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**Racial Bias Within The Blue Vein Society in The Blacker
The Berry by Wallace Thurman**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to: My beloved Mother and brother Riad who encouraged and supported me while doing this work both morally and emotionally., To my aunt Fouzia who supported me on my journey, my grandmother , my Father Dris and brother Hillel.

To all my family .

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to dive into the issue of colorism and attempt to get to its depths including the effect this phenomenon has on the African-American society as a whole and on individuals. The paradox is explored through the eyes of Wallace Thurman in his novel *The Blacker The Berry* (1929) , the exposition of such delicate topic aims to emphasize that hate isn't only interracial but intraracially as well, taking into consideration the event of black history or rather the African-American fight to win freedom , that would eventually be brushed off by aristocratic white thoughts implanted in the light skinned minds . In the novel, the blue vein society is that portion affected by white supremacy in which the protagonist, born with a very dark complexion struggles for most of her life with unending rejection from those around her. Subjected to such treatment, she wishes to be different in order to fit in, in a society where she would belong naturally, one had to struggle and pave her way to self-love and acceptance, that is what one would eventually conclude as a reward for the hardships endured. The research will answer many interrogations starting with: how did colorism begin? how does colorism affect people? and how is one defined by their skin color?

Key words: Colorism, Blackness, Race and Racism, Blue vein society, Identity, Hate, Discrimination. acceptance. self-esteem

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General introduction

The African-American culture witnessed numerous changes throughout history, luckily and thanks to historians and authors, the journey was captured on paper for future generations to learn about. starting from the very first Africans to be kidnapped and brought to the new land to the current community , the timeline shows how different their journeys were and how they all suffered but each in a different way , slavery was the major source of suffering to the early Black Americans, they were abused and objectified for centuries until the emancipation gave them their liberty -supposedly- since after the emancipation , racism still existed , they had to face hate on a daily basis and be reminded that they were different , separation was reinforced by the law , the segregation wasn't equal in anyway meaning that despite giving them their freedom , the white still had the upper hand and controlled them with the law .they dealt with a daily life filled with racism , hate and oppression for being black .

Those who were fortunate to have lighter skin due to the intermingling of masters and their female slaves – either consensually or not -, were able to have easier lives by passing as whites, and eventually escaping the fate that those with a darker complexion had to endure on a daily basis. Some used this way out to have a better life but still connected to their past or real self that wasn't tied to their skin color but to their identity. This practice evolved from being a simple way to escape mistreatment to an actual lifestyle, from getting to the point of rejecting one's origins and passing for a white person to adopting the white psyche and practicing racism on those of the same community with darker skin tones , in this case it is called colorism that is the phenomenon that this research revolves around.

However, to get the issue of colorism or the discrimination based on skin color, steps were taken, starting by investigating the following questions: What is the origin of race? how is identity defined and by how many factors? Does identity vary from one person to another? following that comes the fact that African-Americans at some point were at lost, due to how slavery shaped their personalities especially after the emancipation (1863) so the questions to be answered in this work are how did African-Americans deals with the situation?

This thesis tackles these question in the first chapter in order to set a clear picture on the basis that it has taken to reach the main theme in this research tat is colorism , starting from internalized racism and pigmentocracy defining them then moving on to Colorism itself not failing to mention the various authors that have spoken on the issue suck as Toni Morrison,

Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neal Hurtson and Wallace Thurman in *The Blacker The Berry* (1929) that is the case study of the thesis .

The analytical framework involves the story and the characters as well as the major themes tackled in the novel, and how the story portrayed colorism and participated into bringing awareness to it and finally sending a message to the readers about self-love and acceptance.

Chapter One
Race and Identity

Chapter I : Race and Identity

I. introduction

In a nation where slavery has been instituted and practiced for almost three centuries, millions of Americans with African descent have come to struggle both physically and intellectually to find peace in a land where whiteness was the dominant race and where those non-whites came to be regarded as second class citizens as they were considered as inferior. They were indeed, more often than not, highly objectified and treated unfairly .Since the beginning of slavery in 1619 , Africans were brought from their home lands and were forced into slavery in America , meaning that they were completely unacquainted to the new land and had absolutely no clue of how that would affect their psyche .As years went by and with the birth of Africans on American soil , they would face the same fate as the ones who preceded them , what differed was the psychological effect and the identity crisis that faced them .In this chapter the concept of identity would be tackled from different angles, and how the practice of slavery resulted in an urgent need to define oneself as not only American but African too, especially when it came to crossbreeding between black and white people leading to the apparition of another shade of blackness and its consequences on their identity and self-recognition .

I.1 Defining identity

Identity is defined as being the pillar that each individual stands on to have a personal and particular being, it is the way every person differentiates himself/ herself from others and it shows the distinction between people or groups of people. Identity was defined by The Oxford English Dictionary as: The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness. Also, Steph Lawler (2008) states:

The root of the word 'identity' is the Latin idem (same) from which we also get 'identical' One important meaning of the term , then, rests on the idea that not only we are identical with ourselves (that is , the same being from birth to death) but we are identical with others . that is we share common identities as humans, say, but also within this as, 'Women', 'Men' 'British', 'American', 'white', 'black' etc (p. 2). which means that identity is the same and would not be affected by the environment one lives in or could not be molded by one's situation or status However , this same scholar has presented another aspect of identity that declares people's individuality

I.1.1 Personal identity

There is another aspect of identity , which suggests people’s uniqueness, their difference from others , what leads us to the two notions that identity would divide into , scholar James D. Fearon in his article what is Identity (1999) notes that identity has two correlated definitions explained as « social and personal » and he defines personal identity as « the aspects or attributes of a person that form the basis for his or her dignity or self-respect. Used in this sense, “identity” has become a partial and indirect substitute for “dignity,” “honor,” and “pride.” » meaning that identity is the way each person perceives himself according to his beliefs or morals , taking into consideration the external factors that would only fortify this identity , thought it can be perplexing to define one’s identity , this concept relies utterly on one’s self image and self-recognition . among other scholars that spoke of the matter, one can may mention Derek Parfit who, in his philosophical review on personal identity declared

Some people believe that in this respect they are different. They agree that our criteria of personal identity do not cover certain cases, but they believe that the nature of their own identity through time is, somehow, such as to guarantee that in these cases questions about their identity must have answers. (Parfit 374)

To him identity is very unstable but somehow people believe they have mastered the concept of identity, as well as their certainty that each individual has his own distinctiveness. As Stuart Hall a cultural theorist stated « ‘Identities’ are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity (Hall 1996)

