

Percival Everett's *Erasure*: How Are African Americans Erased?

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After centuries of slavery followed by decades of de jure and de facto racial segregation, the life of African Americans has finally improved. Today, many African Americans seem to enjoy the life of inconspicuous middle class citizens and yet, unbeknownst to most people, many African Americans are still grappling with identity issues, looking at the world through the prism of race. Thus, the color of their skin has remained a determining factor in the way they lead their life, but the discrimination that they have to face on a daily basis is concealed rather than overt.¹ Percival Everett's *Erasure* (2001) tells the story of Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, a middle-class African American academic and novelist overwhelmed both with family problems (his father's suicide, the murder of his sister, his brother's coming out, and his mother's Alzheimer's), and professional problems. The latter is particularly relevant to this essay since it has to do with racial categorization. Indeed, reviewers dismiss Ellison's novels for not being "black enough." Infuriated, Ellison decides to expose the biases of his critics by writing the parody of a ghetto novel under the nom de plume Stagg R. Leigh. But his plan backlashes when Stagg R. Leigh becomes a literary sensation, which forces Ellison to assume a dual personality and erase his true self behind the fake, unsavory ghetto author. The first part of this essay focuses on *Fuck*, the ghetto-novel parody that Ellison hoped to use as a weapon against the literati's ingrained racism, and discusses the Negrophobic stereotypes Ellison relies on to make his point and his identity issues. The second part, which gives particular importance to the televised literary award ceremony that punctuates the novel, endeavors

to show how the protagonist's dual personality affects his life and what it tells about the society he lives in.

Part 1: The Writing of the Novel *Fuck*

First, the writing of the novel *Fuck*, the novel within *Erasure*, is full of stereotypes about African Americans and brings a huge public attention to Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, but it does so in a wrong way. Ellison intends to write that vulgar novel in order to prove how offensive ghetto novels are. However, the white publishers and critics believe that the novel is very realistic and true, and then the novel results in a huge literary success. The success of the novel means that the stereotypical image of African Americans would spread through the nation, and the readers consider all the stereotypes as "real." The use of satire often provokes at best controversy and in the worst case anger and even violence as the deadly terrorist attack on a French satirical journal in January 2015 has shown.²

Likewise, African Americans may consider the novel upsetting because it insults most African Americans with stereotypical depictions that whites may enjoy. The irony, of course, is that the novel is written by an African American author who gets a huge amount of money for parodying African Americans. Surely, his intention for writing the novel is to use the novel as a weapon against literati's ingrained racism; yet, he ends up being caught in a vicious circle that backlashes against him. There is a scene in *Erasure* that illustrates this backlash. In that scene, Ellison is on his way home from shopping and a man in the street points at him and sings, "Bread and Wine Bread and Wine, Your cross ain't nearly so heavy as mine..." (237). His response is "I think I scared him slightly... I nodded to him, said, 'You're right.' And I gave him my bag with the melon" (237). Through his interaction with this poor man, Ellison realizes that his novel *Fuck* is an insult to his own

African American community and it is out of guilt that he offers things to the victims of his stereotypical story, as if to make amend. At the same time, Ellison's response "you're right" suggests that he accepts the responsibility of writing a novel that is disrespectful of African American lives.

Ellison's success in writing the novel results in his creation of a dual personality. He faces the identity crisis through his experience in his life. The first example is that white publishers always refuse his books as "not black enough." At the same time, he is enraged against the national success of Juanita Mae Jenkins, an amateur middle class African American female author with very little knowledge and experience of the African American ghetto, publishing the ghetto pulp fiction *We's Lives in Da Ghetto*. Those experiences make him think that he has to be "a Black Writer" despite the fact that white writers normally do not call themselves "White Writers" so that he can be successful as a literary intellectual. In light of this, it is obvious that there is a discriminative treatment in the publishing industry, which means that if writers are considered to be black, their talent and literacy cannot be equally evaluated and they are forced to write about African Americans. That is why Ellison decides to write *Fuck* as a way of exposing the literati's ingrained racism as well as showing his literary intelligence and talent. However, Ellison's parody is acclaimed by white editors and critics as authentic and powerful even though Ellison thinks that the novel is poorly written and offensive. This is when Ellison realizes that the world does not demand his talent and literacy at all but the gritty vulgar novel of an African American. Immediately, he faces racial categorization and starts to think about race.

