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Saturday's Child, Sunday's Christ: Masculinity, Religion and Community in Select Twentieth Century African-American Poems, Plays, and Novels

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SATURDAY'S CHILD, SUNDAY'S CHRIST:
MASCULINITY, RELIGION AND COMMUNITY IN SELECT TWENTIETH CENTURY
AFRICAN-AMERICAN POEMS, PLAYS, AND NOVELS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Saturday's Child, Sunday's Christ: Masculinity, Religion and Community in Select Twentieth Century African-American Poems, Plays, and Novels

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In this dissertation project, I focus on four major twentieth-century African-American literary figures: Countee Cullen, Harlem Renaissance poet; Adrienne Kennedy, noted playwright; Ernest Gaines, southern novelist; and, Chester Himes, detective /crime fiction writer. My interest in these four artists coincides with contemporary concerns regarding the state of black America, particularly black men. Hopefully, my investigations of these artists' works will provide greater insights into the emotional and psychological chasms of the —black experience. My overarching aim is to place my own critical inquiries of gender performance and race in American society within the cross-sectional of contemporary masculinity, protest literature, and religious studies.

Using a combination of theoretical approaches with heavy emphasis on critical race theory and neo-Marxism, I explore the social and political implications of aligning three different African-American writers' perspectives on masculinity, violence, and religion. Because these writers' ideas span the larger space of the twentieth century, I offer broader claims regarding the shifts and transformations of black masculine performance as it relates to gender, violence, and religion in the United States. More importantly, I draw interdisciplinary connections that serve as helpful classroom and community models in the current resurgence of critical discussions on redefining black manhood for the twenty-first century.