On the other hand, Social identity takes up a larger scope, as it is outlined by social standards and social settings, as well as it’s being shared among a group of individuals unlike personal identity that is more specific. One of the scholars that contributed to the definition of social identity is Henri Tajfel whom declared that social identity is defined by the communication of more than one person to create an entity that is a society characterized by its social identity , to elucidate he puts forward the following « interactions between two or more individuals (or groups of individuals) that are fully determined by their respective memberships in various social groups or categories, and not at all affected by the interindividual personal relationships between the people involved » meaning that social identity is defined by groups for example if a person is asked about himself one can identify as Algerian or as a student or a member of a certain group , which emphasizes his belonging to a category or chain . every external factor would define the social identity as a group membership, not to exclude each

person's distinctiveness but to create union. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested a pattern that would explain how social identity can be achieved, starting from social categorization that consists of placing people into categories to make it easier to classify and identify them since each person identifies according to the group he belongs to, yet one person can belong to many groups. successively followed by social identification that is the acceptance of the social classification, a person starts adapting to the concept they were put in and would begin to identify as a part of that particular society for example, a person that doesn't consume any animal product is named a vegan, this social construct is adopted by many people, whom ever joins the wave of this distinctive lifestyle would immediately identify as a vegan before anything else. Henri Tajfel states that each person would be emotionally bound to the group he belongs to and every aspect of their self-esteem would primarily rely on that belonging. Finally, social comparison, after each person is categorized and identifies to his group, a need to compare to other groups is bound to happen, each group would attempt to prove one's self better than the other as they feel the need to compete other in order to maintain their self-esteem. This behavior would be endorsed by stereotypes, prejudice and sometimes hate, where groups may be considered as rivals creating hostility and clashes between them. One of the main reasons is race. Race has been the prime reason for division throughout the years, it is defined by OED as any of the (putative) major groupings of mankind, usually defined in terms of distinct physical features or shared ethnicity, and sometimes (more controversially) considered to encompass common biological or genetic characteristics." ("Putative" means "supposed"). Also it is "The fact or condition of belonging to a racial division or group." People that identify racially are more likely to exhibit or face hate for a simple statement for example, one may identify as white and be called a racist for it, which lead us to our next point, Racial identity. the next part will proceed to define racial identity and more specifically how it is characterized.

I.1.2 Racial Identity

Since the beginning of time, the human specie coexisted relying on life skills and survival, with time going by and with the formation of certain groups that would naturally fit together according to a handful of criteria as it was mentioned in the SEP (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) that race is known to be the division of humanity into small groups that share the same genetic inheritance and biological features, members of this group would only identify with each other taking into consideration their physical aspects or colors, the SEP provided a list of physical traits that would define a person's belonging to a certain

racial group *This inherited racial biological foundation manifests itself primarily in physical phenotypes, such as skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and bone structure*

While these peculiarities may define a person's race, researchers such as Johann Friederich have agreed on the existence of four main races that they listed: white or Caucasian, black or African, yellow or Asian, and red or Native American. whereas other scholars disagree with this statement, one may bring to light Cornell and Hartmann on race and ethnicity who said that: "Races (...) are not established by some set of natural forces but are products of human perception and classification. They are social constructs." (Cornell and Hartmann 1998p. 23), according to the race is utterly a social construct and all people are part of one race that is the human race, this concept is still considered a taboo and people are afraid to speak of it not to offend or hurt anyone. even though race was constructed to separate people, some scholars disagree that physical features don't define a person, but in fact people do identify by their physical features. when one mentions race it directly leads to the notion that is ethnicity, it refers to the roots of a person according to their race and heritage, while one may be confused between race and ethnicity, the two are correlated and one wouldn't exist without the other.

« Ethnicity, conversely, is defined as a sense of common ancestry based on cultural attachments, past linguistic heritage, religious affiliations, claimed kinship, or some physical traits (1998, 19). Racial identities are typically thought of as encompassing multiple ethnic identities (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, p.26)

As stated, ethnicity is mainly related to the origins that a person belongs to, starting from their past, traditions, culture, language, religion, and most importantly family.

Although race and ethnicity are linked, the two can be very different, since a person doesn't have the choice to either be this or that, no one can choose what race they want to belong to, but when it comes to ethnicity, one can choose whether to abide to the ethnic characteristics, since it is barely possible to make a difference between ethnic groups, on the light of that one race can be very rich in ethnicities considering that race take on a very large scope and would as well involve multiple groups that may differ both culturally and religiously. *Racial identities are typically thought of as encompassing multiple ethnic identities (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, p. 26)*

In the 16th century the word race meant belonging to the same family or live in the same place, but this term strongly shifted with colonialism and slavery. Scholars strongly agree that the notion of race was created by white people primarily to differentiate themselves from black people (being the Africans), back when Europeans discovered Africa during their exploration, found themselves face to face with people with different traits and color.

Whites feeling superior to other has never been a secret , to the point of creating boundaries and separating the human kind to validate their sense of superiority . after the discovery of Africa , Europeans felt the need to exploit and civilize the Africans with the thought that they were backwards , primarily because of their illiteracy and absence of religion within that community. The white man's burden that meant Europeans or the white people felt that it was their responsibility to enlighten the aboriginals which later led to the enslavement of Africans , that was justified with the fact that they (Africans) themselves traded their own people , so Europeans felt free to deprive them from their basic human right that is freedom .

Subsequently , slavery has taken a big part forming the identity of Africans in America , since it was never a choice , the practice that consists of extracting labor by force and violence without anything in return isn't something a person would choose to abide to, besides the fact that they were treated as inferior for their difference of color of physical repartition. Thomas Jefferson , one of America's founding fathers , whom himself was a slave holder , during his life span , it was recorded that Jefferson owned the total of 600 slaves , in his book he clearly states that the difference between slave owners and the slaves is very eye catching despite the fact that they are all humans , color still mattered .

The real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. -- To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral. The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. (Notes on the State of Virginia (1785)

I.2 Identity defined by Slavery

The indigenous being transferred from his home to a completely different continent has only left him with fragments of his identity, safely kept in his head, from songs, language, and traditions he held on to in order to secure his identity. The subjection to slavery can be divided into two major forms that are physical and mental slavery.

Slavery , a dehumanizing institution itself is the forced labor that obliges people to work against their will casually treated as property to be exploited commercially , as it was defined by the Cambridge dictionary as the condition of being legally owned by someone else and forced to work for or obey them , both men and women faced monstrous treatment from their owners , as they were beaten to unconsciousness for the slightest mistakes and at times for no reason at all , in an article written by Jennifer Hallam where the author describes both men and women's sufferings during their enslavement , focusing on the tasks

and the roles each played and how this deracination affected them . The article states that women and men were generally assigned the same tasks but at certain times, the more hectic the task is the more likely a man would do it , as when it comes to women , their primary duties were domestic ones such as cooking , cleaning , washing and bearing children -that was profitable economically for the master who would be gaining more slaves as field hands or to be sold eventually- . On top of this both genders were highly objectified and sexualized by their masters , black men were often used to fulfill their white masters' sexual fantasies , as they were portrayed and treated as objects and more specifically for intimate intercourse with white ladies that forced or rather sexually abused black men in order to achieve their personal satisfaction on the account of the others mental health and even physical health , the non-consensual act was indeed inflicted on men , but those who have suffered even more were black women whom according to Rachel A Feinstein were forced to submit as a way to confirm the masculinity of the white men that were looking for a way to validate their manhood through sexual violence against black women , also this practice would render profitable to the slaveholders with the forced breeding that slaves were subjected to , more slaves were born equaling more profits to the master , in this case one can only mention the Willie Lynch speech , Lynch being a British slave owner delivered a speech on slave management , in his speech he mentioned black African women as a way to reinforce the economy

Take the female and run a series of tests on her to see if she will submit to your desires willingly. Test her in every way, because she is the most important factor for good economics. If she shows any sign of resistance in submitting completely to your will, do not hesitate to use the bull whip on her to extract that last bit of resistance out of her. Take care not to kill her, for in doing so, you spoil good economic The making of a slave (1712),

Showing that they were not only considered as property but were also beaten into submission , as when it concerns the offspring , even ones own children could be taken as slaves for their color; ignoring the blood that runs through their veins. Sexual violence significantly impacted the lives of enslaved men and women both physically and mentally leading to the next point that would discuss the impact of slavery of the African-American identity as well as the identification of mental slavery since the human brain tries to adapt to every event that occurs and tries to value the situation while calculating the consequences of each actions, when a person is constantly oppressed or abused - in this case African-American slaves - would live in constant fear and in order to avoid any type of punishment -valid or not – one would try to please their oppressor , according to , Ph.D. Ana Nogales (2014) this behavior only encourages the persecutor to demand more , endorsing the white man's ego even more. Thus this impacted

the slave's identity as being submissive and willing to comply to avoid any type of disciplinary action undertaken by the slaveholder.

