed him to claim the legacy of equality and white resentment toward those demands ( Paul,2014,p.220). Obama narrated his origins both 'in Kenya and Kansas. He articulated a liberal multiculturalism to

redefine African American self-identity. Shortly after the Philadelphia speech, Obama once again raised his lineage and his international experiences, this time connecting them to his grandparents' participation in American war efforts to affirm his deep patriotic commitments. He said:

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. "I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived the Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a black grandmother who worked in her wild field in Africa to deepen my roots while I was overseas".(p.221)

In this context, Obama shaped the meaning of his heritage and its relationship to American national identity by tying it to the patriotism of war and war production, which elevated his status as an African American, and as a message to all African Americans to consider their important role in the past and definitely in the future.

### **Conclusion**

From a social point of view, Parks presents the African American identity through the use of Abraham Lincoln as a symbol of black American liberty. The Foundling Father who abandoned his wife and son to impersonate Abraham Lincoln in a park known as the Great Hole of History. According to Parks, the hole is a grave for all black people who died unjustly and silently in America. the nameless African American victims who died alone never being properly buried according to the church rules. Parks used large hidden treasures to fill the missing place of her people and to revive black American history. "Dig a hole" is Parks' golden strategy for continuing to write plays that elevate the true image of her forefathers and give self-confidence to new generations to find their real position in society.

Furthermore, Brazil, the gravedigger's son, represents the black new generation as he digs and digs for black traces in the hole in order to revive and

honor his father's legacy. Slavery's oppressive tactics were a deliberate and hostile erasure of African American culture and history. Children were taken away from their parents. Most African Americans ignored their forefathers' names. As a result, the play emphasizes the importance of alternative historical records because American history is faked and narrated by a single side. Much of black history was passed down orally because they were prevented from reading or writing. In the crucial image of *The America Play*, when Brazil discovers his father's body still unburied, waiting for his narrative that has never been heard by the world, he decides it is time to finally lay him to rest. The Foundling Father's "lack of proper burial" is a symbolism of the lives of blacks. During the nineteenth century, most blacks were not given memorial burials at the church. To conclude, in *The America Play*, Brazil is attempting to enhance his family's legacy as a "gravedigger" who constantly searches for his buried great ancestor inheritance in order to assert new self-assertion or true identity to the rest of the world, something that the previous black man never achieved.

تعزيز الوجود الأفريقي الأمريكي في مسرحية سوزان لوري باركس "مسرحية امريكا"  
الكلمات المفتاحية : الارتقاء الاجتماعي ، الفجوة العظيمة للتاريخ ، الادب الافريقي  
امريكي

ا. د. ناهض فالح سليمان

اخلاص كرجي حسن

جامعة ديالى/كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

### الملخص

إنّ المفهوم الأساسي لهذا البحث هو الارتقاء الاجتماعي الذي تناولته الكاتبة الامريكية من اصل افريقي سوزان لوري باركس في اعمالها المسرحية ،لتشجيع الامريكان من أصل افريقي لإعادة النظر في مكانتهم الاجتماعي في هذا البلد. حيث تتناول هذه الدراسة موضوع التطور الاجتماعي من خلال تبني نظرية الهوية الاجتماعية لهنري تاجفيل في سبعينيات القرن الماضي والبحث عن الشعور بالانتماء في التجربة الأمريكية الأفريقية من خلال المجتمع والتاريخ الكبيرين. سوزان لوري باركس كاتبة مسرحية معاصرة تنحدر من أصل أفريقي ، حيث حصلت على تكريم وشهرة واسعة لدى النقاد في وقت مبكر من حياتها. زوّدت باركس الأدب العالمي بالعديد من الإسهامات الدرامية التي تهدف فيها إلى مواجهة استبعاد

