

Class struggle in Park's, Topdog/Underdog,
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الصراع الطبقي في مسرحية بارك "المتسلط والمضطهد"

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المديرة العامة لتربية نينوى

DOI 10.58564/MABDAA.66.2.2024.1038

Abstract

In Suzan-Lori Parks' play *Topdog/Underdog*, the class struggle provides a good starting point for a discussion on the intricate relationship between Lincoln and Booth, two African brothers. This play is set in a dismal apartment and it looks into their lives, which concerns their struggle in poverty, survival, and, power quest. The mention of their names, Lincoln and Booth, gives clues to the historical background of the oppression and the inequalities that African Americans suffer in the United States. The play's central feature makes us see the social strata issue and life of the minority in the most microscopic way through the way the brothers relate. Class struggle is one of the many complex aspects of the author as the brothers get engaged in conflict explores. In fact, *Topdog/Underdog* not only examines the conventional ideas of class conflict but also explores how systemic forces affect both personal decisions and familial bonds. In Park's opinion, the race for survival and advancement may pit even the closest people against each other. Through the play, the limits of the social constraints are questioned and the possibility of freedom despite the very oppression is discussed. Finally, this work also brings to the fore Suzan-Lori Parks' incredible narrating skill, which not only enthralls the viewers but also satire of the class struggle among African Americans. The play is built on the idea of linking the characters' experiences with the greater socio-economic context. This makes the viewers reflect on the lasting consequences of inequality and the pursuit of the American Dream in a system that favors a few privileged ones. The study will most likely lead to a much deeper understanding of the play's socio-political relevance and its continuing relevance in today's society. **Key Words:** Park, class struggle, African brothers, inequalities, American Dream.

الخلاصة

في مسرحية سوزان لوري باركس «المتسلط والمضطهد»، يوفر الصراع الطبقي نقطة انطلاق جيدة لمناقشة العلاقة المعقدة بين لينكولن وبوث، الأخوين الأفريقيين. تدور أحداث هذه المسرحية في شقة كئيبة وتتنظر إلى حياتهم التي تتعلق بصراعهم في الفقر والبقاء والسعي إلى السلطة. إن ذكر اسميهما، لينكولن وبوث، يعطي أدلة على الخلفية التاريخية للقمع وعدم المساواة التي يعاني منها الأميركيون من أصل أفريقي في الولايات المتحدة. السمة المركزية للمسرحية تجعلنا نرى قضية الطبقات الاجتماعية وحياة الأقلية بأدق التفاصيل من خلال طريقة تعامل الأخوة. يعد الصراع الطبقي أحد الجوانب المعقدة العديدة للمؤلف حيث يخطر الإخوة في الصراع. في الواقع، لا تتناول المتسلط والمضطهد الأفكار التقليدية للصراع الطبقي فحسب، بل تستكشف أيضًا كيفية تأثير القوى النظامية على كل من القرارات الشخصية والروابط العائلية. وترى بارك أن السباق من أجل البقاء والتقدم قد يضع حتى أقرب الناس في مواجهة بعضهم البعض. من خلال المسرحية، يتم التشكيك في حدود القيود الاجتماعية ومناقشة إمكانية الحرية على الرغم من الاضطهاد ذاته. أخيرًا، يبرز هذا العمل أيضًا مهارة سوزان لوري باركس المذهلة في السرد، والتي لا تبهر المشاهدين فحسب، بل تسخر أيضًا من الصراع الطبقي بين الأميركيين من أصل أفريقي. تعتمد المسرحية على فكرة ربط تجارب الشخصيات بالسياق الاجتماعي والاقتصادي الأكبر. وهذا يجعل المشاهدين يتأملون في العواقب الدائمة لعدم المساواة والسعي لتحقيق الحلم الأمريكي في نظام يفضل

عددًا قليلاً من الأشخاص المتميزين. من المرجح أن تؤدي الدراسة إلى فهم أعمق بكثير للأهمية الاجتماعية والسياسية للمسرحية وأهميتها المستمرة في مجتمع الحالي. الكلمات المفتاحية: بارك , الصراع الطبقي, الأخوين الأفريقيين, عدم المساواة, الحلم الأمريكي.

1.Introduction to class struggle

In the wake of recent economic crises, class struggle has once again emerged as a significant concern, encompassing political discourse, social considerations, and even psychological tensions. This predicament has captured the attention of people in various regions, reigniting discussions about its implications and impacts. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, class struggle is defined as “opposition of and contention between social or economic classes especially: such a struggle between or felt to exist between the proletariat and the capitalist classes”. In fact, Class struggle refers to the ongoing conflict and tension between “different social classes within a society”, often stemming from disparities in wealth, power, and access to resources. This concept revolves around the idea that different classes, such as the “working class” and the “owning class”, have conflicting interests and that this conflict can manifest in various ways, including economic, political, and cultural arenas (Samoff, 1982, p.107). The historical development of the term "class struggle" is intertwined with the evolution of social and economic thought, as well as significant political and societal changes. While the term itself was not used, the idea of social classes and conflicts between them can be traced back to “ancient civilizations”. In ancient Greece, for instance, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle discussed the roles and tensions between different classes in their writings. Plato, as evident in works like "The Republic," 375 BCE explored the concept of a just society organized into distinct echelons: “the rulers (philosopher-kings), the warriors (guardians), and the producers (craftsmen, farmers)” (Aristotle, 2017, p.26). He extensively examined the potential clashes inherent in these divisions, emphasizing the essential requirement for harmony and a balanced distribution of power to preserve stability. In contrast, Aristotle, in his treatise "Politics," presented a more intricate perspective on social classes. He acknowledged the coexistence of diverse classes, including the affluent and the laboring class. Aristotle conceded that conflicts might emerge due to their disparate interests, and he grappled with the quandary of effectively managing these disputes to safeguard the overall welfare of the society (2017, p. XVIII). “Feudalism” took shape in the “Middle Ages”, characterized by a hierarchical system encompassing land-owning nobles, the clergy, and peasants. The tensions between the ruling upper class and the serfs frequently ignited revolts due to economic inequalities and an unequal distribution of resources (Barry, 2008, 53). The concept of class struggle became more conspicuous during the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe. This change brought about significant transformations in social and economic frameworks, giving rise to novel classes and dynamics. As the merchant and capitalist classes ascended alongside the traditional feudal nobility, inevitable tensions and conflicts ensued. In this era, several early economic thinkers played pivotal roles in dissecting and elucidating the intricacies of the evolving social and economic terrain. Adam Smith's seminal work "The Wealth of Nations" (1776) and David Ricardo's introduction of concepts like comparative advantage and the law of diminishing returns were particularly influential. Moreover, the notion of "class struggle" was further developed and influenced by the literary works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In the midst of the 19th century, Marx formulated the theory of “historical materialism”, emphasizing the role of economic influences and interactions between social classes in shaping societies. According to Marx, societies have been characterized by class conflicts with varying goals throughout history. He claimed that the core of capitalism was a struggle between the working class "proletariat" and the capitalist class "bourgeoisie" (Escudé, 2021, p.77). The working class faced exploitation and harsh labor conditions during the advancement of industrialization, leading to the emergence of labor movements and trade unions. These movements aimed to address class-based inequalities and enhance the rights and well-being of workers. The term "class struggle" gained practical significance as a rallying cry for these movements. The concept of class struggle held a pivotal role in shaping political ideologies such as “socialism” and “communism” (Mayer, 2002, p.780). These ideologies aimed to redress the inherent inequalities within capitalist societies by advocating for the overthrow of the capitalist class and the establishment of a more equitable social and economic framework. Indeed, the 20th century witnessed the apex of class struggles across various contexts, encompassing labor movements, anti-colonial endeavors, and revolutionary insurrections. The frictions between distinct social classes assumed a central role in shaping worldwide occurrences, revolutions, and societal reforms. In modern discussions, the term "class struggle" remains pertinent when examining topics of income disparity, social equity, and economic gaps. It has also evolved to encompass considerations of “gender”, “race”, and other intersecting factors that can amplify “class-based inequities” (Belkhir, 2001, p. 150).

