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**Beyond the Skin Tone: Colourism and Systemic Racism
in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* (2015)**

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master in
Civilization and Literature

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Dedication

To all my family.

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My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisor Mr. Abdelkader KOURDOURLI for his patience, support, and guidance.

Abstract

The current study seeks to assess and investigate skin tone and racial prejudice as an issue within the systemic racism in American culture. This study adopts a historical, analytical, and qualitative approach. The key results of the current study demonstrate that colourism and internalized racism are not the result of the racial and cultural inferiority of black people in the United States, nor are they the result of white domination. However, they are the result of a timeless systemic racism that has gone unnoticed throughout American history. The research contributes to dispel stereotypes of black victims and white domination in America.

Keywords: colourism; discrimination, internalized racism; segregation; stereotype; systemic racism

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General Introduction

Describing how racism is can be systemic in the United States, Thomas writes: ‘That’s the hate they’re giving us, baby, a system designed against us. That’s Thug Life’ (170). The foundation of the United States was by means of the various ethnic groups and races. Their diverse cultures, ethnicities, and colours contributed significantly to building this nation. However, these various ethnic groups and races were not always equal. Among these races and ethnic groups, we can cite the African Americans who constitute an important minority in the modern-United States. From the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, however, this minority was brought from Africa to America through slavery. Although African Americans participated in the development of the United States economically and culturally, and even though they were emancipated in the second half of the nineteenth century, they became the unfortunate victims of discrimination, segregation, and even organized racism in the country.

Therefore, the problem I explore in this dissertation is the notions of colourism and black inferiority, and whether they are innate or systematically enforced. Then the purpose of this study is to highlight the role of systemic racism and its effects in defining black African Americans and their psyche. So, this piece of research will adopt a qualitative, historical, and analytical approach.

As for colourism, Hall defines it as ‘a discrimination based on skin colour . . . [and] is a kind of prejudice and discrimination in which persons of specific ethnic groups or those who are seen as belonging to a darker skinned race are treated differently based on their darker skin colour’. Hall also terms ‘colourism’ as ‘shadeism’ (177). As regards ‘systemic racism’ or ‘structural racism’ or ‘institutional racism’, these terms are employed to represent the interaction between institutions and people. Therefore, systemic racism comprises people as well as society's racist beliefs and practices. (Ratansi, 95)

I chose to investigate this issue because of an avid interest in finding out why racism is so deep in American society. Therefore, this study will undoubtedly contribute to the field of American civilization and literature. To conduct such a research, a number of questions will be asked:

1. Why does racism and inter-racial hatred exist in American society?
2. Why do some African Americans suffer from an inferiority complex?
3. How does racism still exist in American society?

The current research will focus on the notions of colourism and systemic racism in the United States during the first half of the twenty-first century, by analysing Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child*.

Winthrop D. Jordan's *White over Black: American attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968) simply defines the black scientifically with a racial viewpoint.

W.E B. DuBois's *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques* (1906-1960) attempts to show how many lighter-coloured people in the United States try to produce children who are not identified with the negro race; therefore, DuBois addresses a real racial problem in this country. People of colour feel that light skin colour is the only way to be treated with respect in American culture and to overcome the issue of race.

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) investigates the consequences of exploiting black people as slaves in plantations by enormous forced migration. Donning white masks over black skin represents a circumstance in which the whites imposed their ideals and culture on the black man. However, when the latter embraced these principles, he was rejected. This method tended to convey the idea that black people will never be on the same level as white people and should embrace the fact that they were born inferior. After having a mental

disease, acting forcefully against his reality, or being alienated and ambivalent, this will result in a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. The duality will eventually cause him to be half asleep, making him an easy property.

Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (2018) demonstrates how the system favours the dominance of the whites over black Africans in the United States, by referencing white supremacy and distinguishing between races. It stresses bigotry originating with white academics and scientists. Additionally, it portrays how these academicians believe firmly in the inferiority of the blacks, considering them as nonhumans. This belief was tracked in their research, influencing how white Americans viewed the black man.

