

# Inhuman Treatment of African Americans in Jacqueline Woodson's *After Tupac and D Foster*

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## Abstract

This paper sets out to compare and contrast the daily lives of African Americans in America with reference to Jacqueline Woodson's *After Tupac and D Foster*. African Americans have been gone through a lot of the same things that oppressed or marginalised people in other parts of the world have: mental and physical abuse that causes mental and psychological problems; humiliation, torture, exploitation, pain, suffering, shame, and discrimination based on gender, race, creed, class, and gender. The story of *After Tupac and D Foster* centres on a middle school girl in Queens, New York, whose life is altered when D Foster enters her neighbourhood. She is free to walk about the city. In her work, Woodson had a keen awareness of cultural nuances and exacting timing. In the text, Woodson does not mince words while discussing heavy topics like violence, racism, homophobia, death, imprisonment, and abandonment. The protagonists of the novel suffer not just at the hands of the antagonists, but also of the most pitiful memories of their ancestors. Black people have triumphed despite hardships because of their resiliency and resolve, as discussed in the three main chapters that address the duration of paradigms of suppression, mental battle, and expectancy.

**Keywords:** Blacks, Suppression, Gender, Exploitation, Race

Among the many great fictional narratives produced by African American authors is Jacqueline Woodson, who attempts to centre on the most excruciating and unpleasant experience of black people, and whose works exhibit a rare blend of charisma, subject diversity, and technical creativity. By re-examining African-American history from its inception to the present, Woodson positions Black history, racism, and African-American children's and young adult literature in a broader American perspective. She establishes the crucial historical connection between Black ancestors and the present through storytelling. By doing this, the author gives Black people a chance to integrate into society and come to terms with who they are. Her approach to narrating a novel in poetry, which appears to be completely different in the genre of fiction, is exceptional. As a result, her distinctive storytelling style captivated a wide range of global audiences.

In *After Tupac and D Foster* The three anonymous self-assured girls plan to enter the world with a purpose, was expounded in the novel as "We all just out in the world trying to figure out our Big Purpose" (19). This novel's goal is lush and perilous, offering fresh opportunities for self-determination. The girls' bravery is tempered by strong familial bonds and is displayed without affectation. The novel is set between the rapper Tupac Shakur's life in 1994 and his shooting murder in 1996. D Foster is a lonely, daring foster child who subtly but profoundly changes the lives of her peers. According to the novel's explanation of youthful parenthood, Neeka tells her mother Irene at one point that no one told her to have all these sorts. Woodson asserts this in her story about three pretentious strong girls in queens.

A mysterious eleven-year-old girl named D Foster lived in Queens, New York, during the mid-1990s. Neeka and the narrator, two African American girls, interacted with D Foster to form a lifelong bond. These three discuss their personal hardships and how they like musician Tupac Shakur's songs. Neeka's family consisted of her mother Irene, her eldest mother Tash, an effeminate gay incarcerated for a homophobic hate crime he did not commit, and Jay Jones' brother, who wants to play professional basketball. In the end, D Foster leaves to live with her original mother; her friends don't even want to know her true name till she returns home by bus. Although D Foster's life is more complicated than romantic, he can still agree with Neeka's statement that "she's like from another planet. One day, I will travel to the planet of the Free" (80).

After his death, Tupac Shakur became a symbol of honourable struggle. He started his musical career as a rebel and expressed the injustices that many African Americans faced. He was a sensitive, gifted, and tortured person. There is no question that the numerous males who frequently engage in these activities are in risk when it comes to comprehending the function that drug dealing and gang activity play in the marginalised Black communities. Tupac Shakur explains how prostitution becomes the main source of income on the streets and acknowledges that Black men are not the only group that has an impact on society and the economy. “Brenda’s Got a Baby is one of Tupac’s old videos where Tupac sang about the young girl getting pregnant, and in the video, Tupac was holding the baby because Brenda had put it in a garbage can,” (8) he adds, recalling his difficult delivery experience with young Black women. This centred-on Brenda, a twelve-year-old girl who had an unintended pregnancy after committing adultery.

