ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom LXXII, zeszyt 11 – 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18290/rh247211.5

MARTÍN FERNÁNDEZ-FERNÁNDEZ

THE AFFILIATIVE RELATIONS OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC IN JOHN A. WILLIAMS'S *THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM*

INTRODUCTION

In an astute gambit to promote the publication of *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967), John A. Williams converted a five-page passage of the novel into flyers and, as John Jackson documents, scattered the copies on "New York city subway trains."[1] This casual gesture initiated the birth of a popular narrative in the African American collective imaginary, as the flyers spread a fictional scheme to eradicate Black people in the US known as "the King Alfred Plan." Despite the inclusion of the book title along with the names of the publisher and the author to avoid confusion, the information on the five pages seemed so plausible that many African Americans believed it to be true. A map of the country with districts marking the installation of concentration camps and the realistic figures of the operation added to the verisimilar report on the contingency of extreme racial unrest in the country. As Williams reflects close to forty years later, "[a]ll this, of course, was to be (and in most cases was) a publicity hype, but soon that broadside was being passed around without attribution, which created an additional degree of curiosity, if not uneasiness."[2] The long history of racism in the US and the social polarization of the late 1960s gave credence to a narrative that, to a different degree, African Americans had been experiencing in their own flesh since the onset of slavery. As Anthony Cooke points out, "King Alfred

MARTÍN FERNÁNDEZ-FERNÁNDEZ, PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Santiago de Compostela, Faculty of Philology, Department of English and German Studies; e-mail: m.fernandez.fernandez@usc.es; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5153-5190.

[1] John L. Jackson Jr., *Racial Paranoia* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2008), 111.

[2] John A. Williams, afterword to *The Man Who Cried I Am* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004), Kindle.

possesses reality not because it happened; the government's historical existence vis-à-vis Black people 'proves' it *could* do it, therefore making it true somewhere out there."[3]

The plausibility of the King Alfred Plan, and the highly acclaimed reception of the novel, responded to a Black experience in the US that, in terms of police brutality, excessive criminalization, and vicious killings, does not differ significantly from the current social scenario. The late 1960s saw the consolidation of the Black Power movement as one of the major forces in African American activism, to which the FBI retaliated with its secret Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Herb Boyd notes that, during this period, "[m]any activists were convinced that the FBI, CIA and local law enforcement agencies were in cahoots and conspired daily to make sure the Panthers and other radical organizations were neutralized or otherwise infiltrated."[4] Their suspicions were officially confirmed with the revelation of the COINTELPRO scheme on March 8, 1971, thanks to an operation of the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI. Founded roughly four decades later, Black Lives Matter has reinvigorated the Black Power tradition through a social movement that has been leading African American activism since 2013, meeting a similar law-and-order response to their protests over time, especially during the Trump administration. Black Lives Matter continues the fight against the systemic racism that breeds the police brutality, excessive criminalization, and extreme violence to which Black people are exposed daily in the US, still rendering the King Alfred Plan a plausible conspiracy for many African Americans nowadays.

The inclusion of the King Alfred Plan, which Williams only discloses in its entirety toward the end of the book, completes a narrative that puts the Western humanistic project into question by following the evolution of Black thought from the 1940s to the late 1960s. As John Reilly notes in his analysis of the novel, Williams challenges the traditional vision of the racial status quo, "first, by demystifying the claim to humanism that justifies white dominance in Western politics and literature."[5] Civil rights advocacy, Black nationalism, and Pan-Africanism, among other philosophies, converge into

[3] Anthony C. Cooke, "Black Community, Media, and Intellectual Paranoia-as-Politics," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 4 (2011): 618, https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934710387278.

[4] Herb Boyd, "The Man and the Plan: Conspiracy Theories and Paranoia in Our Culture," *Black Issues Book Review* 4, no. 2 (2002): 38–40, https://www.proquest.com/magazines/man-plan/docview/217750160/se-2.

