

INTERSECTING MARGINS: REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK DISABILITY AND ECONOMIC PRECARITY IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Asadul Al Galif¹, Tamanna Ferdous², Md. Ziaul Haque³, Wahid Kaiser^{4*}

^{1,2}Department of English, Dhaka International University, Satarkul, Badda, Dhaka, Bangladesh

³Department of English, University of Creative Technology, Chattogram, Bangladesh

⁴Department of English, Kishoreganj University, Kishoreganj, Bangladesh

Abstract

This paper examines the intersections of race, class, and disability in contemporary American literature through Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* and Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*. It considers how both novels represent Black, disabled, and economically precarious subjects while challenging dominant narratives of normalcy, productivity, and social value in U.S. society. Drawing on intersectional feminist literary criticism and critical disability studies, the study employs qualitative close reading and thematic analysis to examine characterization, narrative voice, embodiment, and communal resistance. The findings suggest that both authors frame disability not as an isolated medical condition but as a social, political, and historical formation shaped by racism, poverty, gendered vulnerability, and structural neglect. Bambara foregrounds psychic distress and communal healing within Black political struggle, whereas Ward represents embodied precarity and survival amid environmental disaster and systemic poverty. Together, the novels challenge ableist and neoliberal assumptions by emphasizing care, cultural memory, interdependence, and collective endurance. This research contributes to scholarship on African American literature and disability studies by demonstrating the importance of intersectionality in literary analysis and by positioning literature as a crucial site for political imagination, resistance, and the revaluation of marginalized lives.

Keywords: African American Literature; Critical Race Theory; Disability Studies; Intersectionality; Resistance Narrative

INTRODUCTION

Literature provides a significant lens through which the overlapping structures of race, class, and disability can be examined. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) foundational work on intersectionality demonstrates that multiple forms of oppression do not operate separately but compound one another within legal, social, and cultural systems. Although African American literary studies and disability studies have each developed rich critical traditions, their convergence remains insufficiently explored, particularly in relation to economic precarity. As Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) argues, the exclusion of marginalized disabled people from dominant narratives contributes to their continued invisibility and vulnerability. Contemporary American literature, especially works by Black women writers, plays a crucial role in challenging such erasures.

Recent studies have expanded this conversation by foregrounding Black disability as a distinct analytic category. Pickens (2023) and Pickens (2024) emphasize that Black madness and Black disability must be understood through histories of anti-Blackness, not merely through medical frameworks. Their work underscores how disability in Black communities is shaped by racialized surveillance, structural neglect, and cultural meaning-making. Similarly, Johnson (2022) and Schalk (2022) highlight how contemporary Black fiction positions disabled characters as active agents within community struggle, challenging assumptions that disability is apolitical or passive. These perspectives reinforce Schalk's (2018) earlier argument that Black disability politics and aesthetics reject restrictive notions of normalcy, ability, and value.

Toni Cade Bambara and Jesmyn Ward document the structural violence experienced by marginalized communities while also using narrative form to contest systems of exclusion. Their novels reveal the interwoven realities of disability, race, and poverty and challenge dominant discourses of individualism, normativity, and productivity. Recent studies of environmental racism and racialized debility (Oaks, 2025; Puar, 2022) further illuminate how systemic neglect and ecological vulnerability produce disabling conditions for Black communities—an insight central to Ward's depiction of post-Katrina precarity. Likewise, new work on Black feminist healing and political memory (Gines, 2021; Wallace, 2023) strengthens readings of Bambara's representation of psychic distress as a communal and political phenomenon rather than an individualized pathology.

These developments show that intersectional literary analysis informed by Black disability studies offers a productive framework for understanding how narratives represent nonnormative embodiment, solidarity, and resistance. Yet despite this growing body of scholarship, the interconnected experiences of disability, race, and poverty remain comparatively underexamined in African American fiction. This gap contributes to the

continued invisibility of Black disability within both literary criticism and broader public discourse.