1.1 Class struggle in literature

Class struggle is a central theme in literature that explores the conflicts, tensions, and disparities between different social classes within a society. It has been a recurring theme throughout history, reflecting the societal and economic conditions of different periods. Class struggle in literature often delves into the power dynamics, injustices, and inequalities that arise from the divisions between the upper, middle, and lower classes. A few examples that illustrate the relationship between class struggle and literature: *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Oliver Twist* (1838) by Charles Dickens, *The Jungle* (1905) by Upton Sinclair, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga, *Animal Farm* (1945) by George Orwell, *Pittsburgh Cycle* (2005) by August Wilson, *A Doll's House* (1879) by Henrik Ibsen, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941) by Bertolt Brecht's, *Death of a Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller, *Pygmalion* (1912) by George Bernard Shaw, *Master Harold...and the Boys* (1950) by Athol Fugard, "London" (1794) by William Blake, "I'm Explaining a Few Things" (1904) by Pablo Neruda, "The Unknown Citizen" (1940) by W. H. Auden. These examples display how class struggle is a compelling and multi-faceted theme in drama. Dramatic works provide a space to explore the complexities of social hierarchies, economic disparities, and the human connections that are shaped and strained by these divisions. Briefly speaking, the depiction of class struggle in the writing has been of great essence. Literature with its unparalleled power is a magnifying glass that highlights the myriad facets of human relationships and shows the multifaceted aspects of social status. Through literary devices, we can mentally wander into the realms of people of various social classes and therefore can unravel the injustices, break class restrictions, and bring the readers to the questioning of their views. Furthermore, literature's capacity to evoke empathy and engross the emotions enables readers to empathize with characters from diverse backgrounds and garner insight into their adversities. This can cultivate a sense of shared human experience and spur readers to contemplate the imperative for societal reform and equity. Exploring class conflict in literature goes beyond portraying strife; it can also offer solutions, prompt critical thought, and inspire readers to strive for a more equitable society. Literature's intricate portrayal of characters, relationships, and societal structures can ignite discussions, heighten awareness, and enrich the ongoing discourse on social change and the quest for a more just and diverse tomorrow.

2. Introduction to Suzan-Lori Parks's theater

Suzan-Lori Parks, born on May 10, 1963, in Fort Knox, Kentucky, is a celebrated American playwright, screenwriter, and novelist recognized for her groundbreaking and intellectually-stimulating contributions to modern theater (Geis, 2008, P.3). Her distinct narrative style, intricate character evolution, and deep dives into intricate societal and cultural matters have garnered her widespread acclaim. In 2001, Suzan-Lori Parks was granted the prestigious "genius grant" from the MacArthur Foundation (Kolin & Young, 2013, p.1). Her play *Topdog/Underdog* clinched the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, a historic achievement, as she became the first African American woman to receive this recognition. Time magazine acknowledged her as one of its "100 Innovators for the Next New Wave" (Hill & Barnett, 2009, p.387). Actually, Parks is a renowned playwright and is "described as a 'black Samuel Beckett'" (Feist & Feist, 1998, 243). At the 76th Annual Tony Awards in 2023, Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog* was honored with the "Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play. Notably, it had previously secured two Tony nominations in 2002", including Best Play, and secured "the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Drama", solidifying Parks' status as the first Black woman to attain this prestigious accolade (Ghasemi, 2016, P.223). One of her most distinctive qualities is her use of language, "[Parks's] stark but poetic language and fiercely idiosyncratic images transform her work into something haunting and marvelous." (qtd. in Geis, 2008, P.3). Parks often plays with language, experimenting with form and structure to create a dynamic and engaging theatrical experience. She has a knack for blending poetic and everyday speech, creating a distinctive rhythm and tone in her plays. Suzan-Lori Parks has created a diverse body of literary works that span various formats and genres. Her contributions to contemporary literature include plays, screenplays, and novels that delve into complex themes and highlight her unique storytelling style. Among the most well-known of her literary creations are *Topdog/Underdog* (2001); *In the Blood* (1999); *The Red Letter Plays* (2000-2001); *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990); and *Father Comes Home From the Wars* (Parts 1, 2 & 3) (2014). Comics: Her first book, an autobiographical book entitled *Getting Mother's Body*, was published in 2003. Suzan-Lori's writings include these kinds of literary offerings as well: *White Noise* (2019); and *365 Days/Plays* (2002-2003). Screenplays: Parks is not only voicing but also is scriptwriter and in this capacity, she wrote the screenplay of the "Their Eyes Were Watching God" movie (2005), based on the novel by Zora Neale Hurston. Actually, Park's main idea is a new kind of storytelling that has to do directly with the day-to-day life, our identity, and the society we live in. Parks has been the lucky recipient of many prizes and

distinctions. Her works are still staged and researched. Her plays have been staged and the same has been studied by scholars, actors, and audience members all over the world. To sum up, Suzan Lori Parks's theater is highly regarded for its intellect's poignant impact, and fearlessness, in addressing challenging and sensitive topics. With her contributions to the world of drama and storytelling, Parks has made an impact that will not be forgotten.

3. Introduction to Topdog/Underdog

Topdog/Underdog is a play written by African-American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, achieved a historic milestone by winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2002. This dark comedy first premiered in 2001 at "The Public Theater off Broadway in New York City" (Chaudhuri, 2002, 1). It marked a significant moment, as Parks became the first African American woman playwright to receive this prestigious award. After her victory, Parks remarked, "As the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize [for drama], I have to say I wish I was the 101st" (qtd. in Jasim & Lajiman, 2018, p. 142). Over time, the play has gained substantial recognition in contemporary American theater. It delves deeply into intricate family dynamics, issues of identity, the struggle for survival, and the challenges faced by African-American men in a society influenced by historical legacies and societal expectations. The play's structure, in Topdog/Underdog by Suzan-Lori Parks, mirrors the complexity of the themes it delves into and the interplay between its two central characters, Lincoln and Booth. The play unfolds through "six scenes," (Larson, 2008, p.334) all situated in a rented room within a boarding house. Notably, the play does not specify a particular time period. Parks aimed to create a story with universal themes that could transcend any specific era. In fact, each scene sheds light on distinct phases of the brothers' relationship and their ever-evolving challenges. Topdog/Underdog revolves around the lives of two African-American brothers, Lincoln and Booth, whose names carry historical symbolism, referencing Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth. These names infuse their interactions with deeper meaning. The brothers grapple with a complex and often strained relationship as they confront personal challenges and pursue their aspirations. Lincoln, initially a successful "Topdog" in the three-card Monte street game, later transitions into a role where he impersonates Abraham Lincoln in a sideshow act, complete with whiteface makeup. This act engages the audience in the game. Lincoln, seeking stability and a more substantial identity, now works as an Abraham Lincoln impersonator in a theme park. Booth, the sibling, dreams of becoming the "Underdog." He aspires to master the art of three-card Monte, aiming to overcome his challenges and establish his identity. His driving force is a desire for recognition and dominance. The play tackles many issues as struggles between siblings, how history affects who you are, power balances, and living in a world filled with racial bias and tough economic times. Parks uses a special style of writing. It has a beat to it and some-times feels like poetry, making the characters' conversations more meaningful. Topdog/Underdog offers an insightful look at the experiences of African Americans through the tricky association of two brothers and the societal influences that mold them. The play underlines power forces and a constant battle for the top spot and existence. This controversial work arouses topics like race, family, who we are, and the American Dream.