تجربة الامريكان من ذوي الاصول الأفريقية في التاريخ الأمريكي. وكانت مسرحياتها تجسيدا لمحاولتها نحو إحياء الماضي وإنقاذ المجتمع الأسود من التواجد على هامش المجتمع الأمريكي. لذا يعتبر الارتقاء الاجتماعي المفهوم الرئيسي الذي ناقشته سوزان لوري باركس في مسرحيتها (1993)، حيث تقدم باركس موضوع الفراغ التاريخي وأهمية الفجوة *America play The* كاستعارة تستخدمها لإعادة كتابة التاريخ من خلال أسلوبها المجازي المتميز، مما يمكّنها من إبراز أفكارها بوضوح. وفقاً لباركس، لم تتم مناقشة التراث الأفريقي الأمريكي بشكل عادل. نتيجة لذلك، يجب عليها تتبع وجود أسلافها عبر التاريخ الأمريكي من أجل تحسين حياتهم في المجتمع الأمريكي اليوم. لذا تبحث هذه الدراسة التطور الاجتماعي للهوية الأمريكية الأفريقية من خلال استخدام شخصيه أبراهام لنكولن كرمز للحرية الأمريكية. حيث تقدم شخصية حفار القبور الأسود البسيط، أو "الأب اللقيط"، الذي تخلى عن زوجته وابنه لانتحال شخصية أبراهام لنكولن في حديقة تُعرف باسم الفراغ العظيم للتاريخ. تقدم مسرحية أمريكا تشابهاً قوياً بين الأب اللقيط الأسود المجهول والرئيس أبراهام لينكولن. حيث تناقش حقيقة ان الرجلين وجهان لتاريخ واحد وهو تاريخ امريكا.

## References

- Anada , Rie (2015) *Enacting Black Suffering and Laughter: Creative Restorations of Black Experiences in Suzan-Lori Parks' Plays*, Osaka. University press.
- Jiggetts, Shelby, and Suzan-Lori Parks. (1996). *Interview with Suzan-Lori Parks. Callaloo* . P. 309-317.
- Malkin, V.G. (2002). *Unguarded Gates: A History of America's Immigration Crisis* . Oxford print.
- Mandela, Nelson, (2018). *Long walk to freedom*, bibliography: National Library of Australia.
- Miller, Geoff. (2000). "40 years in Los Angeles Magazine", *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., 323-857 6000.m.d. With over 40 years combined laser experience, Dr. Miller and Dr. Seltzer .
- Park, Yong-Nam. (2008). *The Melting Pot Where Nothing Melted: The Politics Of Subjectivity In the play of Suzan-Lori Parks, Wendy Wasserstein, and Tony Kushner*. Diss. Indiana University , 2008. Web. 14 May 2015.
- Paul, Heike. (2014) *The Myths That Made America ,An Introduction to*

- 
- American Studies* . © transcript Verlag, Bielefeld print.
- Pickett, Brent,(2005). *On the Use and Abuse of Foucault for Politics*. New York, Toronto ,Oxford.
- Pearce, Michele. (1994).Alien Nation: An Interview with the Playwright [Suzan-Lori Parks]." *American Theatre* .
- Reese, La Tanya L.( 2005) *Black Surrogacy: Refiguring Myth, Memory, and Motherhood in Suzan-Lori Parks' "the America Play", Topdog/Underdog " and "in the Blood".*" Howard University, 2005. Ann Arbor: *Pro Quest*. Web. 14 May 2015.
- Savran, David, ed.( 1999).*The Playwright's Voice: American Dramatists on Memory, Writing and the Politics of Culture*. Theatre Communications . Group, Print.
- Schmidt, Kerstin.(2005) "The America Play: Playing America." *The Theatre of Transformation: Postmodernism in American Drama (Postmodern Studies 37)*. By Schmidt. Amsterdam: Rodopi, p. 198-211.
- Wilmer, S.E. (2000).*Restaging the Nation: The Work of Suzan-Lori Parks*. *Modern Drama*, 43 fall 2000. Print.