To address this gap, the present study examines Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980) and Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011), two novels that offer richly textured portrayals of Black lives at the social margins. *The Salt Eaters* explores mental illness within the context of Black political struggle, whereas *Salvage the Bones* depicts the precarious conditions faced by a Black family in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Recent analyses of Ward's fiction (Reji & Nandha, 2025; Smith, 2024; Turner, 2022) highlight how childhood, gendered embodiment, and environmental vulnerability shape Black Southern life, while studies of Bambara (Gines, 2021; Wallace, 2023) emphasize her experimental narrative strategies and healing aesthetics. Building on these discussions, this study investigates how disability intersects with race and economic precarity in African American fiction, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the representation and persistent invisibility of Black disability in literary and social discourse. Accordingly, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. How are Black, disabled, and economically disenfranchised characters represented in *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones*?
2. What narrative strategies are employed in the representation of these characters to challenge dominant ideologies of normalcy and value in *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black disability studies have emerged in response to the historical exclusion of Black disabled experience from both mainstream disability studies and African American literary criticism. Central to this field is the recognition that disability must be understood in relation to history, race, embodiment, and systems of power. Bell's (2012) edited collection is a significant intervention because it emphasizes the distinctive cultural meanings of disability within Black communities and argues that Black disability is often marked by both invisibility and hypervisibility in public discourse. Bell critiques frameworks that fail to account for the ways anti-Blackness shapes disabled experience differently from white normativity.

Similarly, Schalk (2018) argues that Black women's bodies in literature repeatedly challenge restrictive notions of normalcy, ability, and value. In *Bodyminds Reimagined*, Schalk examines speculative and realist fiction by Black women writers and develops a model of disability politics that is deeply intersectional and inseparable from struggles against racist and sexist epistemologies. These contributions provide an important foundation for analyzing layered forms of oppression in both *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones*. In both novels, Black characters experience forms of bodily, psychological, and social vulnerability that cannot be fully understood through medicalized definitions of disability alone.

Critical disability studies further expands this framework by examining how economic, political, and social forces shape disability rather than treating it solely through a medical lens. Kafer (2013) advances a political/relational model of disability that refuses to detach embodiment from sociopolitical realities and instead situates disability within ecological, ideological, and institutional constraints. This model foregrounds interdependence and critiques cultural investments in productivity, independence, and able-bodied ideals. Schalk (2018) extends this perspective by insisting that Black disability must be understood through race, power, and gender. Her theory of Black disability politics challenges white-dominant disability discourse and demonstrates how Black cultural narratives often resist ableism even when they do not explicitly use disability language. This approach is especially relevant to literary texts that portray Black disabled characters whose experiences are not merely medicalized but deeply entangled with histories of economic marginalization and racialized violence. Together, Kafer and Schalk help frame disability as a complex site of community-making, affective labor, and knowledge production rather than as a limitation to be overcome. Their work makes it possible to read nonnormative embodiment as a fundamental challenge to hegemonic narratives of ability, value, and futurity, particularly within African American literature.

These perspectives intersect with intersectional feminist theory, which explains how multiple systems of oppression operate simultaneously. Crenshaw (1991) as a medium of comprehending the way class, gender, and race interrelate to generate compounded forms of oppression that are merely supplementary but structurally ingrained in ethnic, legal, and societal institutions. Her work focuses on the removal of marginalized individualities, especially Black women, from leading discourses, providing an intellectual lens through which to analyze literary characters whose identities challenge singular cataloging. The framework can be reduced to the matrix of dominance, the discussion of which concerns the cultural, organizational, and interactive power areas, as a composite of which the actual experiences of Black women are depicted (Collins, 2019). The most valuable point to me is the way Collins closely earmarks the Black feminist thought rooted in real know-how, which allows us to recognize that we should make the stories of Black women seem like knowledge-making spaces rather than photographs or image fragments. Similarly, Scott (2025) argues that afrofuturism provides an imaginative and theological framework through which Black women defy prevailing narratives and visualize liberatory prospects (Scott, 2025). About *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones*, these frameworks take a nuanced reading of central characters into consideration who undergo interconnecting oppressions based on class, race, disability, and gender. Instead of observing these identities as disjointed or detached, intersectional feminist theory insists on a collective exploration that seizes the complicated sociopolitical backdrops inhabited by the characters. It also confirms the narratives of

community curing, struggle, and memory as counter-hegemonic actions that face leading conceptions of status quo and value.