Similarly, François Bernier claims that these scientists thought that individuals were born with distinct characteristics; as a result, they identified the whites as a rational race and non-whites as beasts (Ratansi 25). This shows how certain researches and intellectuals presented the black man for the purpose of excluding him from the white American society. Bernier gives historical evidence when he contends that the black man went through an acculturation system both during slavery and colonization. This system deprived him of his culture and values. It also deconstructed black people's minds.

Three studies seem extraordinarily important to the current research. First, *Racism and Identity in Alexander Haley's Roots and Nadine Gordimer's July's People* (2012), a Master dissertation by Samia Zaghba from the University of Biskra is a comparative study of two novels, the first by an African American and the second by a South African novelist. This study shows how racism impacts the formation of black identity in two societies that had suffered much from this phenomenon. In particular, Gordimer's novel depicts the end of white dominance in South Africa and the emergence of a new South African identity where whites and blacks can live and

work together to the benefit of the whole nation. Second, *People of Colour: Past, Present, and Future* (2021), a Master dissertation by Abdelbasset Alia et al. from the University of El Oued explores the evolution of racism against African Americans in the United States. The study uses historical and critical analysis to study the origin of slavery, the status of slavery in the new nation, and racial discrimination. The significance of the study lies in the attempt to understand the uprisings and reactions of African Americans towards racist treatments. Third, Andre Rubin Fields's PhD thesis *The Effects of Systemic Racism on the Academic Achievement of African American Adolescents* (2014) from Western Michigan University investigates the role of systemic racism in African American male adolescents' academic underachievement. The results of the research show significant correlations between perceptions of racism, coping behaviour utilization, and psychological dysfunction.

The current study will consist of three chapters. Chapter one will trace the history of black people in the United States from slavery to the civil rights movement. Chapter two will introduce the major concepts of colourism and systemic racism, and how these are illustrated through an analysis of Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child*. In chapter three, the main findings of the current research will be presented and interpreted.

Chapter One

A Historical Background of Racism in the United States

Introduction

This chapter will explore the concept of racism, its history, and how race is used to classify humans. Additionally, the chapter will study the history of racism against black people in the United States of America and their struggle for emancipation.

1. What is Racism?

Racism is a doctrine or ideology whose core is that race resolves culture. Later on, the concept of racism developed into the superiority of a race. (Cashmore, 308). The British sociologist Michael Banton defines racism as ‘the doctrine that a man’s behaviour is determined by stable inherited characters deriving from separate racial stocks having distinctive attributes and usually considered to understand one another in relations of superiority and inferiority’ (Isaac, 17). Moreover, Goldberg (1993) defines racism as ‘any practice which, intentionally or not, excludes a racial or ethnic minority from enjoying the full rights, opportunities, and responsibilities available to the majority population’. He adds that racism seeks to explain and justify social inequality based on race (330).

2. The Definition of Race

The term ‘race’ means a group of people who are linked by the same origin. The term was used in the sixteenth century mainly to describe the person’s belonging to a specific group, or to elaborate the shared descent of such a group. Race was used as classification to differentiate between groups of people, according to their appearances and cultures (Cashmore, 294). The

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term 'race' began to be used in the sixteenth century. Then the term referred to the family lineage and breed. However, the use of 'race' changed progressively from one generation to the next. The major change in the meaning of the term 'race' was that it began to refer to people's skin colour, religious, as well as social values which created hierarchy and human classification between superiority and inferiority. (Ratansi, 23)

In the English-speaking world, the use of the concept of 'race' started with the British who had a long history of segregation against the Irish. The latter were described as savages who were incapable of being civilized. This was an argument to conquer them and take over their lands. The English applied the same principle to the peoples they conquered later in the new world and Africa. Ta-Nehisi Coates states writes that race is the child of racism, not the father because he means that first, the English exploited people for their resources, not according to how they looked. Coates adds that the ideology of unequal races to justify exploitation came after exploitation itself (DiAngelo,33). This occurred within the context of the Industrial Revolution and the increasing demand for resources.

