

# Counteractive Militant Protest in John Alfred Williams’ The Man Who Cried I Am

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**Abstract - John Alfred Williams is a prolific African American writer and best known for his 1967 novel, The Man Who Cried I Am, a story of an African American Writer who struggles against racism, cancer and learns of the U.S.A government’s King Alfred plan for African American which is comparable to Hitler’s Final Solution. Williams’ novels have been described as a merging of history into fiction to create new dimensions for the writings of Black novelists and fresh images for the black readers to digest. The present paper focuses on Williams the militant protest novel The Man Who Cried I Am in which it deals with the problems of highlighted tone of frustration, despair and anger. It also deals with era of segregation and a desperate plan of the government to exterminate the whole Black population. It brings how the militant Minister Q, one of the Characters of the novel, organizes the blacks to wage war against government, and creating awareness among the blacks about the imminent danger of King Alfred plan. It also focuses on the amplifying racial injustice through Moses Boatwright’s Capital punishment.**

## INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century African American novels deal with militant protest which is the core ideology of the many African American writers including Richard Wright, John Alfred Williams, John F. Kennedy, and Malcolm X. Richard Wright’s Native Son is the pioneering work of transition to the militant protest novel since 1940. Before the arrival of Richard Wright, the African American novels were divided to four categories which are Accommodationist, Assimilationist, Apologetic Protest and Militant Protest. During the twentieth century in African American novelists, John Alfred Williams, also known as John A. Williams is a prolific and unpopular writer in the mainstream of African American literature. However, his articulation has established a vast space for him in his writing career that is a unique significance among the readers. John Alfred Williams,

The Man who Cried I Am offered him as an international reputation and he emerged as a robust in his profession. He has spent three and a half year writing the novel. Williams has used violence as a tactic to bring the important changes in the society through his characters and settings. The present paper focuses on how Williams used the militant protest and its efficacy is the centralized theme discussed throughout the novel. It also deals with how the blacks can face the desperate plan of the government to exterminate the black population. It also focuses on political assassination, urban conflagrations and prophesying racial genocide.

## COUNTERACTIVE MILITANT PROTEST

Noel Schraufnagel defines, “Militant protest fiction reflects the tempestuous racial situation of the sixties”. Racial pride, the insistence on the dignity of being an African American in the face of continuing racism has created conflicts in which blacks will no longer play a passive role. This conflict was influenced by Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and other extremists. The distinctive features of the militant protest novels are the organization of blacks for resistance to white oppression. This usually means only the “reciprocation of Violence, but in its extreme form of militancy produces revolutionary activity designated to thwart or destroy militancy and law enforcement agencies in the United States”(Noel 173). This extremism aims to accomplish the positive goals that the peaceful movements such as, Black Arts Movement, Black Power Movement, Black Panther Movements, etc, have failed to bring about the appropriate solutions for the blacks. The militant protest basic idea is not to overthrow the entire country, but, by a force, to persuade the officials to meet the demands of blacks.

The militant protest novel *The Man Who Cried I Am* deals with the problems of highlighted tone of frustration, despair and anger. It also deals with era of segregation and a desperate plan of the Government to exterminate the whole Black population. It brings how the Militant Minister Q, one of the characters of the novel, organizes the blacks to wage war against government, and creating awareness among the blacks about the imminent danger of the “king Alfred Plan”, which is introduced by the white Americans. It also focuses on the amplifying racial injustice through Moses Boatwright’s Capital punishment. The paper concludes with the death of Max Reddick, is the central character, and Harries Ames, a compatriot by the capricious historical forces seek to find the eternal remedy for the blacks’ demand.

*The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967) reveals a government plan to exterminate the Negro population of the United States. The only hope to prevent this plan not happening among black population lies in making the blacks aware of the danger, and organising them into a counteractive force. This job is relegated to the militant Minister Q, Williams’ version of Malcolm. The protagonist, Max Reddick, is a black novelist, who, at the age of forty-nine, is trying to discover the meaning of his life before his imminent death. Through his life, Max Reddick has been struggled to get back his tolerance in the face of racism. He wants to become successful writer. Reddick is frustrated due to new ranges of bigotry and false promises made to blacks by the president of the United States. By the time, Reddick employs as a speech writer in the American Embassy and expects the government going to release a separate land for the blacks and civil rights act. But, denying the demands of the blacks by America, Reddick becomes impatiently quits his job and travelling to Holland to visit his estranged wife. While in Europe, the writer Reddick learns of the death of Harry Ames, a former compatriot, and a novelist whose career resembles that of Richard Wright. At the end of the funeral of his friend Harry, Max Reddick discovers King Alfred plan by the American Government to exterminate the black population, and the increasing militancy of blacks. Ames was murdered because of his knowledge of King Alfred and government agents also kill Reddick, but not before, he informs Minister Q of King Alfred.