[5] John M. Reilly, "Thinking History in *The Man Who Cried I Am*," *Black American Literature Forum* 21, nos. 1–2 (1987): 39, https://doi.org/10.2307/2904419.

the story to offer a rich Black perspective on history and modernity, while William's aesthetic choices further underpin his ambitious critique. As Reilly continues, the author completes his challenge "by appropriating the form of the novel to a more accurate representation of perception and historical understanding than has normally been offered by either American historical or 'problem' fiction."[6] The naturalistic tradition, which constrained the artistic freedom of African American writers for decades, is transcended into a form of historical realism where humanistic and anti-humanistic philosophies are confronted through narration. Ewa Łuczak deeply explores this confrontation in her 2012 essay, noting that "Williams's novel skillfully traces the nuances of a black intellectual's journey from humanism towards anti-humanism and back."[7]

In what is considered his magnum opus, Williams narrates the story of Max Reddick, a forty-nine-year-old African American writer who, in a span of two days, remembers his nomadic life from his latest sojourn in the Netherlands. The perspective of his imminent demise in the final stage of rectal cancer provides Max with the retrospective lucidity to connect the key life and historical events of his philosophical evolution between the 1940s and the 1960s. His struggles as a Black writer, his deployment in Italy during World War II, his long stay in Paris, and his coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and the decolonization of Africa are but some of the experiences that contribute to shaping his complex personality. Max's story is narrated by means of the telescoping of time—a technique that Williams retrieves from Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947)—alternating between a past and a present narrative timeline to offer a detailed portrait of his life. This formal reliance on the use of recurrent flashbacks also introduces a large array of locations in the narration, while chronicling the major historical events of the period. As Gilbert Muller remarks, following Georg Lukács's theorizations in *The Historical Novel*,[8] "John Williams succeeds in creating a central figure whose entire consciousness and behavior are the embodiment of history."[9] Thus, the Black critical tradition of the mid-twentieth century materializes in the protagonist's life story to set forth William's thorough critique of Western modernity. With this premise, the

[6] Reilly, "Thinking History," 39.

[7] Ewa Łuczak, "After the End of Man: John A. Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am*," *Polish Journal for American Studies* 6 (2012): 70.

[8] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 34.

[9] Gilbert H. Muller, *John A. Williams* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 82.

present article explores how African American identity relates to different national scenarios in *The Man Who Cried I Am*, arguing that their transnational affiliative ties contribute to reshaping African American identity in the post-World War II period.

AFFILIATIVE RELATIONS IN THE BLACK ATLANTIC

In *The Word, the Text, and the Critic*, Edward Said ponders on the impossibility of explicating human social bonds only through traditional filial relations, conceptualizing his notion of "affiliation" to reach for the whole relational experience. As Said remarks:

> What I am describing is the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship.[10]

While filiation accounts for a typological hierarchization resulting from "natural" relations (i.e., parentage, ethnicity, culture, etc.), the affiliative mode transcends these rigid boundaries to offer new possibilities in the association among human beings. Yet, these two notions are not conceived as opposite forces, in that their interaction results in two distinct alternatives. One in which affiliation operates in a similar manner, though in a different sphere, to filiation, thus leaning on what Said describes as "the transfer of legitimacy from filiation to affiliation"; and another where "the alternative for the critic is to recognize the differences between instinctual filiation and social affiliation, and to show how affiliation sometimes reproduces filiation, sometimes makes its own forms."[11]

This second alternative links directly to the theory that Werner Sollors developed three years later in his 1986 monograph *Beyond Ethnicity*. The organic interaction of the affiliative mode with filial relations finds its equivalent in Sollors's interplay between "consent" and "descent." In his exhaustive study of ethnicity in US culture, Sollors explores the adaptation of the consent-descent paradigm over various historical periods, starting with the early US nation-state at the end of the eighteenth century. In doing so,

[10] Edward Said, *The Word, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991), 19.
[11] Said, 23.

Sollors lays out a "terminology which takes the conflict between contractual and hereditary, self-made and ancestral definitions of American identity—between *consent* and *descent*—as the central drama in American culture."[12] In a similar way to Said's dualistic conceptualization, for Sollors,

> Descent relations are those defined by anthropologists as relations of "substance" (by blood or nature); consent relations describe those of "law" or "marriage." Descent language emphasizes our positions as heirs, our hereditary qualities, liabilities, and entitlements; consent language stresses our abilities as mature free agents and "architects of our fates" to choose our spouses, our destinies, and our political systems.[13]

The application of this relational approach to US culture has adapted to the changing social scenarios and different ethnic communities over time. Adding an African American perspective to the equation, the interaction between affiliation/consent and filiation/descent triggers an interesting discussion about its adaptability to the analysis of the Black subject.

