The Cornucopia of Characters in Edward P Jones's *Lost in the City* and *All Aunt Hagar's Children*

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Abstract:

This essay will examine the character demographics and symbolism in Edward J Jones's short story collections *Lost in the City* and *All Aunt Hagar's Children*. The study will discuss the distinctive aesthetic of the "cornucopia of characters he has built in Washington DC, which proves to be realistic in a real scenario and will offer a specific symbolic portrayal of black's existence under blacks." Jones uses discourse for his characters that contains characteristics of the Southern American dialect. Subtle speech differences start to show up as these various personas engage and communicate with one another. In addition, speech patterns and inclinations start to show themselves as these characters interact and speak. These trends point to changes in the Black community's speech and the location, demography, and general character of Washington, DC.

The paper uses descriptive approach to the study. The research was analytical and involved the use of secondary data. The literature of both short story books have been critically analyzed and discussed. There are 28 evenly distributed between *Lost in the City* and *All Aunt Hagar's Children*; all of them are mostly set inside the confines of the country's capital. They are populated by hard-working individuals, some of whom work for federal government organizations, while many others toil as bus drivers, merchants, chauffeurs, and retail employees to break into the middle class. Doctors, attorneys, and soldiers are among them. There are some criminals and slackers among the group as well, but Wyoming has its fair share of those. Perhaps people who have received such delicately accurate literary depiction also merits political representation. Perhaps now is the time to mention that almost all of Jones' Washingtonians are Black, much like around half of their real-life counterparts. Language also creates barriers between older and younger characters, particularly when the older characters, like the majority of people in Washington, DC, are immigrants from more southern American cities. Three older women—the mother, Miss Agatha, and Aunt Penny—have maintained some of the Southern slang they acquired while growing up in Alabama in "All Aunt Hagar's Children

KEYWORDS: Edward P. Jones*, Lost in The City*, *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, Character Sketch, Symbolism

INTRODUCTION:

Between *Lost in the City* (1992) and *All Aunt Hagar's Children* (2006) by Edward P Jones, there are a total of 28 short tales, the majority of which are set in the nation's capital Washington D.C. They are populated by hard-working individuals, some of whom work for federal government organizations, while many others toil as bus drivers, merchants, chauffeurs, and retail employees to break into the middle class. Doctors, attorneys, and soldiers are among them. There are some criminals and slackers among the group as well, but Wyoming has its fair share of those. Perhaps a person that has received such a delicately accurate literary depiction also merits political representation. Perhaps now is the

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time to mention that almost all of Jones' Washingtonians are Black, much like around half of their real-life counterparts.

The kind of people that characters are is shaped by the tales they tell, their beliefs, and the acts they conduct. To create what he believes to be authentic portraits of individuals who immigrated from the South to Washington, DC, and the Southern values and traditions they carry with them, Jones employs all three of these factors. Individuals in DC are moulded into the types of people who can easily combine religious and superstitious ideas into one cohesive system that includes both the worship of faith and the ritual of the supernatural (Jackson, Lawrence P., and Edward P. Jones., 2000).

There is a clear generational divide in the stories. The traditional beliefs and practices of the elder Black community's ancient South are lost on a young Black generation. A slow-moving White incursion that results from gentrification widens the disparity. Black people are compelled to move and leave their hometowns. As a result, a significant severing of community and familial ties deepens the gap between the younger generations and their commitment to the past (Coleman, James W, 2016).

The depiction of the Black community in the works of Jones is his characteristic feature. In his other work, named *The Known World*, he has depicted the same. The central concern of the story focuses on black ownership of other slaves. With Henry Townsend's passing, the system of law and order broke down as slaves fled for their lives, liberated slaves were returned to servitude, and the violent behaviour of the white community living nearby was no longer constrained. As a result, the narrative fully explains the significance of its title. Unique slaves from Townsend's Known World deteriorate into a being that combines freedom and anarchy. The agony of slavery is not lessened by the knowledge that free black people like Fern and Henry held slaves. Instead, it demonstrates how pernicious slavery was and reminds the reader that it was not the work of a single lunatic or despot. The most significant element of all was that it was an open, legitimate social institution that was approved by the society it existed (Bassard, K. C. 2008). The objectives of the study are to explore the Cornucopia of characters *in Lost in the City*. The study also explores the Cornucopia of characters in *All Aunt Hagar's Children.*