4. Class struggle in Topdog/Underdog

By Suzan-Lori Parks, Topdog/Underdog offers an insightful consideration of the conflict between social classes, focused on their journeys. This play digs deep into the tangle of relationships within society, especially of a financial kind, and throws light on the particular barriers facing African Americans in a society so riven by racial divisions. Topdog/Underdog is Suzan-Lori Parks' title, and right away, she has encapsulated the play's theme of class struggle in a subtle and metaphorical way. It demonstrates the power relations, and the continued pursuit of greater strength—both the name and symbol to which Lincoln and Booth are the two central characters. The title serves as an emblem of strength and support in general, indicating that two people, discovered by acquaintances to be brothers, are engaged in a constant struggle for power. One of the brothers, Lincoln, comes in terms of family and professional life to represent the "top dog;" his family, is dedicated to a single ideal, in control and power, while the other—Booth—and others in his professional world take for granted that he is the "underdog." While learning to cope with a life of hardship on the fringes of society and the impossibility of climbing into the ruling class, this harsh existence. Throughout the course of the play, Lincoln and Booth are locked in an unending competition for supremacy, whether it is in their professional pursuits, personal lives, or their continuous attempts to outshine each other. The opening scene of Topdog/Underdog lays the foundation for examining the theme of class struggle in the play. Booth's economic hardships are vividly portrayed through the depiction of his apartment as "A seedily furnished rooming house room. A bed, a reclining chair, a small wooden chair, [...] the cardboard playing board a top 2 mismatched milk crates" (Parks, 11). The

term "seedily" typically conveys an atmosphere of dirtiness, darkness, and overall poor living conditions, providing a clear indication that Booth's housing situation is far from ideal. The utilization of improvised furniture made from these materials serves to underscore his financial struggles; as such, furnishings are commonly associated with individuals who lack the means to afford conventional furniture. In essence, Booth's living conditions serve as a poignant representation of the challenges endured by many individuals in lower socioeconomic strata, where access to essential resources is limited, and substandard housing is a harsh reality. This portrayal not only underscores the difficulties faced by those in these socioeconomic classes but also highlights the stark disparities in access to basic necessities. Ultimately, this narrative element fosters a strong and relatable connection between the audience and Booth, effectively shining a light on the real-life economic struggles experienced by many who grapple with inadequate housing and constrained access to resources. Lincoln's encounter with the child on the bus serves as another illustration of the class struggle portrayed in this scene. As he says, "so I'm riding the bus home. In addition, this kid asked me for my autograph [...] I got a look at him. A little rich kid [...] I told him he could have it for 10 bucks" (Parks 15). The child, referred to as a "little rich kid," signifies a noticeable economic gap between Lincoln and this youngster. In this context, Lincoln deceives the child, presuming that the child has misconstrued his identity as the historical figure Abraham Lincoln. When the child requests an autograph, Lincoln capitalizes on the child's innocence by agreeing to exchange his autograph for money, thus underscoring the financial challenges Lincoln confronts. It displays how individuals from different economic backgrounds can interact and the tension that can arise when someone from a more privileged class approaches someone from a less privileged class. Lincoln's response can also be viewed as an attempt to monetize his own identity or the little recognition he may have. In a society marked by economic hardship, individuals might resort to unconventional means to make money, even if it means selling something as personal as an autograph. The play's central themes revolve around economic struggle, and the pursuit of a better life. This speech captures some of the complexities and tensions related to class and economics that are prevalent throughout the play. Another illustration of class-related tensions can be found in the discussion that occurred between Booth and Lincoln concerning Lincoln's salaries, spending on water, and the use of the toilet. Lincoln told Booth "You living in thuh Third World, fool! Hey, I 'll get thuh food" (Parks 20). The mention of "living in thuh Third World" implies a significant socioeconomic divide. The "Third World" is often used to describe economically disadvantaged and underdeveloped regions. In this context, it suggests that one person is living in conditions that are reminiscent of extreme poverty and lack of resources. The statement highlights economic disparities and suggests that Booth is in a more privileged position and has the means to obtain food, Lincoln may be struggling to do so. This rich-poor gap is part of fights between classes. Also, calling someone "fool" and the tone of the sentence shows frustration or tension that usually comes with class fights. It may also show anger or impatience Lincoln has towards Booth because of their money situations. The fight between classes in *Topdog/Underdog* is shown in the Three-Card Monte game. In this game, the dealer moves three cards around and asks the player to find a red card. It's a trick used on the street to cheat people out of their money. This connects to the struggle between the two main characters, Lincoln and Booth. Booth was really into a tricky game that involved Three-Card Monte. It shows how badly he wanted more money. He was ready to lie and trick people just for some cash. Booth's need to deceive others reminds us of the struggles people face when they cannot find good opportunities. Booth chose to be called "3-Cards" (Parks 24), to show he believed he could get rich and be important by doing it. He thought that by taking on this new name, he could find chances to make money and get a better place in society. This shows how determined he was to get more money, even if it meant being linked to lies and chasing after profit. In his plea to Lincoln to join him in their pursuit of financial gain, Booth states, "Oh, come on, man, we could make money, you and me... We could clean up, you and me" (Parks 24). Here, Booth's words highlight how Three-Card Monte represents not only an avenue for survival but also a means of establishing a sense of identity. It is seen as their ticket out of dire financial straits, offering a purposeful path forward. Continuing, Booth adds, "We could be a team, man. Rake in the money! [...] There'd be some days when we could lose money, but most of the days we would come out on top! Pockets bulging, plenty of cash! And the ladies would be thrilling! You could afford to get laid! Grace would be all over me again" (Parks 25). Booth's desire to team up with Lincoln in the Three-Card Monte hustle underscores the intense competition for economic prospects, even within familial bonds. The sibling rivalry over this potential earnings avenue reflects the wider societal competition for resources and the economic challenges confronted by African Americans. Moreover, Booth passionately expresses his eagerness to break free from their current economic struggles and enhance their financial situation, as he states, "Here I

