

## The Literary Self: An Examination of a Contextual Black Identity

Jarvis Young, English

Research Mentor: Christopher Freeburg

### Abstract

By analyzing the works of Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* and *David Walker's Appeal*, I argue that a particular literary self appears contextually in the form of a political agitator which represents black identity. By using the literary self in their polemical essays, Cugoano and Walker are able to "humanize the African" (Gunn, 2). The political agitator is the literary "self" displayed in both texts. The significance of examining the political agitator is to see who Cugoano and Walker appear to be when writing their political documents. In essence, Cugoano and Walker use a polemical self in order to state their claims. Some of the major questions I will address are, why use a political agitator self to convey a message, and what was at stake for the African race during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and if proven human, what would happen to slavery? Wheatley was able to prove that African slaves were capable of producing poems and heroic couplets which suggests that African slaves could be poets. Likewise, by producing polemical documents, Cugoano and Walker are able to prove how African slaves could be political agitators and write scholarly. Their method, like Wheatley, was through writing (essay) since literacy was the primary way to prove the human status of Africans. We will find that both Cugoano and Walker have presented the "literary self" polemically, but structurally different.