Literature review:

(Eggers, Dave, 2006) discusses the Lost in the City. Eleven of the fourteen tales in Lost in the City have women as the main protagonists, and of those eleven, nine feature women as the main speakers. "An Orange Line Train to Ballston," "The Sunday Following Mother's Day," and "His Mother's House" is three stories with female main characters and main male speakers; nevertheless, "The Store" is a narrative in which main male character cedes speakership to a female character. According to the pattern seen above, just 7% of all the words Jones wrote were said by men, compared to nearly 12% by women. Since male protagonists and male speakers have generally been given preference in fiction, Jones' use of female characters is a distinctive aspect of his writing. Women play significant parts in Jones' writings, and their observations of DC offer fresh perspectives on the lives of people of colour. Jones's mother, Jeanette Jones, had a significant effect on how he portrayed women. As Jones portrays them in "Dark Night" and "Marie," women preserve and hold alive the shared African American history via storytelling. Jones supports the traditional portrayal of the Black woman, especially the mother, as the educator and guardian of the community by female writers like Toni Cade Bambara and Alice Walker.

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(Jackson, Lawrence P., and Edward P. Jones, 2000) talk about Jones's "All Aunt Hagar's Children". Even more astounding than what could be deduced through attentive reading and study is Jones' ability to portray the feminine voice. Since there are many male characters in the story, a traditional reading might suggest that Jones writes mostly about other men. However, when we take into account the prominent position of women as both primary characters and primary speakers, we see that these male characters are frequently taking a backseat to the daughters, sisters, and mothers who take the helm in many of the stories. The way a person moves around the City is also influenced by their gender. The descriptive method of the investigation have been used in the paper. Secondary materials have been used in the analytical aspect of the study. The 28 short tale books, evenly divided between *Lost in the City* and *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, will be subjected to a critical examination will discuss in the analysis section.

All Aunt Hagar's Children:

Jones uses discourse for his characters that contains characteristics of the Southern American dialect. His characters span from prostitutes to physicians, from kids playing street rope to elderly people on the hunt for a killer. Speech patterns and inclinations start to show themselves as these many characters interact and speak with one another. These patterns show alterations in the Black community's speech as well as in the topography, population, and general appearance of Washington, DC.

When characters use thoughts and words to communicate their opinions regarding Southern speaking, one speech pattern is demonstrated. For instance, Horace, a wealthy and intelligent man, finds himself surrounded by prisoners who speak a language far different from his own in "A Rich Man." Horace tries to impress the other prisoners by speaking as well as he can in "white man's English". However, Horace discovers that speaking in a lower range to mirror his cellmates' informal speech makes communication far more successful. Similar to this, Terence, a rich future doctor, states, "I don't care about it," after ordering Amanda, a reputed terrible neighbor, to relocate her car in "Bad Neighbours." All you can do is relocate the item to a different location. First off, "I am not moving shit', Amanda responds. First of all, it's nothing. It is timeless. Thirdly, you'd best get out of my face, dammit. Man, this is a free nation". Readers may observe how various Black characters interact with and respond to the usage of the Southern slang in this narrative possibly more than in any other in the collection (Jones, Edward P., and Peter Francis James. 2006).

Language also creates barriers between older and younger characters, particularly when the older characters, like the majority of people in Washington, DC, are immigrants from more southern American cities. Three older women—the mother, Miss Agatha, and Aunt Penny—have maintained some of the Southern slang they acquired while growing up in Alabama in *All Aunt Hagar's Children*. In keeping with her Southern roots, Miss Agatha offers the anonymous narrator some advice: "Maybe you shouldn't have been working in' today, on the Lord's day" (Graham, Maryemma. "Edward P. Jones. 2006). "Whatcha going to be takin' up?" This was a question the narrator asked a prospective college student earlier, observing that he stated it the way his Southern mother would have (Jones, Edward P., and Peter Francis James. 2006). These expressions highlight the generational divide as well as the Southern heritage of several characters in the short tales. Similar to this, Imogene Holloway, an elderly root worker in "Root Worker," utilizes more Southern vernacular heard in North Carolina than Glynnis, a young doctor who speaks great English. The difference in ages may portend a change in how DC's Black residents speak.