Shakur discusses two key takeaways from Brenda’s tale. Shakur first refers to Brenda’s predicament and describes the psychological anguish of a young Black girl who is pregnant without sufficient proof. Second, Shakur uses a depressing story that is typical of Black communities on the periphery of society to describe the living conditions of the impoverished girl in the ghetto. As he sang about Brenda’s life never truly changed, his mouth moved slowly. He seemed to be singing about the truth and someone he knew very well, as seen by the sad look in his eyes. Perhaps he was thinking of his mother, who had been incarcerated during her pregnancy. She was a member of the Black Panthers, a militant organization, not because she had done anything particularly bad.

Shakur uses music to tell the audience a disturbing story. It stands for a number of unsettling facets of the modern Black community that Shakur seeks to expose and address. He keeps using his musical platform to share the tragedies and struggles he and his community faced on the outskirts of society. He also starts to wonder how and why these harsh circumstances keep happening. Shakur contends that crime, bloodshed, and death are tactics used to sustain the ghetto’s hellish anarchy in light of the rise in gang violence and drug distribution. After being detained, Tupac’s mother began making changes while incarcerated, including ensuring that expectant mothers had access to wholesome food so that their unborn children might be delivered healthy. Everyone who was acquainted with Tupac was aware of his mother. Above all, he adored her. Perhaps Tupac was singing about Brenda while thinking about his mother and how she had the option to simply discard him but chose not to. Shakur examines how and why these situations came to seem to never be fixed, having personally experienced many of the effects of oppression that he expresses in his music.

In his discussion of popular media, Shakur asserts that the ruling hegemony has established a number of oppressive and control mechanisms to guarantee Black communities’ social marginalisation. He uses his music to highlight the negative facets of Black society. One must gaze in the cultural mirror in order to advance the community as a whole. Shakur uses music to assess the culture’s views on motherhood, education, and criminality in order to highlight how they are oppressed. The lyrics, however, reveal the upholding of repressive circumstances that the majority of Black people fervently strive to eradicate. The dominating hegemony that still marginalises the Black community, according to him, is the federal government.

The anonymous narrator of *After Tupac and D Foster* is reserved but inquisitive about many aspects of her pals, particularly Neeka and D Foster. They have a new, enigmatic acquaintance named D Foster who lives across the street. Although all of these girls reside with their mothers, each mother has a unique background and set of goals. To see the challenges and triumphs throughout the narrative, it is crucial to make connections between all of these mothers. Children in the Black community who experience hardship without parents may be classified as orphans. The girls discovered that D Foster leads a life that is very different from what they have encountered in their queen’s area.

Despite the narrator’s and Neeka’s financial and familial difficulties, D Foster had endured a mother’s frequent neglect and absence. Neeka is envious of the independence found in the chain of foster homes. “You’re fortunate that you don’t have a real mother involved in your affairs” (15). These girls are all passionate about and interested in music. Tupac Shakur’s filming was the main focus of the festivities. “Me, her, and Neeka were just hanging out, watching music videos on TV” (5). D Foster seems to relate to Tupac’s words, which are evocative of parental love and suffering. The deeper connection of being a child who enjoys playing with pals is universal, even though names and hobbies vary by region. To illustrate her complete cultural integration, she gives a specific example.

Poverty and injustice were prevalent throughout the neighbourhood. The mother, who is left to raise the family on her own, is the family’s strongest member. For African Americans, especially those who reside in inner cities and other impoverished areas, family advice and influence are crucial. “I just don’t want to be hungry like that again” (61) is a pointed statement. In the 1960s and 1970s, “hair style” became a cultural exploitation

of Black people in the African American community. “Afro” is a fashionable haircut that represents Black identity, empowerment, pride in one’s ethnicity, progressivism, and liberalism. Up until about 1969, it was a common hairdo in the southern region. But in the second half of the 1970s, they started wearing braided hair, which excludes men. The Afro hairstyle was used by several prominent Civil Rights Movement activists, such as Andrew Young, Huey Newton, Jesse Jackson, and Angela Davis. It is the personality’s external manifestation of culture and heritage. Everywhere she goes, obstacles follow her, including the hairdo that first appeared during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. During that time, different styles revealed different aspects of a person.