Retrospective passages of Ellison's life with his family also reduce his identity. He struggles with racism and relationship with people around him, and periodically those flashbacks appear in the story. First, his relationship dramatically changes since the separation from his family. For example, his father, who is fond of Ellison and his intelligence, committed suicide. His mother is mentally sick with Alzheimer's, and his sister was assassinated by an anti-abortionist. His brother confesses that he is gay, and he makes no effort to help Ellison take care of their mother. This alienation from the family gives him no chance to rethink about what he has to do with his identity issue because there is none consulting with him. On the other hand, the flashback can be the form of watching himself in an objective way, searching for his identity. Looking at the life of his family including himself would help him understand the root of his identity. This is the mirror effect that reflects all the racial identity of his family on him. He does not have to think about race because his family puts the importance on the individual. For example, his mother and father "never seemed terribly close to me" (152). They are not too affectionate to Ellison in order to respect his personality, which would give him chances to think and act by himself. Also, his father often talks with Ellison about serious topics that are not understandable for Ellison's sister and brother. In other words, he is treated differently since his father sees talent in Ellison. This special treatment helps him try to be successful in literature. Thus, he acts as his family does as if he looks through the mirror reflecting the life of his family, which decides how he has to live his own life.

Another thing is that white publishers, when they reject his novels, tell him: "The line is, you're not black enough" (43). This shows the marginalization of black writers. The novel shows that racial discrimination still occurs contemporarily that African

American writers are expected to write works related to their culture or lives. This illustrates that what African American writers can do in a literary field is limited to show their creativeness. Even if they are talented to write works not associated with African Americans, their works are rarely published and accepted. In this view, it can be said that the reason why Ellison writes the novel *Fuck* is because he is in search of freedom of producing a novel of African Americans by proving what ghetto novels are. What he writes in the novel is a stereotypical and Negrophobic story, which is shocking enough to literary reviewers. In addition to that, writing a bestseller about African Americans encourages the mass-production of vulgar African American novels, which is supposed to show African American low-class life in a miserable way because once people know that those vulgar and miserable novels sell well, they tend to increase the amount of releasing the novels. Generally, Marci Bounds Littlefield argues, films and novels are capable of changing the image that people have and making them become prejudiced. Therefore, producing a large amount of stereotypically written novels reinforces the biases that readers have. The media is used as a tool to define, measure, and understand American society, and also it remakes the picture of reality by controlling the images and the information that people receive.³ Bounds Littlefield goes on to say that, “For that reason, the media serve as a system of racialization in that they have historically been used to perpetuate the dominant culture’s perspective and create a public forum that defines and shapes ideas concerning race and ethnicity” (667). From his point, the media can easily shape the stereotypical images of minorities, and those stereotypes are based on the dominant culture. When it comes to the U.S., the dominant culture is white culture. As described in the book, most of the critics and editors are whites, and they tend not to

evaluate the individual talent of African American writers but they only focus on how well the novels show the stereotypical images of African Americans. As a result, only the stereotypical images of African Americans spread through society. Many good novels by African American writers are abandoned because they are not “black enough.” Although people have to put the center on individuals not race, it is likely that dominant culture creates their own perspective and rules to control the other minorities.

As of the contents of the novel *Fuck*, the stereotypes that Van Go Jenkins, the teenage protagonist, embodies can be seen. First, he mentions, “I thinks, hey, I’m a chocolate. I be a chocolate in a box o’ chocolates” (81). Suggesting that he loathes himself as the same value as a chocolate. If he describes himself as the chocolate, the box of chocolates can be the African American community. He also mentions, “Open me up! Never know whatchu gonna get!” (81) This is clearly a parody of the opening scene for *Forest Gump*, the story of the slow-witted but athletically brilliant man Forest Gump, in which the protagonist, sitting on a bench at a bus stop says: “My Mamma always said, ‘Life is like a box of chocolate: You never know what you gonna get’.” This scene functions as the description of the protagonist of the novel, contrasting those two slow-witted men. What “Open me up” (81) implies is that if someone opens the box, all the evils from African Americans would erupt from the box, and then the terrible outbreak occurs like the last scene of *Do the Right Thing*, the story of a community in Brooklyn that is mostly composed of African Americans and Italian Americans. The frustration against different ethnic groups reaches a peak and people start attacking, burning and breaking houses. This is the kind of violence Van Go Jenkins in the novel *Fuck* may perpetrate. So what Jenkins says is related to what is happening contemporarily in the United States. On

one hand, the box can be viewed as a safe community for African Americans. In the ghetto, generally only a few ethnicities share the community and rich people (maybe white people in this case) rarely step into the ghetto, meaning that there would be no discrimination or conflict among different ethnic groups. According to Charles Hirschman, “Under some circumstances, a ghetto or segregated neighborhood could function as a refuge from societal discrimination” (407). In other words, the ghetto is a haven for those who are discriminated against. It becomes a reassuring place where people somehow feel protected and safe because they are among themselves. They feel they belong to the ghetto community whereas they feel excluded from the rest of society.