Simultaneously, the English regarded themselves as refined people and superior. The rationality was a key service for them to separate themselves from other human categories and race was the surface of this distinctions. The English described others as non-rational to make sense that human species are not one but classified in a hierarchy. Moreover, Bernier maintained that humans were different naturally describing the Europeans as a rational race with an eternal soul, while other categories were non-rational, hence considered as animals (Ratansi, 25). Later, issues of race and racism were encountered in the United States as an English-speaking country.

2. Racism and Race Issues in the United States

The issue of racism ‘has been among the most complex social dilemmas since the founding of this country, while there is no biological race as we understand it, race as a social construct has profound significance and shapes every aspect’ of life in America (Di Angelo,24). In the United States, racism began with the first European settlers in the seventeenth century. The story of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ started when the first Africans reached Virginia in 1619. They were brought by a Portuguese ship. The ship carried nineteen slaves from Angola who were destined to work on the farms of tobacco in Virginia. The procedures of employing blacks (enslaved) continued and increased over time. Since then, the concept of ‘race’ was deeply connected with the evaluation of the two terms of ‘white’ and ‘black’.

3. The Theory of the Black Man’s Curse

From the first arrival of the Englishman to the African continent, many questions were asked about the black people. The latter were a kind of curiosity for the white man. Ancient Greek mythology explained the black colour of people through the story of Phaeton.¹ Ptolemy explained the blackness of people by means of the heat of the sun. he interpreted this black colour because of the climate (Winthrop, 12). In the Western culture, blackness was rather a curse. Based on this idea, slavery and racism were regarded as dictated by nature. Therefore, both were sanctioned by the white man, especially in the United States.

¹The story of Phaeton’s driving the chariot sun widely through the heavens apparently served as an explanation for the Ethiopian’s blackness even before written records, and traces of this ancient fables were still drifting about during the 17th century. There was a suggestion by Ptolemy that what made Negros’ blackness and wooly hair was the hot sun, due to the African climate.

3.1. The Relation between Slavery and Blackness

God's curse on Ham and his descendants was sufficient to account for the colour of black people (Winthrop, 17-18). The Europeans associated blackness with slavery as they assumed that Ethiopians were enslaved since ancient times. For the Europeans, it was impossible to consider the blacks to be equal to the whites. They described them as savages because they failed to be civilized. More importantly, this reason was sufficient for both the English and then white Americans consider that the blacks were different and to set them apart from the whites. Consequently, the writings of the whites about the blacks created a bad image of the latter. Di Angelo writes that 'race scholars use the term white supremacy to describe a socio-political economic system of domination based on racial categories that benefit those defined and perceived as white this system of structural power privileges, centralizes, and elevates white people as a group. (44)

Furthermore, history described the black individuals as individuals who can have their freedom only when they convert to Christianity or work for their lords for one year. Subsequently, the blacks were dehumanized as long as the white American made restrictions and obstacles to oppress them. The black people's oppression by the white man occurred when they were forced to convert to Christianity, and Christianity meant acculturation.² This was a strategy to force black people to forget their roots, identity, heritage, and culture.

Another condition required by the white man to free slaves was to work for a long period of time. This condition allowed the white man to control the black individual. This was the best way for the white man to keep more slaves working. By this means, the white man became able

²'Acculturation' refers to the assimilation by one group of the culture of another, which modifies the existing culture, and so changes group identity.

to their number and temper their expectations of a higher economic level. The laws enacted by the white man in the first colonies in America made the black person's dream of freedom possible only when the white lord approved of this dream. These racial laws created within the black individual's psyche a strong feeling of racial inferiority and servitude. For example, the legislation of Virginia required that the African child situation pursued his mother's situation. In other words, enslaved mothers gave birth to slaves. These black children were considered as commodities to be exploited or sold later. By conquering the mind by this means, the white man dominated black people.