By the mid-twentieth century, the Civil Rights Movement and Black nationalism held diverging perspectives to achieve the shared goal of racial justice and equality, which ultimately resided in the attainment of complete US citizenship for African Americans. Allegedly equal in the eyes of the Constitution, the blatant discrimination against Black people ignited the filial debate among both approaches. From the perspective of Martin Luther King Jr., the "American" part of their binomial ethnonym sufficed in their rightful claim to full citizenship and real integration into US life. As King states in a 1959 speech to the National Bar Association in Milwaukee, "[w]e have moved through the wilderness of 'separate but equal,' and now we stand on the border of the promised land of integration."[14] Malcolm X's precepts, on the contrary, leaned on the "African" roots of Black people to buttress his Black nationalist philosophy. As Malcolm recounts from his meeting with Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah in his 1964 autobiography, "[w]e discussed the unity of Africans and peoples of African descent. We agreed that Pan-Africanism was the key also to the problems of

[12] Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 5.

[13] Sollors, 6.

[14] Martin Luther King Jr., "Address at the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention of the National Bar Association," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V*, ed. Clayborne Carson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 266.

those of African heritage."[15] In his monograph on the revolutionary lives of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Peniel Joseph evinces the increasing connections between their perspectives during the last part of their lives, which contrasts with the generalized misconception of an alleged lifelong opposition. For Joseph, the radicalized King of the late 1960s and the renewed Malcolm of his post-1964 pilgrimage to Mecca, the epitomes of the Civil Rights Movement and Black nationalism respectively, "came to recognize that America, and the rest of the world, could never be free so long as Black people were denied citizenship and dignity."[16]

The theoretical umbrella that Paul Gilroy proposes in *The Black Atlantic* accommodates these perspectives into a single relational concept. In his 1993 monograph, Gilroy explores the interstices and configuration of Black culture through modernity, setting out to decode "the affinities and affiliations which link the blacks of the West to one of their adoptive, parental cultures."[17] To do so, Gilroy puts forth his groundbreaking theorization of the Black Atlantic, an "outer-national, transcultural reconceptualisation"[18] of modernity that intertwines the cultural heritage of Black people and the African diaspora in the West. This approach brings together the philosophies of racial integration, Black nationalism, and Pan-Africanism, to cite some, under a theoretical umbrella that fosters the dialogue between the different perspectives in the struggle for racial justice and equality. In his exploration, Gilroy resorts to the ontological opposition between "roots" and "routes," that is, between filiation and affiliation, to debunk the historical preference of the former in Black identity formation. As he contends:

> Marked by its European origins, modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes.[19]

The notion of the Black Atlantic thus helps to shed light on the filial relations of Black people in the Western hemisphere, while establishing a common framework to explore their affiliative ties within this vast geo-

[15] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Random House, 1992), 389.

[16] Peniel E. Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), x.

[17] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (London: Verso, 1993), 2.

[18] Gilroy, 17.

[19] Gilroy, 19.

graphical region. In this light, the article sets out to explore how the transnational affiliations that Max Reddick unveils in the novel contribute to the reshaping of African American identity in the post-World War II period.

RACE, NATIONALITY, AND DIASPORA IN *THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM*

The narrative time of *The Man Who Cried I Am* covers three crucial decades in the shaping of late-modern African American identity, as the relation of the Black subject to the world, and the world itself, underwent a drastic change in the aftermath of World War II. At the beginning of the book, an ill Max sits at an outdoor café in Amsterdam waiting for his ex-wife Margrit Westoever to pass nearby, while he reminisces about her and the city canals in an interior monologue. His torrent of thoughts soon coalesces with the origins of the Middle Passage:

> *Ah yes*, he thought, *you Dutch motherfuckers. I've returned. "A Dutch man o' warre that sold us twenty negars,"* John Rolfe wrote, *Well, you-all, I bring myself. Free! Three hundred and forty-five years after Jamestown. Now … how's that for the circle come full?*[20]

By invoking the memory of John Rolfe, the English colonial settler who married the legendary Pocahontas, the protagonist is asserting his freedom as he relates himself to the history of European colonization, which brewed the modern system of racial oppression and spread it across the globe. As Łuczak contends, "Max is not just a black American tourist revived by Dutch racial tolerance, but a descendant of slaves dehumanized by the Europeans."[21] This holistic approach contextualizes the European Enlightenment project by illuminating its obscured history while tracing the forced origins of a Black Atlantic tradition that brings together the victims of slavery and its descendants in the West.