But not all African Americans are as poor as those living in the ghetto. For instance, Jenkins is recommended to work for a family owning fancy cars and a quite big house. To his amazement, the house belongs to a rich African American family. His statement when he sees a black owner of the house is, “I’m kinda shocked, you know, I been expecting this muthafucka to be white and here he is darker than me. I don’t know what to say” (86). This suggests that African Americans living in ghetto believe that the outside world is mostly dominated by whites, and it is unbelievable for them to see successful African Americans. More importantly, he mentions the color of the skin: “he is darker than me” (86). This illustrates that the color of the skin (whether darker or lighter) among African Americans provides the indication to decide the quality of life. For instance, people with darker skin are considered to be lower class than those with lighter skin. According to *Racism Review*,

Historically, African Americans with lighter skin have contributed to colorism because they have benefited from the privilege of having a skin color closer to that of Whites and have embraced the notion that privilege comes with having light skin in America... In modern times, lighter complexioned or biracial African Americans

appear to gain more access to the social, political, and economic institutions of America than darker skinned blacks, generally speaking.

This is why Jenkins is shocked to see the rich man with darker skin standing in front of him. Therefore, the income gap is not only the issue among white and black but also the problem within African Americans. Discrimination does not always happen among different races. Colorism among African Americans might be more problematic than the discrimination between whites and African Americans because the number of people with lighter skin will increase in the future, and people with darker skin will become a social minority.

It might be clear that whites are dominant in society, which makes a huge gap between white and non-white in terms of the quality of the life. As Jenkins puts it, “Time is the white man’s. Time ain’t mine” (99). Beyond the hackneyed CPT (Colored People Time) joke according to which colored people are never on time, Jenkins’s remark suggests that African Americans like Jenkins do not control anything, let alone time. According to the *Pew Research Center*, “The unemployment rate among blacks is about double that among whites, as it has been for most of the past six decades” (Desilver). In other words, African Americans tend to remain unemployed compared to whites. Those who have jobs need to have time to manage their business life. For example, businessmen rely on time and a strict schedule, as they have to arrange a meeting, a conference and a business trip. Thus, Jenkins implies that time is not important for people without a job, which suggests that a gap of unemployment rate among several ethnicities is problematic in the United States. On one hand, some people might say that African Americans cannot get a job because they are lazy and uneducated as portrayed in *Fuck*. However, those representations are just stereotypes and there is a lot of African Americans who are more

hard-working or intelligent than whites. The problem is that the whites who dominate the media spread those stereotypes and thus consolidate those racial biases.

In the beginning of *Erasure*, he starts with a self-introduction telling, “I have dark brown skin, curly hair, a broad nose, some of my ancestors were slaves and I have been detained by pasty white police man in New Hampshire, Arizona and Georgia and so the society in which I live tells me I am black” (1). On the basis of his appearance and description of the slave ancestry, people would classify him as a black individual. However, he states that, “Though I am fairly athletic, I am no good at basketball. I listen to Mahler, Aretha Franklin, Charlie Parker...” (1) This strongly stresses his individuality without any thought of race. All the description about himself would stand against the stereotypical image people might have of an African American individual. Although the novel *Fuck* exposes the stereotypes of African Americans, the text-within-a-text style of *Fuck* reinforces its vulgarity since the readers would compare those two African Americans, Thelonious “Monk” Ellison and Van Go Jenkins.

In *Erasure*, Ellison starts to cast a question how people think about the famous novel *We’s Lives In Da Ghetto* through the conversation with Marilyn, the owner of the old Tilman house in Annapolis where Ellison and his mother go open the beach house. Marilyn has already read the novel and liked it. Then, Ellison asks her, “Have you ever known anybody who talks like they do in that book?” (188) And Marilyn just answers: “No, but so what? I just read through that dialect shit. I don’t like the way you’re talking to me” (188). This conversation suggests that most readers of that stereotypical novel unconsciously accept the stereotypical depictions written in the novel. In other words, they consider the novel a “real thing,” which is exactly what Ellison wants to deny. The focus

of the readers of a novel would be different. Some of them might focus on how racial stereotypes are described in a novel although mostly people just want to enjoy the novel. Those who want to enjoy cannot see any stereotypes and take them seriously. Thus, the problem is that stereotypes are naturally assimilated into society and people would not be aware that they are mere stereotypes.