The intersection of these identities becomes visible through economic precarity, especially when undergone together with bodily and racial marginalization, is a frequent subject matter in current literature that highlights the lives of the disabled and poor. In *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment*, Mitchell (2015) opines that neoliberal principles have a racist disability as a form of unproductivity that intimidates the ableist citizenship's logic. The idea of 'ablenationalism' is introduced by him, in which national identity is built through the omission of disabled bodies considered societally and financially nonviable. This framework is extremely pertinent to *Salvage the Bones*, in which the transecting acts of violence of poverty, race, and environmental calamity form the struggle of the characters. Likewise, the latest scholarship in intersectional feminist theory has emphasized the way financial systems unreasonably impact Black women and other marginalized people (Collins, 2019). The combination of economic precarity with racialized epitome generates a situation of what Puar (2017) calls 'debility' – a condition of systemic rejection and sluggish demise. This literature offers crucial gadgets for exploring the way Bambara and Ward recount economic defenselessness as essential to the struggle tactics and identities of their characters, not as a backdrop.

Within African American literary studies, however, the representation of disability has essentially remained under-theoretically understudied, despite the recent proliferation of scholarship in the field of disability studies. According to Quayson (2007), the act of minimizing disability to an allegory or metaphor often deprives it of its reality as it is lived. Nevertheless, disability might be a vital platform in highlighting the vices in society and a collective reflective tool, particularly when attached to the historical drag-lines that encompass segregation, structural violence, and slavery. Some scholars have looked at the representation of disability in the novels of such writers as Octavia Butler or Ralph Ellison, but few of them have dug deep into the encumbrances of economic status and gender stratum in such representations. This gap in research focuses on the intersectional mix between disability and poverty, gender, and race, but does not pay attention to them as independent levels, but to their influence on each other.

This gap is also evident in previous research on Bambara and Ward, whose politically engaged narratives have received sustained critical attention, even though analyses that foreground disability as a central analytic remain comparatively limited. Studies of *The Salt Eaters* have typically emphasized its Black feminist themes, experimental narrative form, or cultural healing traditions (Wallace, 2008), with less attention to how Velma's collapse and psychic distress register the psychosocial toll of activism and structural repression. Bambara's depiction of mental illness as political and communal rather than merely pathological invites a disability-oriented reading that aligns with contemporary debates in Black disability studies. Correspondingly, *Salvage the Bones* has received attention for its post-Katrina realism and

Black Southern poetics; recent work has also examined childhood, precarity, and racialized vulnerability in Ward's fiction (Reji & Nandha, 2025). This study reads these novels through the lens of race-class-disability intersectionality and extends existing criticism by offering a more integrated understanding of how literature represents and reimagines marginalized identities.

It is also supported by Mitchell and Snyder (2001) who assert that typical narratives of disability often function as 'narrative prostheses,' a structural instrument utilized to solve or interpret plot or character development, devoid of attending to the real subsistent know-how of disability. Nonetheless, this inclination is undermined by counter-literary forms like *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones*. These works provide narrative spaces in which disability is ingrained in the fabric of communal know-how, struggle, and history, not a metaphor or device of plot. These texts highlight the tales of black, poor, and disabled characters and disassemble ableist suppositions, and provide fresh narrative agency forms. The struggle is thematic and formal since Bambara and Ward use non-linear temporality, disjointed narrative structures, and polyvocality to mess up normative modes of storytelling. These approaches contradict the image of the normate perspective represented by Garland-Thomson (2002) and give the readers the chance to participate in the embodiment in more widespread and essential aspects. Lee (2025) emphasizes the manner in which healing and shock have become deeply embedded in the collective oppression of Black and Brown independent movements, which reinforces the idea that literary stories often resonate with such processes.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in close reading and thematic analysis, two central approaches in literary research that enable sustained attention to narrative, symbolic, and stylistic features (Ryan, 2015). Within a hermeneutic framework, close reading makes it possible to examine how language, voice, imagery, and form produce meaning in literary texts. The analysis focuses on how trauma, embodiment, and community are represented in *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones* through characters whose lives are shaped by intersecting forms of marginalization.

The study specifically examines the intersections of Blackness, disability, and poverty (Kafer, 2013; Nash, 2019). Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring patterns related to resistance, care, memory, embodiment, and survival in both novels. This approach aligns with intersectional feminist literary criticism and critical disability studies, which foreground marginalized voices and investigate how dominant ideologies are reproduced and contested in literature (Garland-Thomson, 2002). Rather than treating race, class, and disability as separate themes, the study analyzes how they interact to shape characterization, plot development, narrative form, and the representation of social value.