The effects of this type of treatments has engraved a cultural trauma that affected the African-American consciousness Orlando Patterson, a Harvard sociologist who tackled the trauma that followed the unfortunate life in slavery said:

Another feature of slave childhood was the added psychological trauma of witnessing the daily degradation of their parents at the hands of slaveholders ... to the trauma of observing their parents' humiliation was later added that of being sexually exploited by Euro-Americans on and off the estate (Patterson 40)

This pushed black people to look for a way to restore a new identity as a defense mechanism, which was said to be the origin of the word African-American, in order to separate themselves from the notion of slavery. with the birth of an African blackness, identity was introduced as the key identification of the race. this forced submission was a huge part of black history , creating a way of life for them ; a permanent life of slavery and involuntary servitude that lasted for over three centuries reached a point where free blacks were born and the eruption of anti-slavery movements erupted to stop the oppression and for the black people to have their rights as humans and have freedom , equality and justice . An anti-slavery society was created in 1833 in Philadelphia, it supervised and organized meetings fighting for freedom, signed anti-slavery petitions and collected signatures to be sent to congress in order to be heard, some meetings were attended by former slaves such as Frederick Douglass. the flame was later on handed to the free-soil party who successfully introduced the movement to mainstream of American politics , their slogan was “*free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men*”, after the election of the republican president Abraham Lincoln and the objection of the democrats to the republicans position upon slavery , a civil war blew up leading to bloody massacres, which was later on followed by the issuing of the 13th amendment (1865) which gave slaves their freedom and banned involuntary servitude unless it's a punishment for a crime, it is said to have abolished slavery in the U.S but it can be imposed in cases where people are convicted , then the 14th amendment (1868) that provided them with American citizenship and stated than anyone born on American soil would be granted the citizenship and finally the 15th amendment (1870) that allowed them the right to vote and prohibited the government from denying them that right based on their race or color .

I.3 A Duboisian Approach to Identity

After the emancipation and the events that followed , the African American society was still having an identity crisis , not being able to define whether they are Africans or Americans or both .Du Bois in his essay the Soul Of Black Folk (1903) introduced the term “Double Consciousness ” that described the inner struggle that African Americans were facing as being different in a society monopolized by whites. The racial judgement and prejudice that black people faced left them with a psychological battle; not knowing who you are exactly , it can be very difficult if not impossible to embrace or harmonize the opposing feelings , the issue resided in the fact that a person of color of African origins and born in America would face an emotional torment since one wasn’t capable of identifying as neither or both

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder

Du Bois believes that the upbringing in a racially divided society that segregated black people made it difficult for them to unite their black identity and American identity , he mentions that trying to be both would fracture ones identity creating what he called a Twoness “ *one ever feels his twoness , An American , A Negro; two souls , two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warning ID*”

Moreover, he mentioned the color line that was mentioned multiple times in The Soul Of Black Folk (1903) he stated repeatedly “*The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line*” that is the line that separates white from black people , simply allowing white people more accessibility and better life conditions while black people only get the worst , one of the most prominent aspects was portrayed in the Jim crow laws that made segregation not only visible but quite felt , the separation in every facility and institution would not only hurtful but very humiliating to be a human considered inferior according to your skin color. With this came the idea of the veil , that is highly related to the color line , Du Bois believes that it applies on both whites and blacks , the veils is somehow a cover over the eyes of white people that prevails them from looking to black people as equals or as humans , instead of the image designed by society , similarly for black people that have their view covered and they cannot perceive themselves as Americans since they accepted the segregations and are living by it as if it was completely ‘normal’ , he declared that in a way the segregation engraved

the idea that the racial inequality is the corner stone of society as he wrote: *“It dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.”*

Du Bois commented on the fact that white people are unconscious of the veil since the white race isn't subjected to racism, their understanding of the position of colored people is non-existent taking into consideration that they speak from a stand of privilege -white privilege- Richard T. Schaefer observes:

White Americans are free from both life underneath the veil and the double consciousness that stems from it. As a result, White Americans are often seen in terms of their individual attributes and personalities, rather than being viewed as representatives of their race and accordingly feared, distrusted, ignored, or otherwise marginalized. This has led to the reality that many White Americans do not recognize the role that their race plays in their lives, and thus, the inability to develop the kind of race consciousness that minorities in the United States may develop as a result of the veil (Schaefer 413)

The segregating laws such as the Jim Crow laws were created by white southerners in order to implement racial segregation and on a certain context they were put to assert the white supremacy in a legal way, these laws divided all public and private areas and institution in two 'white only' on a side and 'colored' on the other that were meant for black people, it enveloped everything from restrooms, bus waiting areas, water fountains and public schools, people were denied the right to eat in a restaurant that had a white only sign or have been deprived of education because of a white only public school, while transportation was divided as well, busses had reserved seats for white people and other for black people, trains had white only wagons and colored ones and any person who dared to contravene the rules would be arrested and facing legal charges, subsequently setting the quality of life of colored people to its lowest, in addition to the constant harassments that some organizations like the KKK inflicted on them for any or no infraction of the law.

Although it said separated but equal, the Jim Crow laws isolated African Americans and placed them in inferior positions, in 1892 Homer Plessy, a New Orleans man from African and European decent - 1/8 black- took a seat in the white people only cart on a train, as a form of protest against the segregation and the Louisiana separate cart act (1890) and he was arrested for violating the law. This launched the case of Plessy vs Ferguson. Homer Plessy sued the state of Louisiana, he claimed that the law was unconstitutional and stated that the 13th and 14th amendments were violated, after the rejection and fine he was inflicted by the Louisiana judge

John Ferguson, the case was moved to the Supreme and faced rejection as well. In 1896 the Supreme Court decided that Judge Ferguson was right, and no violations of the 13th and 14th amendments were made.