Ellison knows that the media spread stereotypical images of African Americans because this is what people want to see. However, he wants to write more artistic novels. As his sister points out, “You understand stuff I could never get and you don’t even think about it. I mean, you are just one of those people.” And continually, “I just wish you’d write something I could read” (6). His artistic sense is known to people around him since his childhood. For him, writing the novel that the market expects him to write is just humiliating, and he wants no one to ever see his name on the back of the novel. According to Katie Surber, “Like the beginning of the African American movement, current literature focuses on the themes of African American culture, racism and equality, and the role of African Americans in society. The writings often reflect the current struggles of the African American race.” Being African American writers does not mean that they need to write works related to African American themselves. The most important thing that Ellison knows is that real writers do not care about race and focus on individuals instead. In fact, the media and the market expect African American writers to work on racial theme and most writers attempt to write novels for financial benefits, although it is not beneficial for African Americans themselves to keep publishing works with so many stereotypical representations. Like the novel *We’s Living in Da Ghetto*, being an African American writer does not mean to show the typical African American life and know ghetto life. Of

course, Ellison knows more about the African American lifestyle than Juanita Mae Jenkins, but he has never attempted to write about his black life so far because he has never really thought about himself in terms of race.

A dual personality, one as Ellison, an intellectual, and the other as Stagg R. Leigh, a ghetto writer, starts to be formed in Ellison himself the moment he is driven to think about race. The attire of Stagg suggests some implications of his identity. First, he starts to disguise himself in order to hide his real identity as Ellison. Before the famous TV show, Stagg wears a black attire from head to toe, which shows that he does not want to show himself as Ellison on TV because, as a self-respecting artist, he is ashamed to be the author of the novel *Fuck*. On the other hand, this black attire can imply the construction of cool masculinity. Being cool is often used among African Americans as a form of self-expression to counter the stress and oppression created within the white-dominated society. This strategic way of self-expression is called “Cool Pose” (Majors and Billson, 1992). Stagg may also intend to show his strong identity as African American by adopting this “Cool Pose.” He also changes his way of talking, and his behavior completely changes. For example, he becomes rigid, and he confuses the audience as well as Kenya Dunston, the main interviewer on the TV show, by simply answering the questions. That is how he expresses his identity as Stagg, and Coolness may help him to overcome the stress as well as oppression from the dominant society. Although it is not mentioned clearly in the novel, it is safe to imagine that the majority of editors as well as people in the audience are white, which contributes to prompt a typical African American feeling that W.E.B. Du Bois famously defined as “double consciousness” since Ellison is compelled to live both as an American and an African American. Moreover, there is the time he still cannot balance his

double consciousness because his friend and agent Yul is only the man who knows Ellison and Stagg are one and the same individual. Through the conversation with him, Stagg cannot keep being Stagg, and he starts to cry and get lost, touching his bearded face. This moment tells that he is oppressed by racially categorized society but coolness somewhat helps him to balance his identity as well as his temper.

Ellison gets to identify himself as an African American through the contact with white culture. He faces the issue of racial categorization when his novels are rejected as not black enough even if he does not intend to use the race as the point of the novel. This experience gives him the idea of what race is. Through his racial experience, he comes to see the color of others since his mind starts to be influenced by racially classified society. The great example showing this can be seen when he takes the subway. “Stagg takes the subway, the underground, to the studio, realizing as the train rumbles that so does his stomach. He is starving. Other stomachs rumble. He is encased with other black men. Though it is a golden day outside, they cruise below the world to their destinations” (246). This line describes several points. First, he recognizes others by the color of their skin, which shows that he has the idea of racial classification whereas he does not have to point out that he is surrounded by African Americans. However, after the experience of himself as racially categorized, he starts to have a different perspective on society. Thus, this line strongly suggests a change in his worldview. In addition to that, the description of the subway as “underground” is also interesting. “Underground” stands as a metaphor for “invisibility.” The underground is separated from the outside world, and usually people inside cannot be seen. Besides, this description of subway draws a line between poor and rich. Rich high class usually have a car and they do not have to use subway for

transportation, yet majority of African Americans have to take subway for financial reason. Specifically, the description of subway shows the issue of income gap among African Americans and whites, and African Americans are socially and culturally alienated from society. That is why they are left 'underground' so that whites do not need to interact with African Americans. On the other hand, this 'underground' description suggests that Ellison as Stagg R. Leigh, the pseudonym of Ellison, decides to step into the underground society where African Americans are left out of society because Ellison has enough money to take a taxi or other means of transportation that whites usually utilize. Therefore, taking the subway illustrates his decision to live the life of an African American.