The Salt Eaters by Toni Cade Bambara (1980) and *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward (2011) have been chosen as the primary data since they both provide a unique and specific image of Black disability, particularly when these images are interpreted through the prism of economic marginalization, ecological disaster, and negligence on a systemic level. These novels form significant case studies that have allowed us to examine how intersecting systems of oppression, namely racism, classism, and ableism, manifest in the lives of the black characters, especially black women.

The analysis penetrates the texts with a cautious approach, focusing on the role of race, class, and disability in the interaction to define the experiences of the characters. Taking a qualitative standpoint that is supported by intersectional feminist and critical disability theory, it sheds light on how power, embodiment, and resistance work towards different narratives. The emphasis is placed on the following: 1) Narrative voice and point of view – through a focus on narrative perspective, this paper examines the way in which the two works, prefigure marginalized experiences; 2) Characterization concerning embodiment and social identity, the text explores the way the experiences of embodiment of characters, created by pain, illness, racialization, and gendered labor, are integrated into their socioeconomic environments; 3) The representation of poverty, trauma and resistance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Salt Eaters

Bambara opens *The Salt Eaters* with a scene of healing rather than conventional narrative action, a deliberate formal choice that unsettles familiar expectations. Minnie Ransom asks Velma, “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well? ... Wholeness is no trifling matter” (Bambara, 1980). This opening question establishes healing as political, communal, and profoundly difficult. Velma, a Black political activist, collapses under the pressures of social obligation, political labor, and personal disillusionment. Rather than presenting her breakdown as an individual failure, Bambara frames it as a symptom of structural violence, activist exhaustion, and the unspoken demands of racial capitalism. In doing so, the novel critiques Western medical models that isolate illness from social conditions and instead elevates Black women’s spiritual and communal healing practices (Wilentz, 2000). As the novel later insists, “One monkey don’t stop no show. Not one, not six. The struggle continues” (Bambara, 1980), suggesting that healing is not a moment of closure but an ongoing practice of survival and resistance.

In the next section, the idea about reclaiming cultural memory is highlighted by the role of the shamanic healer Minnie Ransom in guiding Velma's recovery, but that really highlights the role of the community, spirituality, and cultural memory for getting better in the future. The healing, however, is not clinical, except that it is ritualistic with an emphasis on African-diasporic traditions and places priority on ancestral wisdom and the spiritual aspect

of wellness. Minnie, with the help of people such as Old Wife, is not simply a healer, but is a cultural mediator who re-establishes Velma with traditions erased by colonialism and systemic neglect (Gines, 2011).

Bambara disrupts the narrative format with broken fragments of linguistic expression, interior monologues, and a non-linear timeline. Velma's paralysis is rooted in fear, as the novel notes: "*Wasn't that what happened to Lot's Wife? ... A fear to change, to look ahead?*" (Bambara, 1980), a metaphor that prepares readers for Bambara's fragmented form. This stream-of-consciousness approach reflects Velma's inner disintegration and directly opposes the rational, linear models associated with Western knowledge. The novel therefore becomes a site where Black feminist aesthetics intersect with decolonial practice.

Bambara also does not make the separation of Velma's breakdown from collective trauma. Characters such as Fred Holt and Velma's husband, Obie, reveal how Black men struggle with vulnerability too, though they are silent about it most of the time. Still, she does not welcome the idea to focus on the male pain but rather expresses the difficulties of the oppressed men within a wider collective healing practice (Lorde, 2012). In the end, *The Salt Eaters* discards the notion of healing a body as the return to productivity and embodies a radical transformation in the way the community, care, and identity are conceived and felt humane.

Salvage the Bones

Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* presents a visceral portrait of family love, poverty, and survival in the days preceding Hurricane Katrina. At the center of the narrative is Esch, a pregnant sixteen-year-old girl who confronts adolescence, loss, and impending catastrophe within a world that repeatedly renders her invisible. Set in rural Mississippi, the novel shows how structural poverty and environmental vulnerability intensify bodily and emotional precarity. As Esch narrates, "*And I get up because it is the only thing I can do*" (Ward, 2011), survival appears less as heroic choice than as bodily necessity. Although the novel does not always name disability explicitly, it represents conditions of debility through malnutrition, exhaustion, environmental exposure, and systemic neglect. As Oaks (2025) suggests, this portrayal of structural violence and racialized abandonment reveals environmental racism as a disabling force written onto both space and body.