Similarly to Homer Plessy, many African Americans have a lighter complexion than others which allowed them to infiltrate the white community easier than others, this created a division in identity, while some were aware of their blackness others were trying to ignore it completely, that is called Passing, a coping mechanism developed by black people with lighter skin and straighter hair, that was considered a white people characteristic since black people were mainly known for having curly to coarse hair texture, they used their racial ambiguity to pass for white and were often unrecognized and succeeded to trick the black degrading system, passing is introduced as a person's ability to infiltrate and be seen as part of a society that is different from its initial one, it included race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion, when it comes to black people passing for white, this phenomenon goes back to the era of slavery where the lighter race surfaced as one may go further to the origin of light-skinned black people that is related to the miscegenation between black and white people during the time of slavery resulting in a brownish offspring, these children would often follow the same fate as their mother and would be denied by their father's and taken as slaves as Willie Lynch addressed the racial mix in his speech *The Making of a Slave*

Crossbreeding niggers mean taking so many drops of good white blood and putting them into as many nigger women as possible, varying the drops by the various tone that you want, and then letting them breed with each other until another cycle of color appears as you desire

After the abolition of slavery the apparition of another shade of blackness didn't go unrecognized "By the time that slavery ended, a majority of American Negroes bore in their genetic makeup some degree of white, which is to say European, ancestry" (Packard, 2003, p. 95). As a consequence many resorted to passing for white if their physical features allowed it, the struggle of mulatto people resided in their double consciousness, they were torn between identifying as white or black, as noticed in African-American literature, the mulatto character is often isolated from either of his/her heritage. For those living in the black society, the person would often have a desire or is urged to leave in order to have the white privileges, as it was portrayed in Charles W. Chesnut's novel "The House Behind The Cedars" (1900) where the protagonists pretend to be fully white despite the fact that their mother is a dark-skinned

African-American , their strategy was settled in order to reach the privileges that African-Americans cannot access even if partially white on the other hand they also lived in constant fear that someone would discover their origin . taking the example of Rowena in “The House Behind The Cedars” that was involved romantically with a white man that later on discovered her blackness and clearly expressed his wonder and disappointment

At first he could see nothing but the fraud of which he had been made the victim. A negro girl had been foisted upon him for a white woman, and he had almost committed the unpardonable sin against his race of marrying her. Such a step, he felt, would have been criminal at any time; it would have been the most odious treachery at this epoch, when his people had been subjugated and humiliated by the Northern invaders, who had preached negro equality and abolished the wholesome laws decreeing the separation of the races. Chesnutt (1900)

Despite the white exterior , mulatto people were still marginalized for having black ancestry , as one drop of African blood would make one black, according to the one-drop rule that was used to define the minority of mixed race people , that blackness always presented an issue to those who passed for white , living in constant fear that it would be inherited to their children , thus , exposing their blackness to their white companions , as an example one may state the character of Clare Kendry in *Passing* by Nella Larsen , this figure passed for “white” and eventually wed a white racist- ironically- she was always offended and hurt by his comments on the black race but could never retaliate since she was constantly under the cover of whiteness and hiding her blackness from him , her constant suffering was internal *“It hurt. It hurt like hell. But it didn’t matter, if no one knew.”* *Passing* (1929), and gave birth to a daughter , Clare was terrified of the idea that her child would exhibit black physical characteristics , but in contrast to that , she was whiling to reconnect with the black society through her childhood friend Irene whom contrarily to Clare was infiltrated into the black community and refused to pass but still took advantage of her white complexions privileges

“It’s funny about ‘passing.’ We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it.” *Passing* (1929)

Many people in the Negro community resorted to hair and skin treatments in order to resemble the white community, these practices were often believed to be the outcome of the

influence of the white supremacy values leading them to manipulate their appearance looking for acceptance , the existence between two races not being able to fully identify to one nor the other and the belief that the white race is more superior often led to the abandon of their colored side and engraved their lineation towards passing , their mindset was highly associated to believing that being fair was equal to having power , the hierarchy of whites had infiltrated their thoughts and manipulated them to the extent that they hated their own kind.

The process of passing would not only impact the person crossing the line from blackness to whiteness but also would affect the entourage as whole , Stanford history Professor and author of 'A Chosen Exile' Allyson Hobbs stated: *"To understand passing we can't just look at the story of the person who passed, we have to look at their whole social world, because everyone is going to be impacted."* She states that over the years, racially ambiguous men and women had had a different view on their social status *"from the late 18th century to the present, racially ambiguous men and women have wrestled with complex questions about the racial conditions of their times, and they have fashioned complex understandings about their places in the world."* Allyson Hobbs (Harvard University Press, 2014), the imagery was based on the racial judgement at that time, in addition , passing was sometimes a way to ensure better living conditions for either a person or a family , as an example , a father could choose to pass in order to obtain a better a job and be able to feed his family .

On the other hand, mirroring racial passing , there is the reversed passing , which includes passers who previously concealed their identity , choosing to go back on their decision and embracing their ethnicity , as W.E.B.Du Bois wrote in his book the soul of black folk that embraced the concept of double consciousness

He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.

With that, came the notion of pigmentocracy, which is defined as being a social hierarchy established by those with a certain skin tone , the system valued lighter skin tones and classified them as graceful , beautiful , intelligent and talented , thus , were more involved both politically and economically . Contrarily, darker skin tones were stereotypically considered unattractive and were associated to having a lower IQ judging by their skin tone ,

which highly affected their living conditions . Eventually the European beauty standards and lifestyle had an impact on them thus leading the apparition of colorism that presented a prominent issue regarding darker skinned members of the society in the history and lives of African-Americans.

I. Conclusion

Race and identity were often considered man made or rather created by those who felt the need to separate themselves from others and create a sense of otherness . America being a multiracial and multicultural country , had had a rich history involving freedom and oppression , a past that can neither be forgotten nor ignored, the events that went on have shaped the American identity , and the Afro-American one as well.

The Afro-American identity has been through many stages , shifting according to the circumstances and the events that switched the lives of colored people in America , from the very beginning of slavery and the kidnapping of Africans , the life of captivity and indentured servitude , to the emancipation and the struggle to define ones self as well as to settle on one unique identity , what W.E.B Du Bois introduced as doubles consciousness as well as the idea of twoness , the state of not identifying as either black or American as if the two notions wouldn't go together , similarly that struggle also affected the light skinned community as they were not quite sure of how to define their belonging to both the black and the white race , the in-between situation led some of them to opt for one identity , to be black or to pass for white . although the transition was more of an option it granted more privileges than being black would provide .

Moreover, the intermingling with white people actually affected the light-skinned community leading to the passing of the white hierarchy to them , and with that surfaced another form of hatred under the name of Colorism that is the prejudice relying on ones skin tone . The theme of colorism would be discussed further in this research to bring to light another form of racism that goes on withing a specific society that is to be explored in the following chapter .

Chapter two

Colorism

Chapter 2 : Colorism

II. Introduction

For centuries now, hate and discrimination have always been around and will probably never fade away, these two notions can be derived from deep emotional deconstruction or an engraved sense of stereotyping. discrimination is defined as being the act of making a distinction against a person based on ethnicity, class or gender that a certain individual belongs to. In other words, one can be discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation, culture and mainly race. In a world where color matters, a person can be hated as result of certain physical features such as skin color a condition that more often than not leads to a feeling of inferiority. Traditionally a white person discriminates those who were born with more melanin in their skin and this is just the most common example, as other races such as Asians get labeled by stereotypes and eventually get discriminated based on that. The issue didn't remain there though, it took another turn where races didn't judge other races but rather turned on their own, creating another form of hatred that is internalized racism.

II.1. Internalized Racism

Internalized racism is said to be derived from the impact racism has on groups of people, it gradually builds up hate and anger within people which means a person subjected to racism would easily start to self-loath and eventually start to dislike his color for example leading this individual to exhibit a form of racism against people of the same race or ethnicity, only because they share the same color. the impact of the abuse that racism leaves paves the way for internalized hatred, by making someone hate who he/she is, one would dislike those who are similar because they would remind him/her of the pain inflicted by racists. Thus, a person victimized by racism, internalizes it.