am trying to earn a living" (Parks 26). He firmly believes that they have the power to transform their lives and escape the challenges that currently define them. This notion of escape reflects the often-illusory hope that individuals in lower socioeconomic classes grasp onto as they relentlessly strive for a better life. Thus, Three-Card Monte can serve as a symbolic representation of the complex dynamics of class struggle, deception, and the pursuit of power and escape. The characters' interactions and the themes of illusion and desperation in the play resonate with the deceptive nature of the card game, providing a compelling metaphor for the challenges faced by marginalized individuals in society. Booth perceives "card game" (Parks 27) as a chance to prosper and assert himself, whereas Lincoln, haunted by his past, sees it as a perilous endeavor that endangers their self-worth and integrity. Consequently, Booth attempts to undermine Lincoln's current occupation with the statement, "Dressing up like some crackerass white man, some dead president, and letting people shoot at you sounds like a hustle to me" (Parks 27). Booth finds Lincoln's current work slavish, "Back to way back then when folks was slave and shit" (Parks 27). It primarily addresses racial and historical aspects, particularly the legacy of slavery in the United States. However, class struggle and racial struggle are often interconnected. In the context of this statement, Booth seems to be expressing his frustration and resentment towards the type of work Lincoln is doing, which involves impersonating white historical figures, possibly for the entertainment of others. Booth perceives this work as degrading and reminiscent of a time when African Americans were enslaved, suggesting a struggle against racial oppression. Booth's speech highlights how economic circumstances can be entangled with racial and historical injustices. The characters grapple with both economic hardships and the legacy of racism, making it a play that explores the complex interplay between class and race in American society. The conversation that concludes the scene one embodies a different aspect of class conflict, as Lincoln declares, "Daddy told me once [...] why he named us both Lincoln and Booth [...] it was his idea of joke" (Parks 28). The reference to Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth in Topdog/Underdog indeed adds a significant historical layer to the theme of class struggle in the play. The historical context of Booth's assassination of Abraham Lincoln is a powerful backdrop that enhances the complexity of the characters' identities and their struggles. In fact, the brothers' upbringing and family history have left them in a cycle of poverty. Their mother abandoned them, and their father named them Lincoln and Booth as a cruel joke. This legacy of abandonment and mockery reflects the broader societal issues that contribute to the cycle of poverty in disadvantaged communities. When Lincoln impersonates Abraham Lincoln in an arcade, work probably illustrates well the belittling of how African Americans powerfully grapple with a historical past that is crucially textured by racial oppression and inequality. This demonstrates that the question of identity is not an easy one for them and also makes them realize the long-term effect that historical events have on one's life. In addition, the use of these historical names is ironic. John Wilkes Booth was the murderer of Abraham Lincoln, consequently, in this play; John Wilkes is regarded as the brother of Lincoln. It emphasizes how historical events can shape personal fates, adding irony and complexity to their relationship and struggles. Adopting historical personas by the characters prompts inquiries about identity and the significance of history. According to this interpretation, President Lincoln portrayed a depiction of himself who was connected with the same emancipation or freedom from slavery. He may want to address of historical effect of slavery as a part of his personal redefinition of himself. The play can be enriched with the inclusion into the plot of these historical figures as it adds more levels to the exploration of class struggle, identity search, and the long-lasting influence of the historical experience on African Americans in this play. It gives a distinctiveness to the story and contributes to enriching the characters' experiences and the wide spectrum of themes. Overall, the first scene of Topdog/Underdog will help the viewer to draw the class struggle theme. It depicts the class separations, the never-giving up attitude for social uplifting, the existence of crooked practices along the ceaseless quest for monetary stability that forms the characters' life. These experiences so profoundly and closely echo the societal-wide difficulties encountered by African Americans in a segregated society as a whole. Continuing from the events in the first scene, the second scene opened with a significant incident: "Booth comes in looking like he is bundled up against the cold. [...] from his big coat sleeves he pulls out one new shoe then another, from another sleeve come two more shoes. He then slithers out a belt from each sleeve. He removes his coat. Underneath he wears a very nice new suit. He removes the jacket and pants revealing another new suit underneath. The suits still have the price tags on them. He takes two neckties and a bottle of whiskey from his pockets and two folded shirts from the back of his pants" (Parks 29) Booth's actions in the end portray him as a victim of his financial crisis and at the same time as a thief who relies on this as a better way out of his economic problems. It is immediately apparent that Booth dotes on expensive material things when he is revealed that he

arrives at the apartment with many items of clothing, including two expensive suits still having their price tags attached. It is clear that judgment towards material objects is among Booth's strong sides. However, he doesn't mind using fraudulent methods, such as taking expensive suits, which is one of the means he uses on his way to a higher social and economic position. Although Booth is from a quite well-to-do family it is also should be noted that isn't class struggle the matter of absolute poverty only; but, rather, it also includes the relative one. Although he has a bigger economic opportunity than others, Booth's thirst for universal glory, elegance, and social standing has not been quenched yet. Here, in a class-stratified society, people find their achievement and self-esteem on evaluation compared to those who are in the social hierarchy. It puts certain people into despair and makes others want to compete with increasing urgency to get more. Booth's infatuation with stealing luxurious suits and fancy undergarments shows his attempt to level himself up from the social position he thinks he has to the one he wants to obtain. He may also have sought to steal in order to temporarily discover the joys and comforts associated with being from the higher social classes, which he would not find on a daily basis in his life. The temporary experience of superiority and power would thus have been the only substitute for him. Furthermore, Booth's desire for greatness, especially his wish to become a well-known actor and political personage, is indicative that the social class of his time had restrictions on his life's prospects. Eventually, it leads the mobility of the society to be exceedingly difficult and such people start resorting to drastic measures to get to the top of the social hierarchy. Booth's ambition, however, is misdirected and in the end, fosters criminal acts, still can be interpreted as someone's passion to be free from the barriers of his social class and obtain prestige and accomplishment. Classes in the society known to Booth might have subjected people to the pressure to behave in certain ways or achieve the same standards as someone in a similar position. Since the youngsters can have a sense of inadequacy in case they do not comply with what they consider standard, it might drive some of them to seek validation even from an unlawful source. In sum, scrutiny of Booth's behavior through such a prism as class struggle discloses facts of life and how the economic situation, social differences, and a strong desire to get rid of one's misery can lead people to crime and indeed the quest for a better life infrequently ends up with quite the contrary consequences. It is a story of tension between individual aspirations, social norms, and economic priorities of the class society. Also, the inequalities in society deliver their presence in the play through Lincoln's telling Booth to "Do tuh budget" (Parks 35). The financial condition of Booth and Lincoln served as a microcosm of the power and wealth difference among the people of their society. Unfortunately, they are a group of people who live below the poverty line that have them covered with their minimum income barely enough for essentials such as rent, food, alcohol, and even electricity bills. Such a picture illustrates the social conditions that proletariat members share, which include the hardship of poverty as well as what is possible given the income they receive. The economic woes faced by Booth and Lincoln are a mirror of the class struggle that ran rampant throughout society. As a matter of fact, the union of the classes implies the conflict of different social classes caused by most of them because of the inequality of distribution of resources and opportunities. The scenario portrays working-class people like Booth and Lincoln who have lesser resources than some elite rich social classes. The difference between the impoverished conditions of Lincoln and Booth and the comfort favorably enjoyed by others stands out, denoting the extreme division of income and possession among the society members. This inequality represents the class struggle where the wealthy and the influential are benefiting themselves from the unfortunate for the majority. Booth's economic disparity is mainly based on the systematic injustices that are in society. The structural elements like the limited job prospects, minimum payment, and simply equal access to education and health care draw a line between the rich and poor and make poverty a communal issue. This kind of inequality makes the Class struggle deeper. Additionally, the struggle of Booth and Lincoln to make ends meet brings about intriguing questions regarding a person's chances of succeeding. People like them often have to overcome different difficulties to raise their financial status and get up in the social class system in a society where social distance is one of the key factors. The impediments to the seeking of an avenue out of poverty are many times so deep full of systemic disparities which bring the quest forward for many individuals to have a break from poverty's cycle. Another reference to the class struggle in this scene is Lincoln's job as an impersonator of Abraham Lincoln. Although unconventional, it is considered the best employment option available to him, as he says, "Not nothing like this, I like the job. This is set down, you know, easy work. I just gotta sit there all days [...] I can sit there and let my mind travel" (Parks 39). This choice reflects a common aspect of the class struggle, where individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds often have limited access to traditional, stable, and well-paying jobs. Instead, they must seek alternative or unconventional means of making a living. Lincoln's discussion of potential cutbacks at