Ellison hides himself behind the personality of Stagg in order to be invisible from the public. As Stagg, Ellison tries to become the typical African American individual that whites expect. The media are still dominated by whites, and they desire to use the stereotypical images of an African American. In order to achieve the purpose as Stagg, he has to pretend to be stereotyped African American. Similarly, creating another personality as Stagg can help him to lighten the burden of feeling guilty of publishing the vulgar novel since he does not want to show his real name in public because of his status as a respected academic, and his pride as an artist. The reason behind that he decides to publish the novel is because simply his family almost collapses, and he is the only one taking care of his mother who is hospitalized for Alzheimer's. Also, he intends to publish the novel as a weapon against the prejudices of the literary world, but his intention backfires. In the end, he cannot stop the rush of the media trying to reward the novel with a prestigious Book Award, and also his popularity through media can no longer be stopped. That is why he ends up creating the novel and the creation of the dual consciousness comes

after that. Thelonious Monk Ellison as the writer of the novel *Fuck*, his reputation as a scholar would be destroyed. If he becomes Stagg, he can keep the lie and would fail to achieve what he means to achieve when he starts to write *My Pafology* (the original title for the novel *Fuck*): Expose ghetto novel for what they are, i.e., a shameless exploitation of racist stereotypes plaguing the black community.

Part 2: The Televised Literary Ceremony

The second part of this essay will center on the televised literary award ceremony that takes place at the end of the story in order to explore the issues of Ellison's identity as well as the society he lives in. To begin with, it is obvious that race is categorized within a white-dominated society in which African Americans are considered a minority. Over lunch with white Book Award critics, Ellison faces discrimination through conversation. One of them, Ailene Hoover, says, "I should think as an African American you'd be happy to see one of your own people get an award" (261). This comment suggests several issues. First, she classifies Ellison as an African American although his racial background should be of no relevance when it comes to evaluating the quality of literary works. In addition, she calls African Americans, "your own people." The problem is that she would never use the phrase "your own people" if Ellison were white. Thus, she is unable to see beyond race: she can only define Ellison by the color of his skin. People would not usually know who the parents are. Their parents could be white or from other ethnic groups, but this scene suggests that some of the biased whites are likely to discriminate people by the color of their skin. During the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr.

famously claimed, in his 1963 March on Washington speech, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” People may believe that King’s dream has been realized after half a century, as African Americans seem to enjoy a life without discrimination; yet, most African Americans, including Ellison, still find out that they are judged by the color of their skin. The second issue is that other critics in the same conversation do not object to her discriminatory comment. Thus, the power of discrimination is implicitly enforced, and Ellison as a minority is the victim of racism, which makes him feel isolated, and alienated as he is forced to be two different persons at one: a literary critic, and a black individual. Adding to his isolation at the lunch meeting is that most attendees have brought their families with them whereas Ellison has not. This might worsen his sense of isolation as well as his idea about racial classification. His identity as an African American becomes far stronger than before, especially after the separation from his family, when he comes to be victimized by a white-dominated society that makes him think about race. The third issue is that all critics choose Stagg R. Leigh’s ghetto novel *Fuck* as the winner for the Book Award for the book, they argue, tells an authentic African American story whereas, in reality, it is a very unflattering portrayal of black life. But it is precisely this display of vulgarity that corresponds to whites’ idea of authentic black life. They are neither interested in the quality of the writing nor the content; they prefer to focus on how vulgar the novel is. Thus, their discriminatory purpose for choosing *Fuck* as the recipient of the Book Award is to expand the stereotypical images of African Americans. According to Yuki Fujioka,

Since television conveys ‘simulations of everyday situations’ and since it shares similar characteristics of real life events (e.g. sound and sight), vicarious experience via television may become a part of our social experience and serve as a basis for social judgments such as racial attitudes, particularly those who had little direct interracial contact... the key hypothesis that the less contact a group has with African Americans, the more television will influence their perceptions of African Americans. (52)

Along with this idea, novels about ethnic groups help create a certain image of such ethnic groups and so, the success of *Fuck*, or any other ghetto novel, becomes a serious problem as readers are likely to form their opinion of African Americans based on what the novel *Fuck* tells them. Besides, Dates and Barlow argue that,

Black media stereotypes are not the natural, much less harmless, products of an idealized popular culture; rather, they are more commonly socially constructed images that are selective, partial, one-dimensional, distorted in their portrayal of African Americans [...] Many researchers argue that media portrayals of minorities tend to reflect white’s attitudes toward minorities and, therefore, reveal more about whites themselves than about the varied and lived experiences of minorities. (qtd. in Bristor et al., 48)

It is important to know that people are usually influenced by the stereotypes that are reflected mainly upon white’s attitude.