Donna K. Bivens in her book *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building* voices that internalized racism is a system that discourages color, mirroring the system that reinforces white privilege “*Individuals, institutions and communities of color are often unconsciously and habitually rewarded for supporting white privilege and power and punished and excluded when we do not.*” (p.44). she goes on saying that low self-esteem and stereotypes can be a symptom of internalized racism but not be the actual phenomenon

Because internalized racism is a systemic oppression, it must be distinguished from human wounds like self-hatred or "low self-esteem," to which all people are vulnerable. It is important to understand it as systemic because that makes it clear that it is not a problem simply of individuals. It is structural. Donna Bivens (P.45)

Bivens explains that internalized racism occurs when a person subjected to racism supports the white supremacy, the victim supporting the attacker is what makes internalized racism, the effect is built through certain impacts that racism leaves, it makes a person feel inferior and worthless, it turns people against each other while using racist statements between people of the same race.

There are multiple ways to determine internalized racism, starting with distrust among people of color and negative reactions, portraying suspicion and mistrust, seeking approval from white individuals could be taken as a red flag of internalized racism, since seeking validation from the white means that the person values them more. Also, a person of African descent is most likely to be bilingual, and being ashamed to speak his mother tongue in fear of judgment, or embarrassment in participating in events that celebrate heritage shows that the person is in fact ashamed of ethnicity. One can notice that such individual is more judgmental of the choices of people of color than those of white people, and prefers to live in an environment that is predominately white and refers to people of color by derogatory and diminutive terms, in other instances, he/she also tries to alternate his/her physical appearance in order to hide his/her own ethnic features. Overcompensating to contradict a certain stereotype in order to prove his/her divergence from the typical person of color and to conclude, avoiding people who are very color present with darker skin and kinkier hair or too ethnic, self-doubt and pretending to be someone else when interacting with a white person and finally being unsupportive of a colored person's leadership and attempting to sabotage the person shows the mistrust and such behaviors are what a person that practices internalized racism displays.

In relationships with other people of color, it can manifest in a myriad of ways, including projecting one's own sense of inferiority and inadequacy onto those of the same race. This results in distrust and a lack of confidence in our ability or acceptance and support of each other's leadership. (Ibid. p.47)

In other words, internalized racism starts with an individual disliking himself / herself and reflecting it on others, from hair texture, body shape, facial features to skin color that is based on pigmentocracy.

II.2. Pigmentocracy

The word pigmentocracy is known to be the distinction that is based on skin color, more specifically the shade of the color, where the lighter the skin tone, the better it is. Historically speaking, the value of a person, his/her intelligence, beauty, talent and grace were

related to the pigmentation of the skin. This marginalization dates back to the era of slavery where a slave fathered by a white master was given less hectic chores or more privileges, such as working indoors, whereas the darker hues were placed in the fields or put through more pain and labor. The belief that a light skinned individual is smarter also goes back in history where slave masters would sometimes acknowledge that the child is their and would send them to the north in order to acquire an education, thus, the idea that people with lighter skin are smarter was born, as explained in the following quotation:

Some masters who recognized their paternity publicly sometimes sent their partially colored offspring to the North to be educated. This practice explains in part the belief that blacks of lighter skin were more intelligent (they simply had more educational opportunities). (Tudier Harris, p.1)

Despite the fact that some master acknowledged their offspring, others wouldn't allow it even if the child is closer to be white than black, he would follow the mother's faith. To make sure the newborn slave would not claim anything from the master/father, the rule was applied to an extent where over five generation - light or not – a person would still be considered black according to the one drop rule that is a system of classification that announces that a person even 1/32 part black, would still be taken as Black “one drop of black blood”, it was related to the invisible blackness phenomenon where light skinned individuals would easily pass for white to acquire the privileges. The overall situation ignited flames of hatred and eventually created a desire to white wash the generation as well as the dehumanization of darker skin tones and devaluating them.

II.3.Colorism

*“If you're black, stay back;
If you're brown, stick around;
If you're yellow, you're mellow;
If you're white, you're all right.” (A children's rhyme)*

colorism is defined as a discrimination based on skin tones, it was introduced as a form of internalized racism by The association of black psychologists – a group of psychologists inspired by black militants- , implying that colorism, similarly to internalized racism develops through the absorption of judgement from a bigger ethnic group, consequently affecting the minorities that accept it as a reality and agree on it “After hearing racist stereotypes and attitudes, a time comes when these are adopted as truth—internalized—and believed by those on the receiving end of the lie.” (The Association of Black Psychologists)

Tracing back the notion, it goes back to the days of slavery, where slave owners were trying to keep the control over their slaves by contacting Willie Lynch that is a British slave owner. He trained them on ways to create conflict among the black people, as a “divide to rule” strategy.

Crossbreeding niggers mean taking so many drops of good white blood and putting them into as many nigger women as possible, varying the drops by the various tone that you want, and then letting them breed with each other until another cycle of color appears as you desire. (Willie Lynch p.3)

Colorism is said to be a consequence of white supremacy affecting the black community since the days of slavery, masters would give lighter skinned slaves privileges that those with a deeper shade wouldn't be allowed to have, mainly because they were their own offspring, despite the fact that the slave owners wouldn't recognize the children as their own but would still assign them to easier tasks as home keepers, cooks and maids, while darker people were in the fields or practicing more hectic tasks, this created an immense gap between them, splitting slaves into classes, meaning the lighter ones were considered of higher class building the idea that fair skin is superior, the white supremacy infiltrated the lives of people of color, idealizing whiteness as a beauty standard.

The paradox was taken by literary minds such as Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neal Hurston and Toni Morrison, the author of *The Bluest Eye* whom in her book, white beauty standards were symbolized in most characters, from the magnification of Sherley Temple, the reaction of the little girl Maureen that voiced the message by calling the MacTeer girls and Pecola ugly because they were dark and she was light, this unravels the fact that the association of lightness and beauty is engraved from childhood and as it is indicated that even Claudia, who was free from whiteness and highly admired blackness, would end up self-loathing as if it were part of the process that is maturing. As is the case for adults such as Pauline Breedlove that preferred to escape her blackness by fantasizing over movie stars as well as her clear preference of the white girl that she worked for over her own daughter. Most importantly, Pecola's wish to have blue eyes -The bluest- that are often associated with white beauty, led her to madness in her quest to fulfill that wish and make the dream come true. The harassment that the glorification of whiteness brought on the lives of Black girls not only made people hate them but also made them hate themselves and their blackness to the point of wishing to be lighter, as Pecola Breedlove used to drink milk from the Sherley Temple cup in order to gain whiteness from both the beverage and the container that had the picture of a beautiful blonde little girl.

Many non-whites seldom consider whiteness as an ideal that influences their thoughts and feelings about self, because it's so taken for granted, nature renders it the norm and that makes it dangerous to all of us. That is why whiteness as an anti Afrikan presence in the black imagination needs to be considered in any discussion of the power of white privilege. Dr William (Lez) Henry.p.1

The post emancipation black society was highly impacted by white supremacy , which led to the creation of societies that were based on skin shade , this color based prejudice within the African American society helped give stereotypes and judgements a voice and a body .They were named by external people , those who didn't belong in the groups gave them appellations as , Black Brahmins , New York's Café au lait Society, the shady group and The Blue Vein Society . (Obiagele. P47)

"If it was so honorable and glorious to be black, why was it the yellow-skinned people among us had so much prestige" (Zora Neale Hurston, 1942)

II.4.1. The Blue Vein Society

Blue Vein Society, one of multiple social clubs whose members had to be able to pass as white is regarded as an offensive and discriminatory form of social separation; the members of a blue vein society would have to have a skin light enough for the blue veins underneath to be visible. It also refers to the association of blue blood with wealth and privilege. The societies were formed among the black society where lightest-skinned individuals were granted positions of privilege, while darker-skinned blacks were lower on the social scale.