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Although there are instances of these tendencies throughout the book, not all of the stories follow them. For instance, the nameless narrator's father and grandparents are from North Carolina in "Spanish in the Morning," but their conversation does not follow typical Southern idioms. In this tale, we can see how deviating from African American Vernacular English could be a deliberate decision based on career advancement. In addition to demonstrating that a portion of the South has moved to the Capitol, Jones, one of the few Black writers to consistently use Black DC as a setting in his work, demonstrates how the movement has influenced the way African Americans of various ages and social statuses speak and consider speech over the timelines of the stories. Moving outside of the South does not always entail abandoning Southern values, customs, and behaviors. Whether these individuals are aware of their southern roots or are making an effort to flee from them, the South remains with them even after they leave their homes and go to DC.

Despite having relocated to DC from South Carolina with his family when he was just seven, Noah Robinson "...still had the gentlemanly aspect of the countrified South about him" in "Adam Robinson acquires grandparents and a little sister" (Graham, Maryemma. "Edward P. Jones., 2006). Noah Robinson exemplifies how these customs and etiquette stick with individuals even after they leave the South by maintaining his Southern manners. However, some individuals relocate to DC to leave the South and separate themselves from the lives they formerly led. In "Blindsided," Roxanne Stapleton, a Louisiana native who had relocated to Washington, DC, notices a lady on the bus who had "a southern accent so thick it offended Roxanne's ears" and reflects on how she had tried to get rid of her accent so that no one would know where she was from (Graham, Maryemma. "Edward P. Jones., 2006). As an example of how some people who relocate to DC, although having relatives and roots in the South, nevertheless do not wish to have any connection to where they came from, Roxanne's efforts to lose her accent and remove herself from her Southern history. However, no matter how far away from the South characters travel, they are constantly drawn back. In "Root Worker," when conventional medicine is unable to assist her mother, Dr. Glynnis Holloway brings her to a root worker in North Carolina. Her mother's nurse informs Glynnis that "occasionally black people from the South need to go back home," adding that sometimes "leave, [they] run away and don't know how much [they'll] need to go back home one day" after moving to DC from North Carolina when she was born (Graham, Maryemma. "Edward P. Jones., 2006). Even though Glynnis has spent her whole life in Washington, DC, she still retains ties to the South in certain ways. Many of the people in the stories are both intensely religious and excessively superstitious; for many of the characters, these two beliefs go hand in hand. Characters from the religious and superstitious, from the South and DC, may cohabit thanks to the rites incorporated into both religious and superstitious customs. As said by Aubrey's father in the story "In the Blink of God's Eye," going to church "is but a small part of your whole life, son... God also has a vast memory. This interaction between a father and son exemplifies the significance of religion in these people's lives as well as how superstition occasionally seeps into religious practices. The way Aubrey's father describes going to church gives the impression that making the minimal effort to do so is a ritual of insurance in case God might notice and remember. For the people in Jones' stories, religion is not only a ceremony or something to believe in; it is also a set of guidelines to be followed.

Lost In The City:

The physical location of a character becomes an identification marker that establishes their identity group and regulates their movement within neighborhoods. As a result, interactions with and connection to other community members shape identity and contribute to a sense of belonging. It is possible to interpret Jones' tales as attempts to retain the geographical identity of the Black DC where

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he was raised. When the people of Myrtle Street are expected to be relocated by the railroad, Lost in the City begins with the unpredictability that DC residents go through in "The Girl Who Raised Pigeons." The neighborhood makes assumptions about who will be evicted by the railroad and, therefore, by DC's drive for advancement. Jones uses this storytelling technique to create a picture of the City before gentrification.