The bond between Skeetah and his pit bull, China, exemplifies the mixed reality of resilience and violence in the family's everyday life. China's marked body and instinctive guardedness reflect the family's negotiation of marginalization and the physical and social pressures they endure. Ward captures Esch's gendered positionality through Hellenistic metaphor: "*it is the way that all girls who only know one boy move. Centered as if the love that boy feels for them anchors them deep as a tree's roots...*" (Ward, 2011). Ward's writing allows little escapism; instead, it confronts readers with the realities of Black embodiment, moral

vulnerability, and social abandonment. Her prose exemplifies a poetics of survival that rejects sanitized narratives of endurance.

In a different sense, the physicality of the novel is emphasized through the experience of Esch, i.e., her periods, pregnancy, and body consciousness, and the adolescence of the Black girls is situated in a whole-body feeling of tolerance, strength, and self-definition. The writing of Ward is characterized by lyrical realism, which reveals the inner life of the marginalized characters and, at the same time, exposes the bleak reality that surrounds them. Myth or ordinary life is a thin line at times, and Esch resorts to the Greek myths, Medea in particular, to contextualize her feelings and experiences of displacement. Weaving these narratives, Ward retells some of the best-known stories of the world as seen through the eyes of a young Black girl who is both feared and misunderstood as Medea.

Salvage the Bones critiques ableist systems embedded in society and literature. Esch's narrative is not a story of overcoming adversity but of living with multiple vulnerabilities—racial, gendered, and bodily. As she reflects after Hurricane Katrina, “*She was the murderous mother who cut us to the bone ... She left us to salvage*” (Ward, 2011), portraying disaster as a violent and formative maternal force. Ward frames resilience as survival rather than dominance, especially under conditions of neglect and marginalization.

Comparative Insights

Figure 1 offers a conceptual portrait of the interaction between narrative structure and embodiment in both Bambara and Ward's novels, providing a platform for a close comparative analysis of the two novels. Bambara asks whether one ‘truly’ wants to be whole, while Ward's Esch admits she rises only because she must — two statements that reveal wholeness and survival as different forms of resistance. Figure 2 expands on this by visually mapping the thematic intensities across both texts, while Table 1 provides a detailed textual comparison of narrative strategies, character representation, and modes of resistance.



Figure 1. Relationship Between Narrative Structure and Embodiment in Bambara and Ward's Novels

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between narrative structure and embodiment in Bambara and Ward's novels. *Salvage the Bones* is positioned in the quadrant denoting high embodiment and linear narrative structure, while *The Salt Eaters* occupies the space reflecting low embodiment and a nonlinear narrative form. This visual analogy actually does bring to the fore the fact that the two authors are completely different in the way they write and the subject matter.

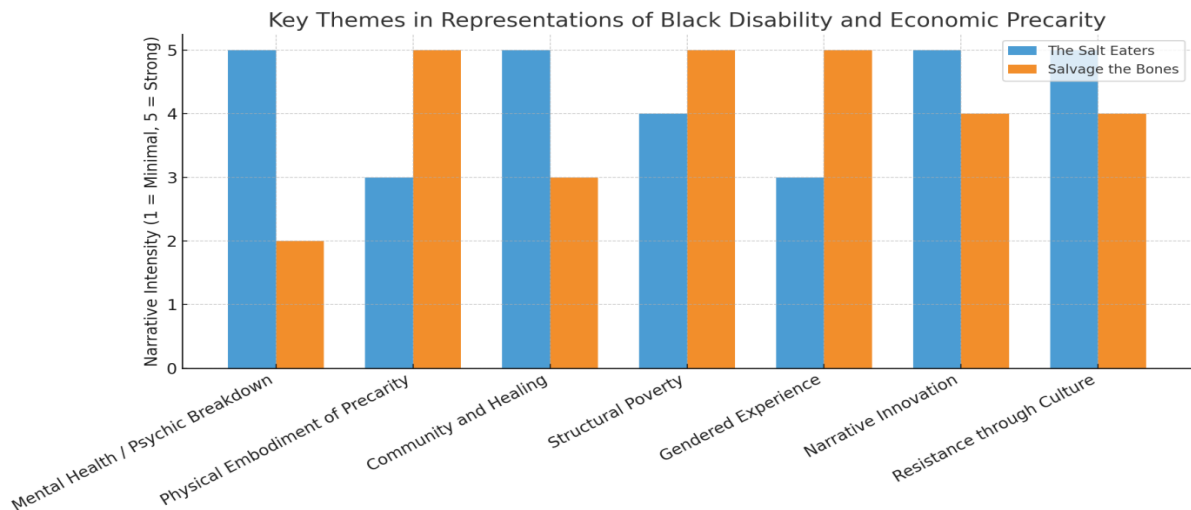


Figure 2. Comparative Representation of Key Themes in *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones* Based on Narrative Intensity (Scale: 1 = Minimal, 5 = Strong)