3.2. Dismantling the Black Individual

In America, the European settlers activated a mechanism to make the black ineffectual by means of their supremacy, suppressing the black psyche. The deceptive plan was to influence the blacks and diminish their presence. Concurrently, the plan aimed at adopting the values of the white man. Notwithstanding, the fundamental aim of the white man was not to civilize the blacks or look like the whites. The blacks attempted fit in, and consider themselves as white as possible. Thus, they embraced white values, religion, language, and practices and rejected their own African culture. In *White Masks, Black Skin*, Franz Fanon refers to this phenomenon as 'donning white masks over black skins' (25) which resulted in a duality of two opposed parts in one body. This sense of inadequacy and inferiority in the black psyche resulted from a mental disorder (ambivalence)³. This caused the black individual to become half asleep, to be abused and exploited by the white man in the plantations of the South. The result was a forced migration to the North.

³'Ambivalence' is the state of having two opposing feelings at the same time, or being uncertain about how you feel.

4. Slavery in America

Slavery came as an outcome of a long period of colonialism and oppression in the African continent. It was a result of white supremacy on the blacks which caused psychological disorders that affected the blacks' psyche. Black Africans were ranked as inferior compared to the whites. Cashmore claims:

Racism provided a legitimization of sorts, however, for it proposed a theory of human types in which some races were superior to others. In this instance, whites were thought to be obviously superior: their military and technological advancement demonstrated that blacks were inferior and subhuman and by that there is no reason to white to treat the blacks equally (346).

For example, many metanarratives⁴ described African Americans as 'savages', 'barbaric', 'uncivilized', and 'beast creatures'(Winthrop, 28-29). By means of these narratives, the white man was capable of controlling African individuals (slaves) and shaping their identity. A clear illustration of the formation of the blacks' identity by the white man is the case of Dred Scott versus Sandford in 1857 when the proslavery US supreme court chief Justice Roger B. Taney stated:

All persons in the United States of African descent were regarded as beings of inferior order and all together unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations and so far, inferior that they had no rights which the white man was born with bound to respect and that the negro might justify and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefits. (Lind, 407)

⁴'Meta-narrative' is a type of play, novel etc., that experiments with or explores the idea of telling a story, or often drawing attention to the fact that it is an invented story, not an account of real events.

Because the economic system of the plantations in the South Plantations depended on slavery, enslaved black people were usually prohibited from learning to read and write. Furthermore, their behaviour and movements were sharply restricted. Their rebellion was brutally punished, and the substantial disagreement between the rebellious slaves and the other slaves helped keep all slaves, especially the rebellious ones less organized against the whites' dominance. However, from 1830 to 1860 Frederick Douglass and his white supporters founded the abolitionist movement in America.

The abolitionist movement sought to abolish slavery. Douglass wrote, 'I prayed for freedom for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs' (Jackson, 80). Douglass was part of the American anti-slavery society. Free black people and anti-slavery had begun by helping slaves to escape from the southern 'inferno'⁵ to the north, searching for freedom. This movement sparked off an economic crisis in the economic system of the south as the number of slaves deceased there. Of course, this was due to their escape to the North. As a consequence, war broke out between the North and the South in the United States.

5. The American Civil War (1861-1865)

The Civil War was the most divisive and bloodiest war in America. The conflict between the states caused a large number of deaths and injuries. The war began in 1861 after tensions about slavery mounted between northern and southern states. The reason for this war was that the North was less depended on slavery because the scale of black slaves was small. However, the South depended critically on slaves' labour in the plantations. With the rise of the anti-slavery movement which encouraged the massive escape of slaves from the South to the North, economy

⁵ Inferno is a very large dangerous fire that is out of control.

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in the South was declining. This provoked the Civil War when the southern states rebelled against the Union. The direct cause of the Civil war was the Emancipation Proclamation.

The preliminary emancipation proclamation was the United States president declared on January the 1st that: 'all persons held as slaves, within any states or designated part of the state, the people were of shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, forward and forever free' (Work, 119). It was a promise depending on the military victory of the Union. The purpose of this first declaration of emancipation was to present the rebellious southern states with ultimatum: they could turn to union or lose their slaves, since slavery profoundly affected Lincoln's presidency and the nation as well. Lincoln campaigned for the abolition of slavery and the recruitment of African American soldiers to win the war against slave powers. (Krannawitter, 17). The emancipation proclamation went into effect on January 1st, 1863, and was applied only on slaves who were under the control of confederate forces. Nonetheless, the proclamation contributed to the inevitable end of slavery. Writing about the Emancipation Proclamation, Krannawitter claims that 'it [Emancipation Proclamation] also gave hope to these skinny black advocates of freedom (18).