In Black communities, straight or loosely curled hair is referred to as “good hair.” A person’s hair style might provide information about their age, wealth, marital status, religion, and fertility. People believed that African Americans were using their culture to flaunt their pride. Similar to real hair, the “Afro” hairstyle consists of a mass of extremely tight curls that protrude all over the head. Before being sold as slaves, Black Americans were subjected to the dehumanising practice of having their heads shaved without their will.

In his novel *After Tupac and D Foster*, Woodson goes into great detail about the flaws in foster care systems. This demonstrates the severe suffering that children in foster care systems endure for a variety of reasons. Racial prejudice and poverty are the main themes of the foster care system. Children undoubtedly require regularity in their lives and the freedom to think freely. Everyone should strive to protect and shelter children, since this can revitalise the society and the country. These children navigate challenging routes without looking out for adults. For the most part, they don’t keep up peer interactions. The foster system can be normalised in a fresh, positive perspective by educators and parents. Children who leave the foster care system are vulnerable and struggle to adjust to life as adults outside of a system they are familiar with. These children are going through circumstances that they shouldn’t have, and a large number of them are dealing with issues like drug misuse, unemployment, unlawful pregnancy, school failure, victimisation, voluntary involvement in problems, and the like.

The actions of D Foster’s character in *After Tupac and D Foster* are described as denying her culture by wearing disguising clothing and straightening her hair, which conceals her curves because half of it is curled above her ear and the other half hangs down to her shoulder. Instead of being a member of the subordinate culture, she is a member of the dominant one. Slaves wore cornrows as a symbol of their ancestry throughout colonialism. In order to express themselves, they also desired to project their age, wealth, marital status, kinship, and religious convictions. In order to communicate their desire to flee, Africans who were enslaved would also utilise cornrows. Cornrows have been shown to save lives and aid in escaping captivity. The braids’ perfect alignment, which resembled the rows of crops in the fields, gave rise to the term. Neeka’s older brother, Jayjones, wanted to play ball. Jay Jones looked like this: “His hair was braided in zigzag cornrows, and he was wearing his basketball shorts” (33). Certain meeting times or escape routes would be indicated by the number of cornrows on a person’s head.

Foster children are unquestionably a recently recognised oppressed group that is marked by a series of traumatic experiences that have an ongoing impact on them from the moment they are separated from their parents until long after they have left the foster system. Due to their involvement in gangs, drug sales, and gun purchases, foster children experience trauma and stigmas as well as physical and psychological harm. Rarely, these children feel soothed when they look up to positive role models. The novel’s explicit character, D Foster, represents a foster girl who roams the community. Additionally, another aspect of a mother is portrayed. Everybody has a unique life narrative and purpose.

D Foster, a foster child, wanted to live with her parents, but her situation depressed her. Many children in the foster care system are unable to join a home with loving parents, siblings, and extended family, but some do. D Foster is a foster child who, while in foster care, happens to walk into the neighbourhood of two girls. Some foster children cannot live with their biological parents, and some moms are unable to keep their children in the same house. The narrator’s mother, Neeka, is content with her child and has made the decision to keep her safe. However, D Foster’s mother permits her child to be placed in foster care and returns at the novel’s conclusion to give birth to her child. The majority of African American households may have a hidden psychology of broken houses.

African American generations were oppressed by the majority of coloured people in American society. The novel’s characters both challenge and uphold prejudices that are frequently found in today’s society. It is the duty of every parent to be fair and kind. According to renowned expert William Ayers, who founded the Center for Youth and Society, parents can characterise themselves as being amiable, helpful, and giving in addition to being morally upright and equitable. Just by purchasing firearms, selling narcotics, joining gangs, “roaming

the streets,” etc. When young children are placed on the streets without appropriate role models, they are denied equal possibilities to thrive as they get older. In *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir notes that “the little girl is more wholly under the control of her mother.” She has more claims on her daughter. Their relationship takes on a far more dramatic quality. The mother looks for a double in her daughter rather than welcoming her as a member of the selected caste (561). Examining how Simone de Beauvoir depicts mother-daughter relationships, the positive and negative elements of their connections, and the impact of mothers’ ideals on their children’s paths to adulthood.