Near the end of the novel, Ellison encounters an old black man in an elevator. The man asks him, “Are you an engineer?” (245) Ellison’s first response is that he is not an engineer. However, when the old man leaves the elevator, he says, “In fact, in a way, I am” (245). There must be some implication in his comment. Of course, he is a writer and he has never studied engineering; yet he can be an engineer, in a way, because he biologically changes himself to his second personality as Stagg, which allows him to be invisible to everyone. Similarly, an engineer creates and fixes things. In the nineteenth century, in relation to politics, the verb “engineer” acquired the figurative meaning of “arrange,

contrive, guide or manage (via ingenuity or tact),” and even more interestingly, as early as the fourteenth century, engineering meant to “seduce, trick, or deceive.” Thus, this conversation shows the turning point at which Ellison embraces the creation of his new identity, which makes him decide to appear in the book award.

Focusing particularly on the selection of a book award. Ellison expects people to think that the novel is too vulgar or offensive, but whites think *Fuck* is worthy of a prize, which certainly increases his anxiety. Although whites confirm the prejudice, it is a great opportunity for them to expand the stereotypes throughout the world by releasing the novel and making it popular. On top of that, the white critics only focus on the racial theme of *Fuck*. They never touch on the construction or literacy of the novel. Thus, Ellison would find it unfair that all white critics in the book award meeting are racists, which describes the contemporary racial issue in the United States. None at the meeting tries to understand the opinion of Ellison at all, a situation reminiscent of the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962). In the film, Tom Robinson, a black man who is suspected of raping a white woman, is quite obviously innocent, but the jury convicts him. The jurors are all white, and it is obvious that they are racist and judge the case unfairly. Contrasting those two scenes, when the majority of the people is of a particular racial background, they tend to disrespect the opinion of the minority. As a result, they can keep their superiority upon the minority (African Americans in this case).

Ellison’s feeling of guilt, which is due to expanding the stereotypical images through the media, reaches its peak at the ceremony, and simultaneously, his struggle with dual personality springs up. Before the ceremony, he starts to say, “I had to defeat myself to save myself, my own identity. I had to toss a spear through the mouth of my own

creation, silence him forever, kill him, press him down a dark hole and have the world admit that he never existed” (259). This feeling suggests the regret of not having stopped publishing the novel. “To save my identity” is meant to show that he should free himself from the white oppression that both tears his identity apart and makes him think about race. The flashback of his life in the rural South tells that his identity is kept within his family; however, the white majority gives him the idea that he belongs to a minority. Particularly, he is rewarded as the best novel writer, which means he starts to be much closer to the white-dominated society. As he gets closer to white culture, he gets classified as black or African American, which is unthinkable when he is with his family.

The ending of *Erasure* is reflected in the novel *Fuck*. Jenkins, in *Fuck*, shows his face in front of TV cameras in the end of the story, and says, “Hey, Baby Girl. Look at me. I on TV” (131). Similarly, Ellison looks at the camera and says, “I’m on Television” (265). This parody illustrates the erasure of Ellison’s identity. Through dramatic life changes, Ellison starts to see race in society as well as inside of himself. Then, the alternative personality, Stagg, is created to interpret African American culture and individuality. However, Ellison starts to assimilate into Stagg and accept that assimilation as the story comes to the end. The last scene shows the beginning of his new life. In a way, he ends up accepting the novel *Fuck* as part of his own art, which brings us back to Du Bois’s notion of “double consciousness.” According to Dickson D. Bruce Jr.,

Du Bois used ‘double consciousness’ to refer to at least three different issues—including first the real power of white stereotypes in black life and thought and second the double consciousness created by the practical racism that excluded being both an American and not an American—by double consciousness Du Bois referred most importantly to an internal conflict in the African American individual between what was ‘African’ and what was ‘American’. (Qtd. in Mocombe 17)

Thus, the creation of double consciousness is the social issue in the United States where historically, people have been classified by the color of their skin; and even if African American people came to be treated equally, the white-dominated society would compel them to suffer from their own identity. Borrowing from William James the notion of “Primary and Secondary Consciousness” (Dickson 304), one may show how Ellison starts to differentiate his own identity and his alternative identity as Stagg. The primary consciousness is the identity of his true self, which is created within his family, and focuses more on the individual than race. However, Ellison gets alienated from his family through dramatic incidents and changes around him. Then, his secondary consciousness is created by white editors who condemn his works as “not being black enough.” In light of this, the white-dominated society creates the standard of an African American identity, which harms most African Americans’ identity. Ellison also ends up acting as an African American created by whites.