Reddick’s final act is a matter of necessity in terms of his racial loyalty, but it is also peak of a developing militant-philosophy. Before his discovery of King Alfred Plan, Max Reddick who thinks him as law, his gun is the law and people can live only by the force of law or the militant force. Williams describes Reddick’s anger upon the white government that he expresses to his wife that:

The law,... I for the privileged and if you’re white in America, you are privileged. We hope for the law to protect us, but it doesn’t. I’ve seen the white House break laws, and i am not about to console myself that if brought before the courts for being in a street fight, i can count on fair dispensation of justice. The other side has gun,...and power, everything serious killers should have to do their jobs. Without law on my side, i become the law, my guns are the law, and the only law people in any nation live by is the law of force or the threat of force (*The Man Who Cried I Am* 294).

The plot to exterminate the Negroes turns Reddick to become weak and shock by the King Alfred. This makes to call the Militant Minister Q, the Black Power Leader. For years, Minister Q has been preaching about the treachery of the white man and the need for armed revolt. Reddick has formerly regarding this kind of attitude as too revolutionaries, but in the end, he realizes that the militant leader is the one person who can possibly save the African Americans. Although, his personal commitment of Militancy occurs too late to allow him to organize effectively and warn his fellow blacks, he has time to recognize his mistake and to proclaim his new attachment with the Alliance.

Williams has presented Minister Q has created himself as a black Militant in the image of Malcolm X. In contrast, Reverend Paul Durrell who is also a preacher in *The Man Who Cried I Am* calls for the economical boycotts in which he gets through the victory inform the whites and proved him as a black power, but Minister Q preaches hatred and district of the whites. According to the militant Minister Q, the whites have stolen black history, and everything else of value the black man had. He also preaches that the men emasculated by the oppression system under which, they are forced to live. Minister Q does not want integration. Rather, he wants the land, that he feels is owned to blacks, for creating a separate black nation. Until this is accomplished by the whites, he advises the Negroes to be proud of their customs. He also warns

them to be prepared to defend themselves against the barbarity of the whites.

On the other hand, Max has always wanted to provide America with a vision of reality. He wants the black people to know ugly truth, the ugly plot behind their reality. He wants the white people to know that the black people “would tear up the country”, rather than to accept anymore of his life trying- perhaps only as an artist would change or at least to alter the destiny of America. He rises about as high as a journalist could rise and an advisor to the president, a top man with Events, an important magazine. However, Max Reddick discovers that he has no power to say. He cries loud and trying hand to direct the president’s “attention away from the Russian- American space competition and the problems of Cuba to the Duress for the Blacks man in America”(1935).

Max thinks that his bitter words will be warning to the administration that the black people “would tear up this country”, goes on observed. But, indeed, they have a well plan in the full of heart, and ready to contribute handsomely to the antinational of the race that bring about the King Alfred plan. A high-ranking Civil rights activist once said, “much of the data compiled by war-on poverty agencies and other progressive government agencies for the ostensible betterment of the black race, have been classified by the government as counterinsurgency information” (David Henderson 1935).

The death of Ames hits Max in a forceful way and a strange occurrence in his life. The legacy Ames left him gives Max his last chance for redemption. But Events magazine would never print the news about Harry Ames’ legacy leaves for Reddick. Because Reddick is directed to maintain secret, otherwise the CIA of America will kill him. If it is printed in the Events magazine, people both the blacks and whites may think that it is rumors. It is assumed that the father of the black writer has left his legacy for his heir. Reddick predicts about his life, by the fact that he is dying any way. But the question is what does Max do with a portable Pandora Box? Therefore, he thinks that Minister Q is the right person to organize the people by creating awareness among them about the imminent danger. So Max calls up Minister Q in New York, similar to Malcolm X, to read off King Alfred into the militant Minister Q and running tape recorder. He prefaces his reading with the remarks, “Hello, you

are a dead man. May Be? (The Man Who Cried I Am 389).