the arcade where he works highlights the precarious nature of employment and the constant fear of job loss, as he says, "they're talking about cutbacks at the arcade. I only been there 8 months," (Parks 37). While Booth dismisses Lincoln's job as "fucked-up job you got," (Parks 39), Lincoln values it as a means of making a living, "It's a living" (Parks 39). The conversation underscores the economic challenges faced by individuals in lower-income jobs and the importance of stable employment. It also touches on the theme of historical memory, as Lincoln's job involves impersonating a historical figure associated with the abolition of slavery, which Booth prefers to ignore. Lincoln's assertion that playing cards is not a matter of luck but a skill-based activity challenges Booth's simplistic view of luck. Lincoln's description of cards as "work" and "skill" (Parks 40) emphasizes the idea that individuals in disadvantaged economic positions often rely on their skills and efforts to survive. This contrast between luck and skill reflects differing perspectives on the role of individual agency in improving one's economic status. The discussion between the brothers regarding work and their varying perspectives on it is indicative of the disparities and complexities within class struggle. Booth's disappointment and restlessness are the manifestations of the social conflict where people, with a lack of experience, endeavour to find the opportunity for a better job. On the other hand, Lincoln's contentment with his unconventional job highlights the acceptance of limited opportunities and the need to make the most of what is available. In other words, Lincoln demonstrated very well that sometimes we do not need big opportunities and that we must be able to make good use of the opportunities that are available to us. Lincoln's revealing of his job as lucky mostly is a depiction of the inequalities in the lower socio-economic class. He recognizes that the opportunity he has, unusual as it may be, provides him with a source of income and a chance to support himself. This recognition highlights the scarcity of opportunities that many working-class individuals encounter. In this scene also, the sibling competition and the conflicts between Lincoln and Booth are put under the spotlight. They do have a cordial relationship, but that does not prevent a tussle for supremacy and scaling over the hurdles posed by their poverty. Booth's suggestion that Lincoln "jazz up" (Parks 40), his Abraham Lincoln act to avoid getting fired can be seen as a way of asserting his own influence and control over Lincoln's life. Often the class struggle leads to unequal access to education and training, as seen in Lincoln asking Booth to "Help me practice" (Parks 40). Many people coming from low social strata sometimes cannot get an education which can be exchanged for jobs with higher pay and stability. They are likely to become targets of low-paying low-income jobs without access to education, which may limit their opportunities to rise out of poverty. The absence of job offerings that offer high-quality work results in the circle of poverty and the divisions in classes. Personalities like that of Lincoln can be trapped in conditions where the only means available for a living become unconventional or are low-wage oriented. Thus, the second scene depicts the struggle of socio-economic through the hardships of the characters Lincoln and Booth, which include economic difficulties, being deceived, job insecurity, and the relationship between them as brothers. Throughout the play, Suzan-Lori Parks uses the characters' interactions and cross to bring up the discussion of economic inequality and the different ways individuals ways of living their socioeconomic status. The economic predicaments of Lincoln and Booth depicted in the third scene of the play highlight the broader financial hardships and work-related security that poor people frequently face. These issues highlight similar difficulties that people in our society face while striving to make ends meet. Lincoln's career of performing as Abraham Lincoln in the arcade is doubtlessly an unsteady job for sure, as he says, "I been waiting, I got all dressed up and you said if I waited up- come on, man, the gonna replace me with wax dummy" (Parks 48). He is concerned about being replaced by a wax dummy, which indicates the precarious nature of his employment. This mirrors the real-world issue of job insecurity, where workers often worry about losing their jobs due to automation, outsourcing, or other factors. The fact that Lincoln has to resort to impersonating a historical figure for a living suggests that he may not have access to higher-paying or more stable employment opportunities. This is a common challenge for those with limited education or specialized skills. Actually, Booth's speech to Lincoln, "Iffen you was tuh get fired, then, well_ then you and me could_ hustle the cards together. We'd have to support ourselves somehow. Rest just show me how to do the hook part of the card hustle, man. The part where the Dealer looks away but somehow he sees" (Parks 58), viewing Booth's desire to learn the art of Three-Card Monte through a class struggle perspective highlights several key aspects of his character and motivations. This perspective sheds light on the broader social and economic forces at play in his life. The act of hustling Booth portrays the economic unrest that is because of the class struggle. People such as Booth, who are from the underprivileged class, might not be lucky enough to have steady employment and financial security. Such a tendency can develop a feeling of despair and an inclination to try new, even illegal, financial schemes. Through a hustle, Booth dreams of escaping poverty and achieving

economic mobility. A society of class divisions wherein the lower socioeconomic class members see hustling as a way up the social ladder irrespective of the morally doubtful or illegal methods. Such aspiration represents the desire to move past poverty and improve the quality of life. From the point of view of class struggle, Three-Card Monte, which Booth plays in the play, also shows that there are exploitative systems that use the weak for their advantage. Cheating games like Three-Card Monte are developed to mislead and take advantage of participants, particularly those with low income. These games are commonly aggravating the poverty problem because they exploit people's poverty. Class conflict often takes place as well when people have unequal access to education and opportunities. Three-Card Monte understood as a skill from Booth's perspective, is used to depict the lack of available education and employment opportunities. In a society where the poor may have the same pathway for economic advancement, individuals like Booth may likely choose an unconventional path that lies outside the conventional career opportunities and quality education access by the wealthy. Booth's story highlights the need to experience and exclusion the poor often experience. Individuals caught in the claws of poverty may be encouraged to do things in a way that is ethically questionable or even illegal, which in the end can only militarize the disadvantage and strengthen the class divisions. In fact, Booth's tale can well be seen as a criticism of the whole societal setup that builds up the class division. This is done because of the importance of systemic changes like better education, jobs, and societal support programs for the underprivileged to solve the class struggle at the foundation. In the play Topdog/Underdog, class struggle is the backbone of the characters' conflicts and motives. The play presents the dilemmas and dreams of the people who are engaged in the struggle against the economic and social circumstances, aiming to achieve economic stability in their lives. It also shows the bigger issues of poverty, lack of opportunities, and struggle to achieve the American Dream within impoverished communities. The class conflict continues in the fourth scene and from the very beginning of the scene, the character named Lincoln has been expressing his frustration. As he discovers that there is no running water, he exclaims, "No fucking running water" (Parks 59). In this speech, Lincoln is depicted in dire living conditions, facing the absence of basic amenities like running water. From a class struggle perspective, this scene provides a vivid portrayal of the challenges and dilemmas faced by the character named Lincoln. The absence of running water in Lincoln's life highlights the dire living conditions that many individuals in lower socioeconomic classes endure. This lack of access to basic amenities underscores the disparities in living standards between different social strata. It also emphasizes the daily struggles that individuals like Lincoln face in meeting their basic needs. Lack of running water is a constant struggle. He searches desperately for a solution, eventually resorting to using a plastic cup as a makeshift urinal. Moreover, the fact that Lincoln is working in a low-paying job as an Abraham Lincoln impersonator in an arcade highlights economic struggles. As a result, Lincoln vigorously pulls "at his Lincoln getup, removing it and tearing it in the process" (Parks 59). Lincoln's behaviour reflects the frustration with his job and the damage to his fake beard symbolize the exploitation and dehumanization that workers often experience in low-paying, precarious employment. His feelings of being singled out for scrutiny due to his appearance reflect the unequal power dynamics and lack of workers' rights that can be prevalent in certain workplaces. Lincoln's mention of a "sit-down job with benefits" (Parks 59). Highlights the contrast between his current unstable and low-paying job and the desire for stable, better-paying employment. This desire for economic stability and security is a common aspiration among individuals in lower socioeconomic classes and underscores the importance of access to quality jobs. Lincoln's reflection on his past as a Three-Card Monte hustler and his manipulation of a naive couple underscores the moral and ethical dimensions of exploiting others for financial gain, as he calls the hustler as a "cheap" and describes it as "cheating idiot" (Parks 60). It portrays the occasionally negative behavior of economically vulnerable people, including preying on the weak, and thus the cycle of exploitation and inequality continues. Lincoln talks about a particular occasion when they were tricking a couple who had just come from outside, and he and his partner, Lonny, fooled them into losing a lot of money. The pattern of their behaviour also depicts their predatory nature and shows that their focus was on the weaker individuals among the crowd that had come to enjoy the big city. Lincoln mentions that the fate of Lonny serves as a bitter reminder that despite hardship and struggles, society mostly remains indifferent to the problems faced by the people working in the hustling business as well as others because of their illegal activities. It also opens up the discussion of the systemic conditions that prompt people into such lifestyles and the lack of tools to extricate them from destitution. Lincoln's interior change and openness to the moral outcomes of his actions express his own personal growth and social awakening. It points out that even though people go through economic inequality and suffer, some of them can arrive at such points where they start questioning their roles in preserving class-based oppression