Max's critique of Western humanism relies on an anti-humanist viewpoint resulting from the history of modern democracy and its intrinsic relation to colonization. In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe discusses the role of violence in modern democracies, highlighting the intentional differentiation between their internal fortification and external consequences. For

[20] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 1.
[21] Łuczak, "After the End of Man," 66.

Mbembe, "[t]he history of modern democracy is, at bottom, a history with two faces, and even two bodies—the solar body, on the one hand, and *the nocturnal body*, on the other."[22] This conception unveils a twofold configuration of democracy where the economic development of the Western region, associated with the "solar body," is fueled by the covert practices of oppression that extended across the rest of the world, which correspond to the "nocturnal body." Mbembe argues that "[t]he major emblems of this nocturnal body are the colonial empire and the pro-slavery state—and more precisely the plantation and the penal colony."[23] Whereas these systems of subjugation were developed by a conjoint endeavor among US and European imperialism, the Western humanistic project tended to overlook the violent history of the latter to the detriment of the US and its systemic racism over time. As Łuczak contends:

> Such bipolar historical thinking, which downplays the European role in the development of the worldwide system of servitude and racism, even if it conveniently simplifies the historical picture, is in Max's eyes, reductive and historically dangerous.[24]

Max's perspective dismantles these historiographical barriers, preparing the ground for his exploration of the affiliative ties of the Black experience in the West.

As Max's reminiscing intensifies, the past timeline takes over in the novel for the first time, propelling the narration back to New York City in 1940. The protagonist has just published his first novel and rejoices at his invitation to a party that will officialize his induction into the US literary world. This event initiates a lifelong friendship between Max and Harry Ames, a fictionalized Richard Wright, that begins with a mentorship following the success of Max's first novel. In one of their early meetings, Harry shares his experience as a Black writer with the protagonist, offering a portrait of US society in line with Wright's "double vision"[25]: "In our society which is white—we are intruders they say—there has got to be something inherently horrible about having the sicknesses and weaknesses of that

[22] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 22.

[23] Mbembe, 22.

[24] Łuczak, "After the End of Man," 66.

[25] Cf. Richard Wright, "The Outsider," in *Richard Wright*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Library of America, 1991), 499–500.

society described by a person who is a victim of them."[26] This intruder's perspective entails a liminal positionality as both Black subjects and, though incomplete, US citizens that turns African American authors into dangerous analysts in the eyes of the white supremacist status quo. Harry's contention encapsulates the internal contradictions of the US, a Western nation that had thrived on the exploitation of its Black population for centuries, while continuously depriving African Americans of their full citizenship.

The racial caste system in the US, established in the slavery period and later perpetuated through segregation, involved a conflicting relationality to the national identity of Black people. According to Sollors, "[i]n American social symbolism ethnicity may function as a construct evocative of blood, nature, and descent, whereas national identity may be relegated to the order of law, conduct, and consent."[27] The nationality of Black people in the US was granted by the Constitution, but their rights as citizens were systematically neglected. This contradiction responded to an opportunistic conception of race in which the white supremacist status quo used the filial component of ethnicity to undermine the affiliative national rights of African Americans. Their crippled national identity transcended the geographical boundaries of the US, reaching such a paradoxical point that even the operations of the US Army overseas were segregated well into the twentieth century. As a chronicler of modern history, Max is drafted to participate in the Italian campaign of World War II (1943–1945), witnessing firsthand how "[t]he society expected, nay, *demanded*, that every black soldier within its ranks die as he had lived—segregated, deprived, discriminated against."[28] The US military command distrusted the capabilities of the Black divisions, which resulted in numerous unnecessary casualties. Seeing the gratuitous slaughtering of African Americans, Max resorts to his Black subjectivity to lead his squad: "he had made up his mind that he was not talking Army anymore; he was going to talk colored."[29] The squad's self-organization within US ranks proves crucial to their survival, and also contributes to the success of the operation, in a context where death was almost certain were it not for their affiliative resistance.