For each person to survive in life, self-esteem is crucial. There are two types of self-esteem: inner and physical. A person’s life may suffer from low self-esteem. These impoverished animals would lose their sense of self-worth as a result of poverty and racial prejudice. The conflict persists in the form of victimisation, even for a boy with high self-esteem. Tupac suffered both physically and psychologically while incarcerated. The girls shuddered when they learned of Tupac’s shooting, and their tears showed how close they were. Tupac is another point made by Jayjones: Jayjones ran up to us as the sun was setting. By the time he reached the stoop, he was breathing heavily.

Despite the fact that some of the characters in the novel have high self-esteem, society mistreats them by treating them like subordinates. They were constantly oppressed; Tash, a gay man incarcerated, was wrongly charged with a hate crime. Tash was incarcerated for a crime he did not commit—assault. Neeka consistently claimed that he was serving time for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Everyone knew Tash wasn’t the type of person who would attack someone unless they were playing tricks on us, with the exception of the jury and the judge. Since we were young, he has constantly threatened to cut anyone who dared to interfere with Tash and Neeka in half. However, he wasn’t imprisoned for cutting someone who was interfering with us.

Every African American child is impacted in some manner by cultural imperialism, violence, marginalisation, exploitation, and helplessness. Due to their incapacity to prosper in a society where the white group predominates, they have historically been the victims of unjust treatment, severe suffering, and intentional acts of cruelty. Poverty, sexual abuse, domestic violence, unresolved anger, anger, sadness, and fatalism are all their fault. Their daily mental burden is severely harmed by this type of persecution.

With the girls tramping through the woods or secretly travelling to the big city and returning, the novel *After Tupac and D Foster* contains sharp allusions. “You can start working on Planning your Big Purpose,” the anonymous narrator tells her buddy Neeka (19). The friends don’t even find out D Foster’s true name until she’s ready to board the bus “Desire ... D’s mama called” (95), which is fantastic. In the end, D Foster moves away to live with her real mother. Some commonalities between homeless young adults in foster care and those not may be explained by three different circumstances. Because these people endure such severe types of abuse, the homeless teens will be more damaging and put at higher risk for unfavourable results, sometimes valuable. Mary Ann had more trouble highlighting the challenge and indicated a heightened sense of dissatisfaction that mirrored her difficulties accepting alternative ways of knowing and behaving beyond her own experiences. It applies to Woodson’s persona. The girls’ bravery is tempered by strong familial bonds. With nearly every page, their concentration on each other and their families grows more acute and complex. D Foster, a lonesome and daring foster child, comes together with the narrator and her companion Neeka, also known as Daneeka Lucy Jones, two girls from the reckless Queens families. Second, compared to those who are not removed, these teenagers are probably going to be far better and receive the proper resources and therapy. According to the narrator, D Foster could still agree with Neeka if his life weren’t so difficult. Third, these teenagers are likely to have comparable early experiences and results since they originate from disadvantaged homes. We crossed a pasture and descended numerous stairs. We then reached a large stage. According to D Foster, it’s known as an amphitheatre.

The child protection process has unnumbered policies. As a result, it seems that child welfare policies are unable to enforce equity, control behaviour, or alter decisions that have an impact on the lives of African American children living in poverty. As individuals, laws, and times changed, inequality and oppression started to come to light through the development of regulations that attempted to offer more accommodating families sensitive services. Woodson has a special gift for elucidating the novel with complex comments, which can be at times abrupt and harsh or calm and upbeat. She depicts the complex friendship between girls with intimacy, gravity, whimsy, and melodrama in her latest novels. With unrelenting attention to emotional detail, they craft a rich environment. Woodson crafts an accurate and poignant portrait.

In *After Tupac and D Foster*, Woodson applied the connection of brotherhood. It is evident that she skilfully depicts how the world is not black or white and the intricacy of familial ties. In the grip of circumstances, even

good people can turn evil. Redemption does exist, but it is tense and uncomfortable. Forgiveness and change are difficult. Each of Woodson's characters has moments that speak to our own human experience because she gives them multifaceted traits like kindness and selfishness, forgiveness and anger, and good and evil.

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