and want to make more ethical selections. In sum, the scene symbolizes the economic ordeals faced by the characters and the way they cope with them. Lincoln's wish to be more than an impersonator and Booth's understanding that con-artistry offers an option to free oneself from poverty demonstrates their proclivity to rise in class, which is one of the key elements of class struggle. The passage vividly shows the class struggle theme through the presentation of the hurdles, ethical challenges, and the personal development of a character who is in a lower socioeconomic class. It underlines how economic, exploitative, and moral factors work together before the lives of the underprivileged, developing a better class-consciousness in our society. While the events unfold between Booth and Lincoln, the fifth scene commences with a distinct portrayal of a class conflict. Booth occupies a seat in "his brand-new suit. [...] In its place is a table with two nice chairs. The table is covered with a lovely tablecloth and there are nice plates, silverware, champagne glasses and candles" (Parks 62). From a class perspective, Booth's preparations for the romantic dinner with Grace and the associated anxieties offer an insightful glimpse into the dynamics of socioeconomic stratification and the influence of class on personal aspirations and behavior. Booth's meticulous preparations and desire for a perfect evening can be seen as an aspiration to climb the social ladder or assimilate into a different social class. This reflects the idea that individuals may perceive certain social classes as more desirable or aspirational and strive to attain that status. The opulence of Booth's apartment and his expensive belongings, such as the dressing gowns and champagne, underscore the economic disparities within society. This stark contrast between his apparent disposable income and the struggles faced by others highlights how class divisions can manifest in material wealth and lifestyle disparities. The "His" and "Hers" (Parks 63) dressing gowns suggest a temporary desire to transcend their economic class boundaries. This indicates that individuals may seek moments of escape from their everyday economic realities and strive for experiences associated with a higher social class. Furthermore, Booth's efforts to hide his "girlie magazines" (Parks 63) and create an idealized romantic setting suggest a desire to conform to societal expectations and norms. The pressure to maintain a certain image or lifestyle, possibly driven by consumerism and social class expectations, can lead individuals to go to great lengths to hide their perceived flaws or deviations from the norm. In fact, Booth's apparent anxiety and impatience while waiting for his date, Grace, could reflect a sense of loneliness or social isolation. In a class struggle context, this isolation might stem from economic or social factors that limit an individual's access to meaningful relationships or social networks. This portrayal offers a compelling commentary on the complex interplay of class and personal aspirations within society. In fact, Booth's endeavor to dazzle Grace with a lavish dinner and champagne underscores individuals' yearning to move beyond their current socioeconomic class and attain a higher status. Conversely, Lincoln's appearance, with a plastic bag in hand and dressed in a "frock coat," (Parks 63) hints at potential distinctions in social class or economic standing. The two brothers who are contrasting each other could demonstrate the differences in their life paths or opportunities, probably caused by socioeconomic status. Lincoln complained that he was sacked because of downsizing and employee dissatisfaction. This speech brings to light the difficulties faced by workers in precarious employment situations, which include downsizing and employee dissatisfaction. As he says, "Showd me thuh wax dummy-hes buying it right out of a catalog. I walked out still wearing my getup. I could go back in horror, I could tell him I'll take another paycut. That'll get him to take me back" (Parks 65). This stresses the vulnerability of people in low-wage occupations to sackings and the precarity of their employment. Moreover, Lincoln's description of somebody buying a wax model, which might stand for excess spending or misuse of resources, serves as a criticism of social inequalities that exist between the poor and the privileged class. Moreover, Lincoln's considering accepting another pay cut in return for employment shows the level of distress experienced by workers in vulnerable job circumstances. It demonstrates their courage to do whatever it takes to get the job done. According to the essence, Lincoln's recent job loss and his conversation about the separation package show the instability of employment for many working-class or low-wage workers. This theme of job insecurity and employment relationship imbalance is one of the main issues in the atmosphere of class struggles. In a conversation between Lincoln and Booth that depicts the struggles and dreams of working-class individuals, it underscores the instability of their financial circumstances, their longing for past prosperity, and their recognition of the broader systemic factors, including industrialization and economic disparities that have influenced their lives. Lincoln admits to swiftly depleting his severance pay with the statement "Just spent it [severance package]" (Parks ٧٠). Lincoln's confession of spending his severance pay quickly underscores the financial challenges faced by individuals in lower-income brackets. It implies that, when they do come into some money, they often feel compelled to spend it promptly because they cannot rely on a stable income. This reflects the common experience of living paycheck to paycheck among the working

class and the impulsive financial decisions that can result from economic pressures. Lincoln losing his job and receiving only a week's severance pay highlights the vulnerability of workers in lower-paying positions. The mention of receiving only a week's pay as severance is significant because it highlights the precarious nature of employment during that period. Workers had little job security, and losing a job meant an immediate loss of income and financial stability, emphasizing the vulnerability of the working class. . Lincoln's reminiscence about a time when he was "making money"(Parks 70) and did not have to tolerate disrespect reveals a sense of nostalgia for a better economic past. This sentiment is common among individuals who have experienced economic setbacks. This sentiment underscores the gap between the working class's past economic status and their current struggles. Booth's question about why "they"(Parks ٧٠) (likely referring to people like themselves, the working class) left can be seen as an inquiry into the economic and social forces responsible for their decline from a better economic position. From a class struggle perspective, it may signify the influence of industrialization, economic inequality, and labor exploitation, which often led to the deterioration of the working class's economic standing. As the scene progressed, the unfolding events are intertwined with a class struggle, as Lincoln experiences a wave of nostalgia while sharing memories with Booth, reflecting on their past, their parents, and the circumstances that led to them being left on their own at a young age. Booth and Lincoln's parents are depicted as working-class individuals who struggled financially, as Lincoln remarks, "they was struggling. We moved out of that nasty apartment into a house"(Parks 71). They moved from a nasty apartment to a house, which was a significant improvement for them. However, it is implied that the parents had to work hard to afford the house and provide for their children. The mention of mortgage bills and the need to work indicates the economic challenges they faced as part of the working class. The instability in the parents' relationship and the eventual separation can be seen as a reflection of the challenges faced by working-class families. The parents' inability to maintain a stable marriage may be linked to economic stressors and the strains of trying to make ends meet. Booth expresses his reluctance to hold down a steady job because he views it as "bullshit" (Parks 71). This attitude may stem from his observation of how working took a toll on his parents' relationship. The idea that he does not want to go through the same struggles suggests a class struggle perspective, where the working class often faces difficult working conditions and limited opportunities for economic advancement. In fact, the parents' decision to leave their children with \$500 each when they split may symbolize their awareness of the financial struggles their children might face in the future, as Lincoln reveals, "They gave us each 500 bucks then they cut out"(Parks 72). It highlights the importance of economic security and the challenges that working-class families may encounter when it comes to providing for their children's future. As a result, Booth's comment about giving his future children \$500 and then leaving reflects a cynicism about the traditional family structure and responsibilities. It suggests a belief that working-class individuals might not have the means or stability to provide a conventional family life. Suzan-Lori Parks in her play, *Topdog/Underdog*, portrays the challenges faced by a working-class family, including economic hardships and the strain it can place on relationships. The play also explores the characters' perspectives on work and family from a class struggle point of view, highlighting the difficulties and uncertainties they encounter as they navigate their circumstances. As the fifth scene nears its conclusion, Lincoln's ethical decline and his decision to revert to gambling instead of quitting can be seen as indications of the economic system's inability to safeguard the interests of the working class. Booth and Lincoln are engaged in a card hustling game. As Lincoln asks Booth, "Lemmie show you a few moves. If you pick up these yll have a chance" (Parks 75), and Booth replays "Yr playing" (Parks 75). In fact, the two characters are engaged in illegal activities. The concept of hustling, in this context, refers to their attempts to deceive and win money from unsuspecting players through a card game. Booth and Lincoln's involvement in hustling can be seen as a response to economic inequality. They are engaged in illegal activities as a means to make money, likely due to limited access to legitimate employment opportunities. Their actions reflect the economic disparities that often exist within society. The characters are taking advantage of the vulnerability of their "marks" or victims. They use deception and psychological manipulation to win money, highlighting the power dynamics at play in their interactions. This exploitation of vulnerability is often a consequence of economic inequality, as Booth says, "You was done with school and I stopped going. And we had to run around doing odd jobs just to keep the lights on and the heat going and thuh child protection bitch off our backs" (Parks 75). The fact that Booth and Lincoln talk about the difficulty of going on day by day shows their struggle to mere existence. They incur the obligation to keep the light on, find a job, and stay out of the reach of child protection services. These objectives are carried forward because of the need to exist and protect the means of their existence, which are an embodiment of the class struggle. It gives a