Figure 2 displays the comparative degree of major thematic features in Toni Cade Bambara, the author of the book *The Salt Eaters*, and Jesmyn Ward, the author of the book *Salvage the Bones*. On a scale of 1 (weak thematic centrality) to 5 (strong thematic centrality), the chart shows that the two novels enter the overlapping yet different spheres of Black disability and economic precarity. *The Salt Eaters* is rated the highest in depicting the struggle of mental health, community healing, and resistance via cultural memory, whereas *Salvage the Bones* accentuates the embodiment of precarity, structural poverty, and gender experience. This visual synthesis proves the thesis statement of this paper that both novels make their own contribution to intersectional narratives of marginalization and resilience.

Element	<i>The Salt Eaters</i> (Toni Cade Bambara)	<i>Salvage the Bones</i> (Jesmyn Ward)
Main Characters	Velma, Minnie Ransom	Esch, Skeetah, China
Disability Type	Mental illness, psychic disintegration	Embodied precarity, animal metaphor
Cause of Distress	Activism fatigue, political trauma	Hurricane Katrina, systemic poverty
Narrative	Stream-of-consciousness,	First-person voice,

Strategy	fragmented narration	lyrical realism
Role of Community	Central to healing and survival	Fragmented but emotionally sustaining
Representation of Poverty	Racialized expectations and resistance	Survival narrative and female embodiment
Resistance Mode	Cultural memory, healing traditions	Familial bonding, bodily endurance

Table 1. *Comparative Representation of Black Disability and Economic Precarity*

Table 1 reveals the representation of Black disability and economic precarity in *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones* by addressing the main thematic similarities and differences. Bambara concentrates on the trauma of politics and healing the community in the framework of the mental breakdown of the character of Velma, whereas Ward attempts to show embodied precarity and survival in the framework of systemic poverty, through the gender experience of Esch. The two novels disapprove of medicalized perceptions of suffering, presenting resistance as a cultural intervention and familial relationships (Kafer, 2013; Goodley, 2016; Khumkerd & Kamolnate, 2025; Puar, 2017).

The Salt Eaters by Bambara and *Salvage the Bones* by Ward move beyond medicalized constructions that define disability solely as illness, abnormality, or deficit. In doing so, they resonate with Kafer's (2013) concept of *crip futures*: alternative futures in which disabled lives are imagined beyond normative boundaries and grounded in collective flourishing. Within this framework, disability is not presented merely as tragedy but as a critical perspective from which to interrogate the social systems that produce marginalization.

However, in the Bambara's and Ward's works, the unconventional role models are put in a perspective where they do not appear as a lack or obstacle. Instead, they are portrayed as highly connected to the racialized past, environmental damage, and intergenerational suffering. In this way, disability is transformed into an area of possibility, political acumen, and community memory, as opposed to a storyline. Neither writers uphold the neoliberal ableist ideals as developed by Goodley (2016) that focus on being productive, autonomous, and having a carefree life.

The works of both authors are framed with the Black feminist perspective that preempts care, interdependence, and survival. Their works are a push-back against dominant violence, which would imply that what Western discourses usually term as abnormal can be a domain of nurture, community endurance, and new narrative potential (Puar, 2017). Such views demonstrate an acuity of reading disability as relational, historically informed, and closely bound up with race, gender, and class.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that *The Salt Eaters* and *Salvage the Bones* create complex literary spaces in which Black disability and economic precarity are represented with critical depth and ethical attention. Both novels embed disability within narratives of community,

resistance, and embodied experience: Bambara emphasizes Velma's spiritually inflected healing through collective care, while Ward depicts the forms of resilience that emerge within a family confronting systemic poverty and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. By challenging medicalized and individualizing accounts of disability, these texts reframe Black disability and precarity not as mere deficits but as sites of knowledge, critique, and communal transformation.