Ellison’s identity is gradually erased as the story approaches the end through contact with white critics and his unsuccessful refusal to the nomination of the novel *Fuck* at the meeting. At the ceremony, there is an interesting depiction of his identity being erased. “Then there was a small boy, perhaps me as boy, and he held up a mirror so that I could see my face and it was the face of Stagg Leigh. ‘Now you are free of illusion,’ Stagg said, ‘How does it feel to be free of one’s illusion?’” (264) This demonstrates that he accepts his new identity as Stagg, ironically embracing the commercial values of the publishing industry and popular culture he once condemned. In a way, he does not have to struggle for dual personality any more. On the other hand, he brings his family and friends to the TV show as imaginary audience so that he finally can confess that he has kept lying

to them by disguising himself. This freedom from dual personality demonstrates that he does not care about the influence of the novel that devaluates himself as an artist. Another important line at the ceremony is that, "Harnet covered the microphone when I was next to him and asked what I thought I was doing. 'The answer is painful and empty,' I said" (265). The 'pain' Ellison feels probably refers to his failure and guilt at not eliminating the stereotypical representations of African Americans. Also, it suggests the feeling of sadness generated by the distance from both his family and identity. He feels pain because he shows himself as the writer of a vulgar novel rather than the intellectual scholar he really is. As for the "emptiness," it shows the freedom from double consciousness. Although he has been burdened by so many dramatic changes in life (his family problems and identity crisis), showing his true self is a way for him to free himself from those burdens. Those are the implication of the terms "painful" and "empty" in his reply to Harnet.

Another interesting point about the description of his identity is that he, as a boy, holds up a mirror so that he can see his face. This might suggest the comparison between his identity with his family and the one after independence from the family. By looking at both young Ellison and Stagg, he realizes that his identity has changed. Also, the comparison of those two personalities describes his and his family disintegration. Although he knows that he gradually comes to have double consciousness, he never sees both personalities at the same time. Consequently, looking at himself as a boy on the one hand, and as Stagg on the other, helps him to separate the two personalities. As for the disintegration from the family, his identity as Ellison is originally created through life with his family, which helps him not to think about race. Though he cannot distance himself

from his family, he begins walking away from his family at the ceremony. The ceremony is depicted as a farewell for him, which allows him to be independent, and start a new life.

Ellison describes the imaginary landscape of the ceremony thus: “But somehow the floor had now turned to sand...My step were difficult and my head was spinning as if I had been drugged. Cameras flashed and people murmured and I couldn’t believe that I was walking through the sand, through dream sand” (264). This description suggests that he makes his life a part of his art. As an artist, he forms his alternative personality to become the protagonist of one story, and thinks carefully about his outfits for the ceremony. Also, he designs the imaginary landscape of his surroundings like walking through dream sand. All the ideas are the parts of his story. In the end of the story, he uses the parody of *Fuck* even though he disdains it so much. This means that he realizes that he accepts *Fuck* so that he can create a new story about himself by abandoning all the life spent as Thelonious “Monk” Ellison.

In conclusion, it seems that social discrimination against African Americans has disappeared in the United States, but the novel *Erasure* exposes the concealed discrimination that forces African Americans to face identity issues. The first part focuses on *Fuck*, the ghetto-novel parody that Ellison hoped to use as a weapon against the literati’s ingrained racism, and discusses the Negrophobic stereotypes Ellison relies on to make his point on identity issues. The response from the publishing industry telling that he is “not black enough” makes him think of racial categorization, which leads to the creation of a dual personality. African American writers are called “black writer” even though

people would never say, “white writers.” Thus, African American writers are only expected to write about their culture or lives. Indeed, white critics do not evaluate the construction or literacy of works by African American authors on their intrinsic merits. What they want to see is a novel full of vulgar stereotypes about African Americans. The media is so powerful that the success of *Fuck*, or any other ghetto novel, becomes a serious problem, as readers are likely to form their opinion of African Americans based on what the novel *Fuck* tells them. Facing racial discrimination, Ellison starts to be guilty of writing the sensational novel *Fuck*, which forces Ellison to assume a dual personality and erase his true self behind a fake, unsavory ghetto author, Stagg R. Leigh. The second part focuses on the televised literary award ceremony, showing that racism still remains in the literary world. The standard of an African Americans’ identity created by white-dominated society harms most African Americans’ identity, and they are compelled to become black individuals matching the expectations of white people. In the end of the story, Ellison accepts Stagg R. Leigh, a black individual created within him. In other words, he decides to live the life of a black individual, discarding his own identity as an intellectual who does not think about race but focuses on individuality instead. His artistic sense makes it possible to accept another life by creating the story for himself. Therefore, it is obvious that African Americans are still victimized by being separated from the rest of society; what is worse, most people are never aware of this discrimination because the lives of African Americans seem to have improved.