The first to ever speak of these societies was Charles W Chesnutt in his short story *The Wife of His Youth* (1898) and other stories of the color line, as he was himself a mulatto and part of these circles. Chesnutt mentions the blue vein society and introduces its creation as merely an organization of cultivated people whom had a relation to judgments or discrimination based on skin color , whilst those who were not part of the society highly affirmed that the social club was in a way encouraging a behavior that people of color have long suffered from .

The Blue Veins did not allow that any such requirement existed for admission to their circle, but, on the contrary, declared that character and culture were the only things considered; and that if most of their members were light-colored, it was because such persons, as a rule, had had better opportunities to qualify themselves for membership. Charles W Chesnutt (P.1)

But this is what the society alleged, on the other hand they had people go through a set of tests that were not only humiliating but very degrading as well.

II.4.2. Admission Tests to the Blue Vein Society

In order to join the social club , one has to endure a set of tests to ensure that a person is worthy of joining the club , that was considered as high maintenance and only the light and intellectual ones were allowed .The process spoke differently since it was based on the appearance for example hair texture , white facial feature and more specifically , skin color . the most common one is the blue vein test one that meant if a person is light enough for their veins to show then they pass the test.

II.4.2.1. The Paper Bag test

This appeared in the 20th century, around the 1950's, where a brown paper bag was pinned to the door and anyone with a hue darker than the bag wouldn't pass the test and wouldn't be allowed to enter. This practice was held mostly in social clubs, Sororities, Fraternities and even Churches. The color of one's skin even mattered when it came to religion, a spiritual bond was interrupted because of the skin shade, the churches were trying to keep a certain reputation of a high standard organization, associating blackness with degrading thoughts, and whiteness on the other hand as a privilege.

II.4.2.2. The Comb (Pencil) Test

This test was practiced in the same time range as the Paper Bag test , a comb was passed through a person's hair to test the coarseness of it , the goal from this practice was to check if the comb would glide or get stuck in the person's hair , if it doesn't move or is hard to comb through then the person is disqualified for their hair texture .

In cases where there was no comb, a pencil was run through the hair to identify it as African texture or not, if the pencil doesn't go through the hair the person would be classified for having a hair texture too kinky to be white. Some would ask a retest that would require a pen as well, but the person has to put a pen in their hair and shake their head, if the pen falls then they would pass, if not they would be rejected.

II.4.2.3. The Doll Test

This experiment was not a test to be accepted into the blue vein society , it was an experiment conducted by Dr.Kenneth and Mamie Clark on black children as case study , by presenting two dolls , a white and a black one , the children's ages ranged between three and seven , they were asked to identify both the race of the doll and which one they preferred , the results were that most of them picked the white one and described it as beautiful , Dr.Kenneth stated in an interview that the aim on this study was to analyze how discrimination affects a person's self-esteem

The Dolls Test was an attempt on the part of my wife and me to study the development of the sense of self-esteem in children. We worked with Negro children—I'll call black children—to see the extent to which their color, their sense of their own race and status, influenced their judgment about themselves, self-esteem. Dr. Kenneth Clark (1940)

The study's aim was to reveal how children acquired a negative attitude towards their race and how they identified, the results showed that most children chose the white doll as good and on some cases refused to answer or cried when asked to make that choice, this perfectly embodies the values that are engraved on children and how blackness is associated with the lack of beauty or ugliness.

II.6. Conclusion

Historically speaking, the issue of color not only generated several racist attitudes apposing whites to blacks, it has also infiltrated the African American society fracturing it with the apparition of the lighter blacks as a consequence of the sexual activity either consensual or not, the new shade of black was often considered better or superior as it was closer to the white race, thus they had better treatment.

Internalized racism has broken lives of many African Americans that were discriminated for something they didn't choose, that is their skin color, hair texture and prominent African features, they were subjected to an immense amount of hate and ended up reflecting on themselves and eventually to despise their own color and race. On the other hand the lighter skinned were privileged in most aspects of their lives such as education and employment, it was easier for them to circulate around society with a sense of superiority, some of those who chose to pass as white and earn more privileges have done it, an advantage that darker members wouldn't be granted

The gap allowed the Mulattoes to create social clubs that would require a person to be white in order to join, this exclusivity was noticeable despite the negation of the rumors these clubs were carrying, one of them was named The Blue Vein Society, as the name states the primary requirement was that a person should be light enough to show blue veins on their arms.

Finally, this type of separation had affected many people's self-esteem and pressured them to fit into these standards, which pushed some people to practice hair pressing to make their hair silky and skin bleaching to be lighter. The issue of color was discussed by many authors such as Du Bois and Charles W. Chesnutt and Wallace Thurman in his Book *The Blacker The*

Berry that would serve as a case study to analyze the Blue Vein Society from an insider point of view in the Following Chapter.

Chapter Three
The story and
Analytical Framework

Chapter 3: The story and Analytical Framework

III. Introduction

African-American literature was born in the US and was mainly autobiographical, it began with *The life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), this autobiography traced his journey from the days he lived in his home country, the abduction, the trip and life on American soil. The narratives then shifted to slave narratives that represented tales of slaves or former slaves recounting their lives during their captivity and their journey to find freedom.

In 1920, the African-American culture and literature included, had noticed a major shift with the Harlem renaissance that revolutionized the African-American literary scene, it moved from narratives that portrayed Africans as victims to actual messages that debated a larger field of issues that Africans were facing at that time; intellectuals stepped into the literary field, addressing social dilemmas such as racism and social equality.

Numerous writers marked that era, such as Langston Hughes whom published *The Brownie* book 1921 at the beginning of that era, also Zora Neale Hurston that was known for her classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* 1937, and Wallace Thurman who stamped that revolution with his novel *The Blacker The Berry* 1929 redirecting attention to the depths of the African-American community and revealing its secrets.

This chapter will be devoted to the revolutionary writer Wallace Thurman and his work *The Blacker The Berry* 1929, the story will be discussed as well as its major themes and characteristics to procure knowledge and a better understanding to this work of art.

III.1 About the author

Wallace Henry Thurman was born in 1902 in Salt Lake City, just a month after his birth, his father walked out on both him and his mother, W.H. Thurman only got to meet him after 30 years later. During his lifetime, it was said to be filled with loneliness and illness, his education was interrupted due to health issues at the age of 6, later on he endured persistent heart attacks and even caught the influenza at some point, but these obstacles didn't stop him.

He moved to Harlem in 1925, and managed to become an editor, publisher and ghostwriter at *The Black Periodical Messenger* in 1926, he persuaded many writers such as Zora Neal Hurston to participate to his publication. Later on, he was encouraged by Langton Hughes to edit a magazine dedicated to young black writers under the title *Fire*, unfortunately it was issued only once, he proceeded to start another work named *Harlem*, similarly orchestrated by young writers, but it followed the same fate as *Fire* magazine.