Max's experience in the Italian campaign introduces him to the potentialities of reverting the filial conception of race to an affiliative perspective on

[26] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 6.
[27] Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, 151.
[28] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 10.
[29] Williams, chap. 10.

Blackness. While white supremacist discourse had succeeded in underpinning the filial relation for centuries, the affiliative approach offered a counter-cultural alternative through which the African American community could own full agency in the process of identity formation. This reconfiguration also fostered the transnational affiliations of the Black Atlantic, in that it linked African American culture not just to the Black experience in the West, but also to the ancient Black tradition originating in the African continent. Over the first half of the twentieth century, the influential tenets of Garveyism and the Nation of Islam, or Alain Locke's pivotal conceptualization of the New Negro, among others, gathered momentum for the valorization of Black history in the subsequent movements for racial justice and equality. Back in NYC, Max ponders his initial skepticism about this counter-cultural tradition after a conversation with his close friend Harry about Africa: "Then there were the J. A. Rogers books and Max had read them many times, with tremendous doubt and with humor. The Africans had kings and princes and great armies and wealth and culture, Rogers said. Maybe so."[30] Despite his doubts, Max's thoughts already hint at the importance that the affiliative perspective on Blackness will have in the reshaping of African American identity after World War II.

In the aftermath of the conflict, Max struggles to continue with his literary career in post-war NYC, finding some respite to focus on his writing during a long stay in Paris. Harry, who had already been pushed to exile, welcomes the protagonist to the French capital and its Black expatriate group in the summer of 1953. Max and his fellow countrymen form a modern community that challenges a notion that Gilroy describes as "the curse of homelessness or the curse of enforced exile," a condition shared by the people of the African diaspora. As Gilroy argues, late-modern Black Atlantic culture shows how this curse "becomes affirmed and is reconstructed as the basis of a privileged standpoint from which certain useful and critical perceptions about the modern world become more likely,"[31] despite stemming from racial inequalities at its origins. In the novel, the African American expatriates could decide themselves to move overseas, later expanding their critical perspective as liminal subjects within Western society, freed from the constraints of US racial ideology. Max notices how the community continues to enlarge by autumn, and ponders on what his brief experience in the French capital has taught him so far: "Paris wasn't going to welcome

[30] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 11.
[31] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 111.

them with open arms because they were discriminated against in the States: if you had no money, the world discriminated against you."[32] Those who wind up settling in Paris when winter comes become part of a Black Atlantic community where African Americans, French Africans, and Africans from various nationalities gather to make common cause, fostering their affiliative ties at the dawn of the liberation of Africa in the mid-1950s.

In May 1954, Max comes back home to cover the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement for a prestigious NYC newspaper, witnessing firsthand some of the major events of this era. The winds of change raised by the US Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which mandated racial desegregation at schools across the country, are followed by the bus boycott that, as most historians agree, officially launched the Civil Rights Movement. Instead of Alabama, Williams sets this historic event in the fictional town of Altea, and shapes his leading figure, Reverend Paul Durrell, on Martin Luther King. Under Durrell's leadership, the bus boycott prospers and becomes a total success, yet the protagonist does not see him as the leader that the African American community really needs: "Max wanted to be convinced that Durrell was all that he seemed to be, but inside him something persisted that said he was not."[33] In the struggle for racial justice and equality, Max's attention turns to a Black orator in Harlem who was rapidly rising to fame, and whom Williams bases upon Malcolm X. As the protagonist describes, "[w]here Durrell employed fanciful imagery and rhetoric, Minister Q preached the history, economics and religion of race relations; he preached a message so harsh that it hurt to listen to it."[34] The decades-long activism that converged in the Civil Rights Movement, along with the potent input of Black nationalism, was providing African Americans with a new subjectivity in a national scenario that kept negating their right to full citizenship.