As in "The Night Rhonda Ferguson was Killed," the protagonists' feeling of belonging is determined by their ties to their local communities. The Black community as a whole is divided into insiders and outsiders by the boundaries of neighborhoods. Similarly, "The Store" shows how communities influence identity and behavior. While working at the business has increased his feeling of neighborhood, an encounter with a police officer causes the narrator to swear off White neighborhoods. In addition, he has been requested to be a godfather for several newborns in the new area, indicating a link to a bigger collective Black identity. However, working at the shop broadens his community.

In "The Night Rhonda Ferguson was Killed," Pearl and Joyce establish new bonds as they work to create the neighborhood, and they will raise their sons. This bodily change not only signifies their passage from childhood to motherhood but also ushers them into a new group of friends and neighbors unrelated to their parents. Finally, in "His Mother's House," Joyce's son purchases her home less than a block from the apartment she and Pearl lived in as adolescents, solidifying the development of this new neighborhood. The commonality throughout these tales is how the protagonists' identities are shaped less by their residences than by how they move from one to the next. Jones employs settings and communities to strengthen the character development throughout the collection while also referring to the growth of Chocolate City, from which he is borrowing, by comprehending the connection between the person and the actual location of the house, or lack thereof.

One of the most intriguing parts of Jones' collection, *Lost in the City*, which has main characters of all ages, is how he arranges the stories such that the youngest character comes first and the oldest one comes last. Children appear as the primary character in three of the fourteen stories, or around 20% of the book, and makeup over 25% of all the characters. In Lost in the City, Jones gives both the very young and the very elderly, two historically disregarded or despised populations, a voice. The youthful characters' disregard for more ancient southern customs serves to illustrate a generational struggle in the novels (Jones, Edward P., 2009).

The experience of Marie Delaveaux Wilson in the short story "Marie" clearly illustrates the gap that is developing. By contrasting the reality of life in DC with what Marie documents for George Carter, the novel puts old values in stark contrast. The younger generation disrespects the elders and no longer adheres to traditional values. Marie is harmed and exposed as a result of her experiences. She uses violence as a tactic for establishing her authority in the City. Respectful behavior is instilled in the family's young members via example. But family dynamics have changed as a result of the metropolis. The behavior of the younger generation reflects this. Two narratives highlight how disconnected the younger generation is from the elder one. In "Young Lions," Caesar is expelled from his father's home and gradually makes his way into the criminal underworld. In "A New Man," Elain Cunningham flees her home and settles into the seedy side of city life. As a result, none of these two characters respects elders or customs (Eggers, Dave. 2006).

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The kids in this narrative are particularly aware of this upcoming change, and they quickly start using it as a form of insult to taunt and even offend one another. The children's uncertainty affects how they perceive the world and compels them to let go of whatever attachment they may have to their homes as an integral part of who they are. Otherwise, they run the danger of being severely hurt by the prospect that they will be the ones who "must go" (Eggers, Dave. 2006).

Conclusion:

Jones's tales immerse the reader in the daily lives of DC locals. Although Jones' characters' challenges and victories are not particular to his work, tying the characters' identities to certain places and times is. When readers have never visited a no-name farm in an unidentified Southern state or a remote farmhouse distant from the nearest metropolis, they are quick to dismiss stories as pure fantasy. Jones, however, requires the reader to realize M Street and New Jersey Avenue because of how those two locations are treated specifically, requiring the reader to confront the reality of the lives associated with those places.

Even if Jones' stories are made up, the reader is nonetheless connected to both the lives of the characters and the stories of the real-life DC because of the detailed topography.

Together, Lost in the City and All Aunt Hagar's Children present a varied portrait of how people in Washington, DC interact and coexist to create a cohesive, though complex, Black identity. Jones' made-up neighborhood captures the truth about Washington, DC: gentrification affects residents as well as structures. As the district "improves" neighborhood structures, they disperse, separate, and move members of the neighborhood who live and work together as a family, regardless of their genetic affinity.

The contrast between Jones' literary persona and the actual, torn-apart neighborhoods illustrates the intersections' genuine effects on the lives of urban planners, decision-makers, and the disregarded residents. Although Jones's emphasis on particular geography is distinctive to African American short story writing—and distinctive to American short story fiction in general—his stories demonstrate how particular locations serve as a bond between people and how disrupting those locations breaks that bond and the identity formed within it.

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