In 1929 , He co-wrote his play Harlem with William Rapp , it received some mixed reviews due to it's content and message that was said to have soiled the Harlem life , his novel The Blacker The Berry : A Novel Of Negro Life , appeared the same year as the play , it tackled a social phenomenon among the African-American community that was internalized racism or Colorism .Despite the fame the story gained , he received immense backlash for addressing such sensitive topics ad was defamed as a racial traitor . Thurman then wrote a satire under the title Infants of The Spring 1932, where he mocked some of the Harlem renaissance figures and described them as overrated, as some people agreed and praised his work, others didn't accept his views. From the appearance of that novel, Wallace Henry Thurman never addressed African-American topics again.

III.2.1 The story

Wallace Thurman tackled a very sensitive topic in The Blacker The Berry, where Emma Lou Morgan, the protagonist is an extremely dark girl born into a light skinned entourage and had to face humiliation and prejudice for the skin she was born in. It begins with a backstory of Emma Lou Morgan's grandparents "Samuel and Maria Lightfoot", both mulatto and descendent from a line of intertwined relations between white masters and people of African descent, they were never enslaved neither were their parents. the couple had plans to escape their past and any ties that would attach them to the history their ancestors had in Kansas, they travelled al the way to Boise in order to restart and create a selective social class that they deemed acceptable. Maria Lightfoot and her husband had fair skin which they thought made them illegible to classify themselves superior to anyone with a darker shade. That lead to the creation of a social circle named "The Blue Vein Society" specifically meant to welcome those light enough to show veins through their skin.

Mrs. Lightfoot was the founder and leader of the community in Boise, she made it her personal mission to eradicate blackness, the motto was "Lighter and lighter every generation". The Lightfoot children were thought to only engage with mulatto¹ or light skinned individuals, but against her personal will, both children Joe and Jane had married Blue blacks² . Jim Morgan, Emma Lou's father was never accepted into their circle for carrying prominent black features as it was said "*For his physical properties undeniably stamped him as a full-blooded Negro*" (Wallace Thurman p.8)

¹ Mulatto: now sometimes offensive is first-generation offspring of a black person and a white person.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mulatto>

² Blue Blacks : extremely dark.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blue-black>

After Emma Lou was born, her features resembled her father's, at her mother's surprise she had only taken her hair texture, thus made her reconsider if she made the right choice by marrying such da dark man. Jane Lightfoot resorted to her mother and eventually succeeded into chasing her husband but the child remained a burden. Now it was for Emma Lou to face her fate. as she grew up, everyone treated her as the ugly duckling which made her realize her darkness stood out and eventually started to weigh on her , she often wished she was born a boy because to her grandmothers and mothers words a boy would be better off with that color than a girl , the judgement and criticism pushed her into wishing she was lighter , it would have made it easier to fit .The blue black girl faced an abusive behavior from both her family and society throughout her entire childhood, from remarks on her darkness to even trying to bleach her skin with marketed products and potions that were deemed unsuccessful and even later had to deal with a step father that resented his own blackness and decided to take his revenge from the dark society that was represented to him by Emma Lou .

After receiving he high school diploma, Joe, her uncle had convinced her mother and grandmother to send her to study away in Los Angles, Southern California and encouraged her to seek her happiness outside of Boise, where he thought people were close minded.

People in large cities are broad. They do not have time to think of petty things. The people in Boise are fifty years behind the times, but you will find that Los Angeles is one of the world's greatest and most modern cities, and you will be happy there. Wallace Thurman (p.11)

In L.A³, there was diversity that made her eager to meet other fellow dark students. she Made the encounter of Hazel Mason ; a southern girl from Texas, a loud and bubbly personality with a similar complexion to Emma Lou's, unlike her she was very loud , Ms. Morgan had immediately felt ashamed to be seen with her , she treated her the same way she was treated in Boise , to her she wasn't the right type of people and couldn't set her mind on accepting her as a friend , she followed her quest to make friends but was as harshly judged by the other black students as she had Hazel Mason.

After years of trying at school , Emma Lou decides to go back to Boise since her experience at school was not what she expected, She then meets a boy and believes she is in love with him , he was dark skinned contrarily to her expectations of meeting a light boy , Weldon Taylor wasn't stable and had numerous other relationships , which leads to their

³ L.A : Los Angeles.

separation , Emma Lou blames it on her skin thinking he wouldn't have left her if she were lighter . Eventually, she decides to finish school and go to NYC⁴ Harlem to restart her life and acquire a job, only to be faced with the same fate, people were selective and discriminated her due to her skin color. She then falls into the arms of a man named Alva whom she let manipulate her, he was ashamed to be out with her in public but would still try to keep her attached. his company derived from her usual lifestyle and social group. At some point, Alva stumbles over the fact that a girl Geraldine is pregnant, leading to his separation from Emma Lou.

Emma Lou continues to work as an assistant to a former actress, who's husband encourages her to fulfill her studies, what he thought was the only way for her to succeed. she takes the advice and moves to Y.W.C.M⁵ , making friends on the way and studying teaching. she starts seeing a good-looking man that fits her taste called Benson and managing to keep her life on track for once. But as she receives news that Geraldine deserted Alva and her son she decides to go visit; he takes advantage of the situation to manipulate her into staying. due to her naïve nature, she does and take the role of a caring mother to the child. Ms. Morgan later on takes a teaching job and becomes financially independent and decides to leave Alva and his son after 6 months of uneasiness.

Moving back to Y.W.C.M, she calls Benson Brown to notify him of her arrival, only to be told that he and her friend Gwendolyn are getting married, the news shakes her a bit while on her way back to her room. She finds a drunken Alva and starts contemplating her life and what she has gotten into. Emma Lou comes to the realization that she needs to take control of her life again, turns around packs her bags and leaves.

To her, there was no more running away , she spent her life running from prejudice but never took time to accept herself , she became her own enemy by believing what she was fed by society but eventually , she realized the first step to her delivery was for her to accept herself.

III.2.2 The story characters

The Blacker The Berry is a metaphor used to refer to darker skin, saying that the juice is sweeter is to show how someone is beyond a skin color, and that more often people with

⁴ N.Y.C : New York City

⁵ Y.W.C.M : The **World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA)** is a movement working for the empowerment, leadership and rights of women, young women and girls in more than 100 countries. The members and supporters include women from many different faiths, ages, backgrounds, beliefs and cultures. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YWCA>

darker hues are richer personality wise. In this story the Berry is **Emma Lou Morgan**, the protagonist and the narrator of the story. Her physical appearance distinguished her from her entourage making her stand out as the only black person in a predominantly white society and 4more specifically a high yellow family, her self-esteem was jeopardized by her family and surroundings that judged her for being born too dark. Growing up she didn't learn to love herself but rather to loath it, she detested her features , skin and even her gender because as a boy she would have less to worry about. Throughout the events she meets lovers that would either make her feel like she isn't enough or take advantage of her using her insecurities , at some point she even meets the right person but doesn't end up with him either because she realizes that before she could meet and love someone , she had to fall in love with herself first.

Other characters that marked themselves in the story are divided into two categories, some who participated in degrading her and giving her self-esteem issue, whilst others tried to lift her spirits and help her out of her dark place into a better. In the community where she was raised, **Maria and Jane Lightfoot** -grand-mother and mother- have always humiliated her, she was shamed into hating herself for being -too black- as they were part of The Blue Vein Society whom marginalized all that war darker than a paper bag. On the other hand, her **uncle Joe** has been supportive and wanted her to leave Boise in order to explore and meet other people that wouldn't judge her for being blue black.