picture that society is static and fragmented. Booth and Lincoln seem to be aliens in the society, decentralized from the mainstream environment, thus highlighting social and economic marginalization. The characters also discuss leaving school and taking up trivial jobs only to make a living. Such a situation puts people in the economically disadvantaged communities at a disadvantage as they have unequal opportunities, restricted access to education, and no chance to move up in the social ladder. Therefore, the discussion on card hustling and the use of "The Shit" (Parks 82) in street language shows the ways how ordinary people may choose to find an alternative way of earning a living or may want to feel powerful and important when they struggle with the economy. In this scene, characters act on their social backgrounds and as well work hard to survive in a world where their opportunities seem limited. In the final scene, we realize how much class and inequality are underlined in Lincoln's behavior as the main character. He enters the room in a state of intoxication, making a conspicuous display of his wealth, emphasizing the economic disparities present. His ability to access and flaunt a significant amount of money suggests a certain level of financial success. Lincoln's enthusiasm for his return to his "business" (Parks 87) and the attention he garners at Lucky's bar reflect his aspiration for social mobility. He seeks recognition and validation from others, possibly aiming to climb the social hierarchy. Furthermore, Lincoln's mention of extracting money from "suckers" (Parks 87) implies his involvement in some form of gambling or hustling. This can be viewed as an exploitation of individuals who may be less fortunate or less astute, thereby contributing to economic inequality. The stark contrast between Lincoln and the "boys who don't have the balls to get nothing but a regular job and uh weekly paycheck" (Parks 87) underscores the divide between those who engage in risky or illicit activities for potential financial gain and those who opt for conventional employment. Lincoln's portrayal of women hanging on him and competing for his attention may also reflect gender-related aspects of class struggle. Women are depicted as objects of desire and symbols of success, reinforcing traditional gender roles within this context. Lastly, Lincoln's reference to "Luckys" (Parks 87) as the place where he gains recognition and attention underscores the role of luck in social and economic mobility. For some individuals, luck and opportune moments can significantly influence their financial success. The conversation between Booth and Lincoln in this scene subtly hints at the existence of class differences and conflicts within their socioeconomic statuses. Booth's disclosure that Grace proposed to him implies a potential gap in their social classes. Grace's wish to marry and establish a family could be interpreted as a pursuit of stability and security, aspects often associated with her potentially more affluent background. Booth's remark about Grace's desire to have a child and her sense of urgency due to her "clock ticking" (Parks 89) hints that she may have greater financial stability compared to Booth. This underscores Booth's financial struggles, including unemployment and financial insecurity. Furthermore, Booth's mention of Grace's inclination to live together and her preference for his dwelling place suggests the existence of a class distinction, as Booth describes this news as "bad news" (Parks 90). Her preference for Booth's living space and her desire to cohabit might indicate disparities in their housing situations or standards of living. The recent loss of Lincoln's job and his financial hardships accentuate the class distinctions within their friendship. Booth explicitly states that Lincoln is now unemployed and facing financial constraints, a sharp contrast to Grace's proposal and her apparent financial security. Lincoln's submissiveness in allowing Booth to make a decision that would evict him from the house indicates that the class factor played a significant role in the power struggle between the two. Lincoln is aware that Booth is being generous enough to let him stay, but Lincoln understands that it is just a temporary situation in which he will have to move out for Booth's comfort and if it occurs, Booth may view Lincoln as a reminder of his class-dependency relationship. Booth's comment that Lincoln's stay would be just a "temporary situation" (Parks 90) shows that Lincoln's housing was temporary until he could get back on his feet economically, implying their class differences. With this gap, one could predict tension in their brotherhood, but Lincoln decided to leave, regardless. Despite the lack of emotional depth in the text, it can ignite the thought process about how the class-related problems might affect their relationship. Lincoln's character seems like an individual directly suffering from economic difficulties, expressed in his job loss, financial constraints, and the search for a place to live. This mirrors the fragile financial situation that many working-class people find themselves in, where a state of affairs where job security is rare, and any unexpected employment difficulties could result in dire consequences. Moreover, Lincoln's portrayal of Abe Lincoln and Booth's response to it touch on the theme of escapism and class-based roles. Lincoln's part-time job as Abe Lincoln suggests that individuals from marginalized backgrounds may resort to unconventional means to earn a living and potentially escape their economic circumstances. In this particular instance, Lincoln adopts the persona of a revered historical figure as a means to earn income and potentially better his circumstances. Lincoln's job as an impersonator raises