Notes

1. Many African Americans tend to be killed with suspicious reasons by white police officers in the U.S in recent years. The color of the skin could be the trigger of those incidents in light of the fact that African Americans are the victims in most of the cases. One of the major incidents happened lately is that Michael Brown, an unarmed African American boy, was shot to death by a white police officer in Ferguson on August 9, 2014. The policeman was not convicted of murder in the end.
2. As the British daily *The Telegraph* reported: “In what could be France’s worst terrorist outrage for 50 years, the attack on the magazine, which has featured prominently on al-Qaeda’s hit-list since it published controversial cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed in 2011, was clearly well-planned and executed, to the extent that the terrorists were able to make good their escape in a black Citroen.” (*Telegraph*).
3. Some people might say that not promoting African American novels is a form of prejudice, too. However, most agents only focus on the business opportunity, and unfortunately, there is a lot of people desiring to read the vulgar stereotyped African American novels, which gives them chance to get prejudiced.

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パーシヴァル・エヴァレット著書、イレイジャー（２００１）：どのように にアフリカンアメリカンは消し去られているのか？

数世紀にわたる奴隷制と法律上、事実上の人種隔離政策の後、アフリカンアメリカン達の生活はますます改善されてきた。しかし、多くの人々は彼らが依然としてアイデンティティー問題に苦しみ、肌の色で人生を左右されるという差別に日々直面しているということを知らず、その差別は社会の陰に身を潜めている。パーシヴァル・エヴァレット著書、イレイジャー（２００１）ではテロニウス・モンク・エリソン(アフリカンアメリカン中流階級の文学教授、小説家)の人生について描かれている。彼の文学人として抱える問題が人種の分類と深く関わっており、この論文で取り上げていく議題である。本の中で、評論家たちはエリソンの書いた小説を“十分にブラックではない”と却下している。それに怒りを感じたエリソンはスタッグ・アール・リーというペンネームで黒人ゲトー小説のパロディーを描くことで批評家たちの持つ偏見を暴露することを決心する。しかし、彼の計画はスタッグが文学界から大評判を得ることで覆されることになる。これによって、エリソンは自身の二重人格を装うことを余儀なくされ、道徳的に好ましくない黒人スラム街小説の著者という偽の姿の背後にある彼自身の本当の姿を消していくことになる。

この論文の第一章では、エリソンが知識階級に深くしみ込んだ人種差別主義に対抗する手段として使用することを望んだ黒人ゲトー小説のパロディーである“ファック”に焦点を置き、彼のアイデンティティー問題と彼がどのような黒人嫌悪的ステレオタイプを使用して人種差別に対抗するのかを議論する。彼の小説が“十分にブラックではない”と非難されることから、文学界には依然として人種差別が残っていることがわかる。“黒人小説家”と呼ばれる作家は存在しても、“白人小説家”と呼ばれる作家はいないだろう。つまり、黒人であるということだけでアフリカンアメリカンの小説家たちは彼らの文化や生活について書かれた作品のみを書くことを期待され、他の白人の作家のように個人の才能は平等に評価されていないのである。メディアの力は強く、白人の求める黒人のステレオタイプの描かれた作品が評判となり、世に知れることはアフリカンアメリカンに対する偏見も広がっていくことを意味するのだ。このようにして多数派は少数派を支配していく。人種差別を目の前にし、エリソンは白人に評価される作品を生み出したことに罪を感じ、もう一人の自分スタッグを演じることで、本当の自分を隠しだすようになる。それが彼の本当のアイデンティティーの消失につながるのである。

第二章では、小説を締めくくるテレビ放送された文学賞の式典を重点的に取り扱い、どのようにして主人公の二重人格が彼の人生に影響を与えるか、またそれが彼の生きる社会について何を伝えるかについて議論していく。エリソンは文学賞の選考会でも人種差別に直面し、そのことがより彼自身のアイデンティテ

イーを失わせることになる。初めに彼は奴隷の子孫であり、肌は黒く、髪はくせのある毛であるが、バスケットボールは上手くなく、白人の人が聴くような曲も聴くというように自身の紹介をしている。このように、人種というカテゴリーについては考えず、個人として生きてきたエリソンだが、実際に白人が多数派である社会で差別に直面することで、人種について深く考えさせられることになる。また、家族の崩壊は彼自身のアイデンティティーの欠陥を導き、白人が求めるステレオタイプ通りの人格スタグとして生きようと決心することにつながる。アメリカ合衆国の公民権運動指導者であるデュボイスの概念“二重意識”をもとに考えると、エリソンは白人が多数を占める社会の中で人種による差別を受け、これまでのアメリカ人としての意識と新たに生み出されたアフリカンアメリカンとしての意識を心の中で感じ始めるのである。そして、彼のアートを追求するセンスが彼のアフリカンアメリカンとしての新たな人生を歩みださせる。