After he passed over the truth to another brother, Max prepares to meet his fate. He loads pistol and holds it in his pocket starting to drive back to Holland. Before he faces his destiny, there are poorly trained men who are the objects of intense hatred from the German soldiers and the America bigotry military men attack a number of innocent black soldiers in the name of King Alfred.

Max sees his platoon suffer in great casualties. Max instructs a new platoon on survival, “you want to live; you shoot first and ask questions later. All you got to tell me is that you saw a white face. Do not tell me what the white face. Don’t tell me what the white face was wearing because I don’t want to know” (The Man Who Cried I Am 386).

However, his way of revolutionary talk is not applicable to the end of his life. He faces his end as a surprise. He is followed by two black CIA agents and captured him. Max’s prior preoccupation with guns comes in hand, shots Roger, before he dies by a “way of a pellet that has only to contact his skin in cause a heart eruption”. Therefore, Max dies from a more modern American disease than cancer.

Besides, Reddick and Ames, Williams’ effectiveness in handling its theme rest upon especially with two instances. In the first, Max is as a young reporter, before the war, writing a series of articles on Moses Boatwright who has arrested, convicted and finally put to death for the crime of murder and cannibalism. Boatwright, a brilliant young black with a master’s degree in philosophy from Harvard, has been perverted by white his education. He kills a white man and eats his genital and hearts the two organs. Bryant comments, the is “Crude and hideous”, and Williams reacts to it with “horror and disgusting”, and Boatwright tasted the organs like” yam with slap greasy roast pork, the combination of sweet and heavy richness”( The Man Who Cried I Am 58).

The Boatwright episode has another meaning in the novel, which is related to the publication of Richard Wright’s Native Son. Williams does not mention the novel, but he makes it in the year in which the fictional crime was committed in 1936, and, in the 1940, Richard Wright has published Native Son, and through Boatwright. Williams attempts to explain why “Native son” has an incident like Boatwright episode and why such a novel had to be published at the time or after

the following year by Richard Wright. The crime of the black against a white in *Native Son* observed by the critics as “horror and disgust” from many reviews and both the blacks and Boatwright were similar to each other to illustrate the crude atrocities in the black American novels to show their agitation against the whites. Both appeared at the time when only the crude and the barbarous could shock the people into readiness to do anything for the justice. Bryant observed Williams’ articulation of Boatwright episode, and the same like incorporated Richard Wright and its implication after published *Native Sons*:

Boatwright showed him that no black writer could legitimately disregard the atrocities of white America against black. Whatever his inclination before, Max could have to enlist his writing in the struggle. By analogy, after *Native Sons*, no black writer could legitimately disregard Wright’s interpretation of the race problem and the form in which he cast that interpretation (Bryant 1947).

The other instances of Williams skilfully handling of the theme of discovery and revelation is Max’s rectal Cancer. It begins as haemorrhoids, some irritating discomfort a bloody stool, pus, and foul smell. It develops slowly until Max arrives in Europe and reads Ames’ letter with only a little time to live. Bryant’s comments on, “the cancer is the growth of Max’s knowledge and understanding of America, the thing that at first makes his life merely uncomfortable, and then in the bloom of its completeness, agonising and fatal” (1974). It suggests that, ironically, any person who belongs to block rises towards death. The cancer is also the terminal illness of being a black in America. It is also suggested that blacks are no longer to live in America. America gives Max, “a pain in the ass”, a pain, which underlies nearly every moment of the narrative. Max moves through his last hours in a cloud of agony, only able to act it in the classical way that black people have always act their cancerous sufferings through liquor and drugs.

#### CONCLUSION

Williams’ use of militant protest is different from other contemporary writers. He used tragic historical understanding through the King Alfred Plan. Even the title *The Man Who Cried I Am*, the symbolizes “Cry” is both an assertion of his individual existence, and a

sign that he is determined to act against racism. Action here is not picking up a gun and shooting someone, or even organizing the non-violence resistance, it is changing one’s perceptions, ideas, traditional or historical system. Williams knows well, introducing King Alfred plan is too lead the civil war, but at the same time, he has no other recourses. The novel ends with the death of Max Reddick. No one can say the militant protest force is the effective method to change the white political system in America. However, Reddick’s handling of militancy allows him too late to organize effectively that is causing for human failure in the novel *The Man Who Cried I Am*. Moreover, before Reddick hands over King Alfred plan to Minister Q he faced his destiny to death. It is another reason for its failure to organize the militants to defend themselves against the barbarity of the whites.

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