questions about authenticity and identity. He portrays Abraham Lincoln, a historical figure associated with emancipation, while struggling with his own personal and financial issues. This reflects the idea that marginalized individuals may adopt different personas to navigate societal expectations and challenges. Lincoln's evident enthusiasm about his new job as a "security guard" (Parks 91) serves as a poignant illustration of the yearning for economic stability and the relentless pursuit of upward mobility. Despite the daunting challenges he encounters, he maintains a hopeful and optimistic outlook regarding the possibility of achieving a more prosperous life. Furthermore, the necessity for Lincoln to swiftly secure a new job after losing his previous one accentuates the absence of a robust social safety net that would offer assistance during periods of financial adversity. Consequently, it places people like Lincoln at risk of suffering financial instability. Topdog/Underdog points to the fact that economic injustice rather frequently traps people from disadvantaged communities in a circle where they have little or no access to education and employment. This situation is one of the fundamental problems that perpetuates the poverty cycle in these communities. Besides the above, their reference to their parents, especially their father's abandonment, pushes one to consider how economic deprivation can dismantle the institution of the family. As Booth says, "Pops left he didnt take nothing with him"(Parks 92). The fact that Pops left no property behind suggests that he might also have been caught up in the trap of poverty and reduced chances of success. The discussion between Booth and Lincoln about class rivalry and economic pressures in this passage brings out the class conflict and economic tension between them. Booth observes that Lincoln's occupation is that of an impersonator and he is less suited to be going around pretending to be someone else for his days. This points to a gap in their attitude toward work and identity, highlighting an assertion of a class-based angle in their views. Therefore, Lincoln brings out the relevance of the issue concerning Booth, as he does not embrace traditional employment and implies that Booth's dreams, as a card-thrower cannot be the appropriate route to economic stability. He expresses this by saying, "You a double left-handed motherfucker who don't stand a chance in all get out there throwing no cards" (Parks 98). This signals a clash in their outlooks on employment and financial success. Lincoln's past involvement with Cookie and his hesitancy to admit that he was recently out on the streets throwing cards suggest the economic desperation both characters face. Their rivalry over card-throwing, a risky hustle, illustrates their shared desire to escape financial hardship through unconventional means. Booth's insistence that he has mastered Lincoln's card-throwing technique and his triumphant identification of the winning card underscore the competitive aspect of their relationship, potentially fueled by their economic struggles. Booth's taunts regarding Lincoln's wife and job shed light on the class dynamics within their relationship. Lincoln's temporary dependence on Booth for housing may contribute to a power dynamic influenced by economic disparities, as evidenced by Booth's remark, "You scared you gonna throw, and I'ma kick yr ass — like yr boss kicked yr ass like yr wife kicked yr ass — then I'ma go out there and do thuh cards like you do, and I'ma be thuh man, and you ain't gonna be shit" (Parks 98). The tension between them also prompts questions about their autonomy and their capacity to overcome their challenging circumstances. For Booth, the card-throwing game serves as a metaphor for their pursuit of financial stability. It symbolizes the allure of quick money and the associated risks of gambling as a means to escape economic hardship. In this passage, class conflict emerges through their divergent perspectives on work, financial stability, and their competitive interactions. It underscores the intricate nature of their relationship and the influence of economic challenges on their identity and decision-making. In the closing scene, scene six, Lincoln enters a room that appears to be empty, and he is intoxicated. He exclaims triumphantly and brags about his recent success, counting and organizing a large sum of money. He talks about how people at a place called Lucky's were impressed by him and how women were attracted to him. He feels like he is back in business and reminisces about the attention he received, as he says, "They all thought I was down and out! They all thought I was some NoCount HasBeen LostCause motherfucker. But I got my shit back. Thats right. They stepped on me and kept right on stepping. Not no more. Who thuh man?! Goddamnit, who thuh" (Park 88). Lincoln's speech suggests a societal judgment or stereotype imposed on the speaker, likely due to his past struggles or setbacks. It reflects how people may be quick to categorize individuals based on external circumstances without understanding the complexities of their lives. Lincoln sheds light on the challenges faced by individuals and communities in their quest for equality and justice. Parks often uses storytelling to highlight the impact of class disparities on characters' lives. Subsequently, Booth discloses that his girlfriend, Grace, has proposed to him, and they plan to marry soon. Booth reveals that they will be moving in together, and Lincoln will have to find another place to live. Actually, both Lincoln and Booth are struggling economically. Booth and Lincoln are discussing their employment and personal lives. Lincoln notes his job loss, attributing it to

company cutbacks rather than poor performance, as he states “They didnt fire me cause I wasnt no good. They fired me cause they was cutting back. Me getting dismissed didnt have no reflection on my performance” (Parks 94). Lincoln’s speech reflects that the upper class often benefits from the labor of the working or lower class, providing them with limited compensation and scarce opportunities for advancement. Moreover, in challenging times, the upper class may resort to laying off workers. This exploitation can be seen in various ways, for instance, low wages, unfavorable working conditions, and deprivation from education or health care. The dispute’s tone turns into a combative one later when Booth voices his willingness to earn money by card throwing with a steady flow and expresses his desire to have more funds. He is indirectly hinting that carrying out a street hustle is the way to get it. This desire for financial success always plays a central role when class struggles are represented in accordance with narratives, involving individuals who are looking for avenues to improve their financial well-being. The characters’ use of gambling and also hustling as a means of livelihood reveals the very limited avenues to economic transformation, as they explore these activities as a means of rising from poverty. Simultaneously to that, it shows the absence of the (modern) conventional ways to get rich. The card game serves as a metaphor for the broader capitalist system, symbolizing a structure rigged in favor of the affluent and powerful, making success exceedingly challenging for those at the bottom. Their conversation becomes more heated, Booth’s struggle to establish his identity, as seen in his rejection of the name “Booth” and his assertion of becoming “3-Card,” (Parks 112) highlights how economic struggles can affect one’s sense of self-worth and identity. He wants to be the one in control and not seen as a “little brother” (Parks 113) or inferior. In an unexpected turn of events, Booth seizes control of the situation, grabbing Lincoln from behind, holding him at gunpoint, and fatally shooting him. Booth rationalizes his actions by accusing Lincoln of deriding his possessions and pilfering his inheritance. He declares his determination to carve an independent identity and reclaim what he believes is his rightfully: “Think you can take my shit? My shit. That shit was mines. I kept it. Saved it. All this while. Through thick and through thin. Through fucking thick and through fucking thin, motherfucker. And you just gonna come up in here and mock my shit and call me two lefthanded talking bout how she coulda been jiving me then go steal from me? My inheritance. You stole my inheritance, man. That aint right. That aint right and you know it. You had yr own. And you blew it. You blew it, motherfucker! I saved mines and you blew yrs. Thinking you all that and blew yr shit. And I saved mines” (Parks 114). Booth concludes by stating his intention to take Lincoln’s money and establish a distinct legacy, detached from Lincoln’s influence. He pledges to reclaim his inheritance, emphasizing that he has been saving it all along, asserting its original intent for him. Booth’s resolve and frustration are evident as he plots a course to emancipate himself from Lincoln’s shadow. The relationship between Lincoln and Booth, marked by rivalry and fraternity, unfolds amidst their shared struggle for survival in a harsh and unforgiving world. Booth, representative of the upper class, seeks personal improvement at the cost of Lincoln’s life. This tragic incident serves as a metaphor for the detrimental consequences of economic inequality and class struggle. Overall, Class struggle frequently entails the pursuit of social mobility, where individuals or groups from lower social classes strive to enhance their economic and social standing. This pursuit often results in competition for opportunities and resources as individuals endeavor to ascend the social hierarchy.

Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, the play by Suzan-Lori Parks Topdog/Underdog is an impressive and expository work that harshly describes the ongoing problem of the social divide in America. The play is centered on two brothers, Lincoln and Booth, whose life is not at all a trip because of the salient fact that they are subjugated and oppressed by a community that is inherently biased against their existence. However talented they may be in the implementation of strategies, for them the unstructured way of life still poses serious challenges that make getting financial security impossible. This play originally illustrates the class struggle problem, a timeless issue that reins in our days, mentioning the upper class at the forefront, while excluding the lower class from an insightful glimpse into society’s progress. The play addresses this issue powerfully by depicting the cruel consequences of this struggle on individuals and their families, exposing to the viewer the often-sad endings this process could result in. Despite the prevailing lack of brightness, we can see through Parkes’s play a brief gleam of hope. Lincoln’s and Booth’s pair of deep devotion reaffirms the notion that fruitful relationships can be forged and allyship built despite the harshest of circumstances, meaning that the human spirit can still be empowered and a source of resilience and strength even when the situation is most challenging (LeMahieu, 2012, p.37) Although the play’s ending brings up mixed feelings of sympathy and remorse, it remains touching, describing the humanity of those who stand on opposite sides of a clash. It depicts a system that is designed to

ensure the rich people emerge victors regardless of what the poor do. To get out of the poverty trap is almost impossible for the poor. On the other hand, it sends a message about the fact that the human race has the strongest power of survival. The fact remains that even if the universe is in its deepest darkness, the possibility of happiness in our life is real. The crux of Topdog/Underdog is not only revealing the class privilege dominating society but also an urging message that should be carefully addressed as a matter of urgency. It restates the fact that the only way to achieve an equitable world is by working together, as people can only enjoy the good life you are chanting about if everyone is treated equally.

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