Amid the national struggle for racial justice and equality, the liberation of Africa continues to unravel, fueling the social movements in the US, and ultimately drawing Max to the African continent. Sent to Lagos to set up a desk for his newspaper, the protagonist meets with several diasporic acquaintances, such as the recently appointed Nigerian President Jaja Enzkwu and Angolan rebel Miguel Assis,[35] whom he had met in Paris and New York respectively. The Black Atlantic affiliations between Max and these leading

[32] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 19.

[33] Williams, chap. 20.

[34] Williams, chap. 20.

[35] These two characters are based upon the historical revolutionary leaders Nnamdi Azikiwe and Agostinho Neto respectively.

figures facilitate his coverage of the liberation of Africa, and Assis ends up granting him permission to accompany a rebel squad across the border with Angola. This dangerous operation leads the protagonist to question his involvement in the conflict:

> If the squad ran into trouble the Portuguese would fire on his black face just as they would on the Angolans'…. Why was he going into this mess? He could hardly rationalize it on the basis of color, but then, color was inescapable.[36]

Feeling now part of the African diaspora, Max longs for the triumph of decolonization in the whole continent, risking his own life to witness firsthand the liberatory movements that were unfolding in Africa. For Gilroy, "the worth of the diaspora concept is in its attempt to specify differentiation and identity in a way which enables one to think about the issue of racial commonality outside of constricting binary frameworks."[37] This sense of "racial commonality" stands as a clear example of the affiliative perspective on Blackness, in that the transnational ties that Max's migrant experiences foster through the novel are what leads him to the very fronts of the African conflicts for independence.

With plans to marry Margrit, Max leaves Africa for the Netherlands to treat an infection, and soon the past and present timelines coalesce in the novel to fully disclose Harry's letter outlining the King Alfred Plan. Under the auspices of Alliance Blanc, a secret international organization of Western countries that was born to undermine the liberation of Africa, the US government had devised "its own contingency plans for handling 22 million black Americans in case they became unruly."[38] The white supremacist conspiracy reacted against the increasing counter-cultural affiliations between African American activism and the revolutionary movements in Africa, which were channeled by the Civil Rights Movement and Black Nationalism in the US. When the protagonist receives the letter, he becomes the main target of the undercover agents who had recently killed Harry to avoid the public dissemination of the plan. Yet, a dying Max does succeed in passing the message to Minister Q via phone call before his final demise in the Netherlands, hoping that the Black nationalist leader is able to spread the word. In keeping with his personal history, the protagonist dies fighting the

[36] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 26.
[37] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 120.
[38] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 28.

agents that chase him in the Netherlands, embodying a new Black subject who poses a real threat to the Western system of racial oppression.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The discovery of the King Alfred Plan culminates the philosophical evolution that Max experiences throughout the novel. In his early days as a writer, the protagonist learns about his liminal positionality as an intruder in Western society, which provides him with a new perspective on the conflicting intersections of race and nationality in the US. Then, his deployment in the Italian campaign forces him to put theory into practice and establish affiliative ties among his Black countrymen to survive World War II. This first war experience introduces him to the potentialities of approaching Blackness through affiliation, which opens a path toward the valorization of the ancient Black tradition originating in the African continent. Despite his initial skepticism, Max continues to explore Black Atlantic affiliations in his long stay in Paris, and experiences firsthand how the Civil Rights Movement and Black Nationalism encourage African Americans to fight for their rights as full citizens. The reshaping of African American identity that takes place in this period keeps fostering Black people's transnational affiliative ties and anti-colonial solidarity, leading the protagonist to the very heart of the liberation of Africa during the 1960s. Last, his second war experience acts as a catalyst for a sense of "racial commonality" that shows him the pivotal role of Black affiliations in the fight against white supremacy, which is ultimately confirmed by his discovery of the conspiracy plans spearheaded by Alliance Blanc.

Max's life-long struggle epitomizes a historical crisis that, as Muller remarks, "pit[s] the heritage of the West against the emerging historical consciousness of traditionally oppressed people, and specifically of black Americans and Africans, whose contemporary task is to discover how they fit into an alien framework."[39] The Black Atlantic affiliations that the protagonist unveils through his nomadic life provide an alternative framework, illuminating a powerful counter-culture that challenges the racial discrimination imposed by Western modernity. Max's allusions to the origins of slavery, his coverage of the struggle for civil rights in the US, and his first-hand experience in the liberation of Africa relate to a Black Atlantic culture that contributed to reshaping African American identity in the post-World War

[39] Muller, *John A. Williams*, 75.