The study underscores the importance of intersectionality in literary analysis, particularly for understanding how race, class, gender, and disability interact to shape narrative representation. By centering characters positioned at the margins, Bambara and Ward disrupt dominant ideas of worth organized around capitalism, ableism, and racial hierarchy. Their novels show that literature is a space in which nonnormative bodies and precarious lives are not simply made visible but become central to meaning-making. As the analysis of Bambara and Ward demonstrates, literature can challenge dominant ideologies while also reimagining care, survival, and social belonging. Ultimately, this research argues that literary texts are vital sites for critiquing social structures and for cultivating ethical attention to those who experience multiple forms of marginalization.

Future work could delve into how queer and trans disabled Black characters are portrayed, with an even more supported intersectionality. Looking at genres such as speculative fiction, memoir, or visual culture might open up new strategies, aesthetic and political. Scholars also might examine the relationships of various narrative forms with issues of disability, race, and class in time and place. These research paths would even widen the field by displaying the breadth of marginalized experiences and the way they are conveyed in literature.

REFERENCES

- Bambara, T. C. (1980). *The Salt Eaters*. Random House.
- Bell, C. (Ed.). (2012). *Blackness and disability: Critical examinations and cultural interventions*. Michigan State University Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Duke University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2002). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. *NWSA Journal*, 14(3), 1–32. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4316922>

- Gines, K. T. (2011). Black Feminism and Intersectional Analyses: A Defense of Intersectionality. *Philosophy Today*, 55, 275-284. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday201155Supplement68>
- Goodley, D. (2016). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Kafer, A. (2013). *Feminist, queer, crip*. Indiana University Press.
- Khumkerd, S., & Kamolnate, T. (2025). Constructing African American identity through oral traditions in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rajabhat Bansomdejchaopraya University*, 19(1), 420–455. <https://so08.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jhusocbru/article/view/3524>
- Lee, S. (2025). "To be available to the universe": Trauma and healing within Black and Brown freedom movements. *Souls*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2024.2445879>
- Lorde, A. (2012). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Clarkson Potter/Ten Speed.
- Mitchell, D. T., & Snyder, S. L. (2001). *Narrative prosthesis: Disability and the dependencies of discourse*. University of Michigan Press.
- Mitchell, D. T. (2015). *The biopolitics of disability: Neoliberalism, ablenationalism, and peripheral embodiment*. University of Michigan Press.
- Nash, J. C. (2019). *Black feminism reimaged: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press.
- Oaks, S. (2025). *Risk, vulnerability, and resilience in "natural" disasters: A Hurricane Katrina case study* (Honor Scholar Thesis No. 306). Scholarly and Creative Work from DePauw University. <https://scholarship.depauw.edu/studentresearch/306>
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Pickens, T. A. (2019). *Black madness :: Mad Blackness*. Duke University Press.
- Pickens, T. A. (2024). *Blackness and disability: The remix; or, I thought I told you that we won't stop*. *College Language Association Journal*.
- Puar, J. K. (2017). *The right to maim: Debility, capacity, disability*. Duke University Press.
- Puar, J. K. (2022). *The right to maim: Debility, capacity, disability*. Duke University Press.
- Quayson, A. (2007). *Aesthetic nervousness: Disability and the crisis of representation*. Columbia University Press.
- Reji, S., & Nandha, A. (2025). Growing Up in the "Dirty South": Precarious Black Childhoods in Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and *Salvage the Bones*. *The Black Scholar*, 55(1), 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2024.2432443>
- Ryan, M.-L. (2015). *Narrative as virtual reality 2: Revisiting immersion and interactivity in literature and electronic media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Schalk, S. (2018). *Bodyminds reimaged: (Dis)ability, race, and gender in Black women's speculative fiction*. Duke University Press.
- Schalk, S. (2022). *Black disability politics*. Duke University Press.

- Scott, M. L. (2025). Imagining Otherwise: Black Women, Theological Resistance, and Afrofuturist Possibility. *Religions*, 16(5), 658. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050658>
- Taylor, K.-Y. (2019). *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Wallace, M. (2008). *Invisibility blues: From pop to theory*. Verso.
- Ward, J. (2011). *Salvage the Bones*. Bloomsbury.
- Waller-Peterson, B. (2019). "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?": The politics of mental health and long-suffering in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*. *Religions*, 10(4), 263. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10040263>
- Wilentz, G. (2000). *Healing narratives: Women writers curing cultural dis-ease*. Rutgers University Press.