The United States expanded its boundaries by determining most of the rights of American citizens. Generally, it limited the right to vote only to white people and other rights such as the right to own land or serve on juries. These were often denied based on racial or gender distinctions. After the participation of the black folks in the civil war about 179,000 served as soldiers in the United States military, while 19,000 served in the navy nearly 40,000 black soldiers died in the war. While 30,000 people were infected with bacteria and disease. (Freeman et al., 118-120) Black African Americans who endured discrimination and segregation tried by the so-called 'free blacks' to gain equality and rights by force. Despite his earlier belief that

African Americans were incompatible with the rights and privileges of full citizenship, in 1865 Lincoln not only called for freeing blacks but also for some equality in politics. He was killed because of supporting the idea that educated and black soldiers should have full suffrage. The participation of black African Americans during the civil war made a real change. Lincoln's policies granted the black community more rights in the United States. This era is called in American history the Reconstruction Era.

6. The Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)

The Reconstruction Era followed the Civil War and was an important era in American history. The Reconstruction Era was significant because it rectified the inequalities, social problems as well as the political ones. Reconstruction achieved a national school system and impartial taxation. During Reconstruction, laws were amended to eliminate racial discrimination in public facilities. Because Lincoln's emancipation did not end slavery, he introduced a constitutional amendment to guarantee the abolition of slavery.

6.1. The Amendments and Social Rights

The 13th Amendment (1865) declared that 'neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction'(Kranawitter, 284). By introducing this amendment, the United States came up with a final solution to the issue of slavery. The amendment allowed the expansion of the civil rights of black Americans.

Afterwards, the 14th Amendment of 1868 was passed. It aimed to prevent the states from violating the rights of African Americans. It also ensured that the blacks and whites would be treated equally. Next, the 15th Amendment established a legal foundation for political equality in

1870. Subsequently, African Americans were enabled to take leadership roles and be employed in governmental offices. Finally, the Constitution gave black men the right to vote. Nonetheless, racial segregation against African Americans continued to be practised in many parts of the United States.

7. Racial Segregation in the United States (Jim Crow)

Many white Americans especially those in the south were not satisfied that the former slaves were more or less equal to them after the Civil War. Therefore, they marginalized the blacks in the southern states by dint of the Jim Crow laws. These laws were enacted in this part of the United States from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. Jim Crow laws were meant to deny many rights of the blacks. These laws came as a reaction to the amendments enacted after the Civil War and during Reconstruction.

7.1. Racial Segregation in Public Facilities

The ‘separate but equal’ doctrine referred to the racist decision by the US Supreme Court in Plessy versus Ferguson (1896), which legalized racial segregation in public facilities. Black people were separated from the whites even in towns, each lived in separate towns and held different schools. Such Jim Crow laws did not exist in jure in the North, but blacks experienced racial discrimination in employment there. The Supreme Court ruled that a state could require racial segregation in public facilities if equality between the races offended one of the two races (Cashmore,187). In some places such as post offices or banks, blacks and whites shared rooms however, the blacks had to wait his turn until the whites finish theirs. In public spheres, African Americans have been prevented the same or similar opportunities that were offered to white Americans. In 1930, for every two dollars that southern schools spent on black children in

contrast for each white child seven dollars was spent. In Pennsylvania, voting rights were limited to those ex-slaves who have property worth more than 250\$. However the white male have no such condition (Bolaffi et al.,166-167). Jim Crow laws were extremely harsh because they restricted the rights and freedom of the blacks severely. When laws were not available to support segregation, the forces of the Ku Klux Klan were invoked.

7.2. The Ku Klux Klan

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was a racist organization which was founded by white patriots as they identified themselves. The organization emerged after the end of the Civil War in the South. It was a secret society that sought to restore white supremacy, especially after the enactment of the 13th Amendment. The Ku Klux Klan was a radical movement that used violence against the blacks to trample on their civil rights, especially the right to vote. This excessive violence included intimidation, flogging, mutilation, lynching, and even hanging (Cunningham, 16-18). The mindset of the members of the KKK was founded on the belief that were the superior race over all other races.