Outside of Boise , Emma Lou met several people and had been in several relationships , **Alva** and **Benson Brown** played significant roles in the story , Alva was the one who accepted her blackness despite his friends that pointed out the difference to which he responded “ *the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice*” . On the other hand , Alva was ashamed to be seen with her and would rather take lighter girls to his social events , his acceptance reassured her and made her feel desirable , as if he was doing her a favor being with her but their relationship gets to an end because she was insecure from his behavior .Years later, she meets Benson Brown , a light-skinned man who's only trait that attracted her was his skin and his acceptance of her darkness , he was neither the brightest nor the handsomest , but she stuck to him because he accepted her skin color . Thought she stood on firm ground with him she decided to leave him for Alva whom to her was a bulldog compared to the litter of puppies that Benson belonged to.

III.3 Colorism and the story

Wallace Henry Thurman based his book on colorism and its effects on those subjected to it , in this case Emma Lou is the victim of colorism from the beginning of the story , her birth alarmed all those around her , taking into consideration of the context of the story , she was

born in Boise , Idaho , a nest to The Blue Vein Society that was built on colorism . Blue veins were very judgmental towards any individual darker than them. A person that practices colorism is called a colorist , instead of seeing a person that is simply white or black , a colorist sees shades either yellow , high yellow, brown , black or blue black , the shades are set to define how someone is to be treated , anything that falls in the range that is considered too pigmented is deemed inferior . The aristocracy of Maria Lightfoot couldn't be missed, how Thurman described her dedication to frequenting light skinned people and emphasizing on her children to only be involved with "Their own kind". Jim Morgan, Emma Lou's father was rejected from the start for being "Blue Black" a shade that is far too dark for a blue vein to be involved with, but the outcome of that relationship was a child that had to suffer the consequences.

This theme is very present in this story where the protagonist is raised to be color conscious, in the comfort of her own home she was tormented and pushed to lighten her skin, and into thinking that her blackness is nothing but ill fate. at school she was the only black girl amongst white and light skinned students which made her darkness more noticeable and affected her highly since she was constantly picked on and put in humiliating situations .Later on, while seeking a professional path , she was faced with the same attitude , the company owners and directors would rather employ lighter girls , a thing that she noticed and was told on her search for employment . Emma Lou's darkness represented a heavy weight that laid on her shoulders, she wished to be white or at least a couple shades lighter so that she could fit in the society that rejected her for her color. She knew she was black and hated it.

III.4 The color of hypocrisy

in this novel, Wallace Thurman, managed to draw a clear picture on how people were mistreated and how they perfectly fit the role of a victim, but in some cases some figures were personifying hypocrisy, starting with the fact that people of African descent were to judge those who were darker and regard them as unworthy which made life for darker black harder , not fitting with people from the same descent for the shade of their skin color. Jane Lightfoot - Emma Lou's mother- by marrying Jim Morgan knew the odds of her child resembling the father , but hoped it would look like her , at this point one would imagine that Jane as a blue vein was accepting of Jim's color and had taken her chances , but as soon as the child was born , the doctrine her mother preached rolled before her eyes , and regret was installed that her choice of a spouse were wrong , which paint an image of hypocrisy for if she was truly accepting of his appearance she wouldn't be surprised that her child was so black . Emma Lou herself carried the baggage that was thought to her by her society , she too was a colorist unconsciously by

judging Hazel Mason for the way she spoke, dressed and acted , Ms. Morgan felt ashamed to be seen with her and tried to avoid her , the same way people treated her for the same reasons , Hazel too was dark but to Emma Lou she wasn't the right sort of people “ *she found herself unable to sympathize with the other girls, for Emma Lou had classified Hazel as a barbarian who had most certainly not come from a family of best people*” p.17 . The hypocrisy that she exhibited shows that a person may be enduring a certain treatment but would inflict it on others, leaving behind similar scars to theirs.

III.5 Self-acceptance

This theme is what the book is about , the message that was meant to be delivered since by the end of the story Emma Lou as a young independent woman realizes that her misery wasn't related to wealth or success but rather related to her self-loathing , rethinking her life choices and the pattern it followed , she was constantly running away from judgement and criticism that was based on her appearance which made her detest her being. Finally, she realizes that what she needed was to accept herself first, she came to the conclusion that her misery was the outcome of the detestation she directed towards her appearance and blackness.

III.6 Conclusion

African-American literature was highly influenced by the Harlem renaissance also signifying rebirth, it was indeed reborn and revolutionized, this time it addressed the harsh reality of life after slavery but more importantly the impact of it on the African-American community .

Wallace Thurman shook the audience with this novel by putting a sensitive topic under the spotlight , he chose to put forward the skin color prejudice or colorism in that era (1920's) where life was hard enough for an African-American but harder for one who was unfortunate to have darker skin ; adding to that the matter of sexism where life is said to be easier for a black man than a black women , the struggle would be for both the appearance and the gender.

Finally, the author chose the wrap the story with an optimistic view that of acceptance and self esteem , despite the judgements and prejudices , one could accept herself in order to be accepted by others , the first step is to be confident and convinced that people's opinion on you doesn't define you , neither does your skin color.

General conclusion

Wallace Thurman is one of the pillars of the African-American literature , from his early career in writing as an editor and co-creator of many magazines that were designed to welcome and exhibit the young African-American talents in literature and writing , he wrote plays such as Harlem (1929) and Infants of the Spring and The Internes (1932) . Thurman helped reshape literature during his stay in Harlem by presenting his very first novel The Blacker The Berry (1929) , a story that received mixed reviews and triggered various emotions in the black community due to its message , while some agreed others couldn't help but oppose his views and accuse him of treason .

As a case study , the experience of Emma Lou represents that of every other African-American born dark and facing the issue of prejudice based on skin color , not only to expose the internalized racism in the society but also for people to find themselves through the story and realize that they are not alone facing that fate. the author speaks about the internalized racism through the life of Emma Lou Morgan, the protagonist born shades darker than her family and surrounding is brought to the world and abandoned by her father at a young age, was left to face criticism for most of her life. The research aims to come to the conclusion of how colorism is dividing society ? and how does it affects those subjected to it ?

In the revolutionary novel , Wallace Thurman brings out the polemic of colorism , the story of Emma Lou is similar to many black people that were left to feel like they don't belong to that particular society because they were too dark , as it is the case of the protagonist in The Blacker The Berry , being too black for her family despite the fact that the family originates from African-American ancestry, she was constantly discriminated ad harassed to lighten her skin and stripping her confidence with every attempt to strip her color off . she grows up in search for acceptance but end up in the same loop she grew in, people not accepting her for her dark skin, which encouraged her to drown herself in sorrow and blame herself wishing she was only lighter to fit in.

Through the story , the author wants to deliver many messages , the first one for which he received criticism is that racism isn't only between races but it also exists within one race itself a fact that many couldn't accept covering it with denial while other couldn't help but testify their experiences with colorism. On the other hand, he made sure to point out how it affects people and how it takes every inch of self-love and acceptance, having people reject one and constantly try to change one will eventually affect one's confidence. lastly his book ends with a realization or rather a wake up call that shook Emma Lou's Eyes open and the reader's as

well , to take a look at the fact that in order to be accepted by others , one has to accept herself/himself first , in order to find love one has to fall in love with herself/himself first and to be Happy one Has to be what she/he wants to be and not what others wan her/him to be .

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