II period, a historical moment in which the Black liberation movements were flourishing across the world. These movements fought against a system of racial oppression that had subjugated Black people for centuries while seeking to restore an intrinsic humanity negated under Western modernity. In the end, as Max protests to his teasing alter ego in interior monologue, "[a]ll you ever want to do is remind me that I am black. But, goddamn it, I also am."[40]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Boyd, Herb. "The Man and the Plan: Conspiracy Theories and Paranoia in Our Culture." *Black Issues Book Review* 4, no. 2 (2002): 38–40. https://www.proquest.com/magazines/man-plan/docview/217750160/se-2.

Cooke, Anthony C. "Black Community, Media, and Intellectual Paranoia-as-Politics." *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 4 (2011): 609–26. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934710387278.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.

Jackson, John L., Jr. *Racial Paranoia: The Unintended Consequences of Political Correctness*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2008.

Joseph, Peniel E. *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr*. New York: Basic Books, 2021.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Address at the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention of the National Bar Association." In *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V*, edited by Clayborne Carson et al., 264–70. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Łuczak, Ewa. "After the End of Man: John A. Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am*." *Polish Journal for American Studies* 6 (2012): 63–72.

Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel*. Translated by Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell. Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Muller, Gilbert H. *John A. Williams*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984.

Reilly, John M. "Thinking History in *The Man Who Cried I Am*." *Black American Literature Forum* 21, nos. 1–2 (1987): 25–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/2904419.

Said, Edward. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. London: Vintage, 1991.

Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Williams, John A. *The Man Who Cried I Am*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2004. Kindle.

Wright, Richard. "The Outsider." In *Richard Wright: Later Works*, edited by Arnold Rampersad, 367–841. New York: Library of America, 1991.

X, Malcolm, and Alex Haley. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Random House, 1992.

[40] Williams, *The Man*, chap. 29.

THE AFFILIATIVE RELATIONS OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC IN JOHN A. WILLIAMS'S *THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM*

Summary

This article explores how African American identity relates to different national scenarios in John A. Williams's 1967 novel *The Man Who Cried I Am*. In his book, Williams narrates the story of Max Reddick, a forty-nine-year-old African American writer who, in a span of two days, remembers his nomadic life from his latest sojourn in the Netherlands. The large array of geographies that the protagonist traverses through the story comes together under Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic, in that the "affiliative" relations, following Edward Said's terminology, that the protagonist experiences across Europe, the US, and Africa unveils the ties that bring together Black people in the West. In this light, the article argues that these transnational affiliative ties contribute to reshaping African American identity in the post-World War II period.

Keywords: John A. Williams; *The Man Who Cried I Am*; Black Atlantic; racism; affiliation; African American identity; King Alfred Plan

WIĘZI AFILIACYJNE CZARNEGO ATLANTYKU W POWIEŚCI *THE MAN WHO CRIED I AM* JOHNA A. WILLIAMSA

Streszczenie

W artykule badany jest proces formowania tożsamości afroamerykańskiej w odniesieniu do różnych scenariuszy narodowych w powieści Johna A. Williamsa *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967). Williams przedstawia w niej historię nomadycznego życia afroamerykańskiego pisarza Maxa Reddicka. Przemierzane przez bohatera kraje są ukazane w powieści jako hybrydowa przestrzeń Czarnego Atlantyku Paula Gilroya. Ukazując relacje, jakie bohater buduje, będąc w Europie, Stanach Zjednoczonych i Afryce, Williams odnosi się do koncepcji afiliacji Edwarda Saida. Przedstawione w powieści transgraniczne i transnarodowe relacje kształtujące tożsamość Maxa Reddicka reprezentują więzi łączące czarnoskórych mieszkańców świata Zachodu. Według Williamsa mają one znaczący wpływ na proces kształtowania się tożsamości Afroamerykanów po II wojnie światowej.

Słowa kluczowe: John A. Williams; *The Man Who Cried I Am*; Czarny Atlantyk; rasizm; afiliacja; tożsamość afroamerykańska; "King Alfred Plan".