In fact, they succeeded in weakening the political power that the blacks had gained during Reconstruction in the South. For instance, in order to reduce the number of black voters in the southern states, the KKK resorted to kill a good number black people. The objective of the KKK was to maintain white supremacy in the South. In 1954, however, the Brown versus Board of Education case⁶ brought an end to Jim Crow laws. This paved the way to the emergence of the black civil rights movement in the early 1960s.

⁶The Brown vs Board of Education case came as an end to Jim Crow policies that segregated schools. This was declared unconstitutional. The principle was then extended to buses, restaurants, and parks.

8. The Civil Rights Movement

During the 1960s, African Americans sought to gain equal rights under the law. These demands started when the blacks experienced racist laws. So, they demanded social justice in the United States to secure full political, social, and economic rights. The major activist during the civil rights movement was Martin Luther King, Jr. King's speech mobilized millions of black and white Americans to fight peacefully for the rights of the oppressed in the country of liberty.

8.1. The Nonviolent Resistance and Struggle

The major achievement of King and his followers was the use of nonviolent resistance. This method of protest helped American blacks to achieve gradual improvement in their status. King was able to mobilize massive black protest by organizing a series of bus boycotts. By desegregating education and securing licenses for blacks, King was forced to launch an ongoing campaign of black protest. King's movement was backed up by street strikes, prison demonstrations and mass demonstrations. This method resulted in Southern whites' dissidence, and civil rights activists and their supporters being tied up and many killed. (Cashmore, 76)

8.2. The Achievements of the Civil Rights Movement

King sought to guarantee a decent life for the blacks. His dream materialized by President John Kennedy who contributed to making African Americans full American citizens. First, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prevented discrimination in employment based on race, colour, or national origin. John Kennedy was elected president in 1960 with significant black support. His first two years were rather cautious changes. Then he supported calls for comprehensive legislation. This led to the end of segregation in public educational institutions, protected black suffrage, ended discrimination in all public facilities.

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Following Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Because of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the percentage of black adults voting in the south increased to almost sixty-five percent by 1969. The Voting Rights Act came to enforce the 15th Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. It stated, 'No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any state political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or colour' (Celler et al., 44). Next, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 provided equal housing opportunities, regardless of race. It stated that 'discriminatory housing practice' means 'an act that is unlawful under section 804, 805, or 806' (62). In sum, the civil rights movement was an organized effort by well-known African American figures who wanted equal rights for all blacks in America under US laws.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a definition of racism and race. It has attempted to summarize the history of black Americans from slavery to the civil rights movement, with a special emphasis on the concepts of 'race' and 'racism'. These two concepts remain fundamental to the study of Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* in the ensuing chapter. In this novel, Morrison shows how our past childhood builds the adults we are now. The novel is a piece of writing which depicts the complex of inferiority that has been constructed during a long-term structured racism in America.

Chapter Two

Colourism and Systemic Racism in *God Help the Child*

Introduction

This chapter is a study of several themes in Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child*. The novel explores the concept of colourism in American society, the strong effects of racism, mother-child relations, and the sexual abuses of the children who become the adults of today and tomorrow. More importantly, this chapter is also a study of the development of the identity of African Americans from abused children to adults through the analysis of a set of characters. Since racism has been dominant in American history and society, most of African Americans have been its unfortunate victims. This long victimhood has engendered the fragility and the complexity of the Black individual. For instance, the novel describes black children's trauma due to the impact of negative stereotypes held by the white community. Additionally, this long victimhood has created the split among the black American community. This split is illustrated by the conflict between light-skinned and the blue blacks in the novel under study.

1. Systemic Racism

Systemic racism is the entire system that governs all of a country's socio-economic and political life, such as the economy, education, healthcare and politics. This systemic racism can be traced throughout the history of the United States since the days of Jim Crow, when African Americans were unfairly prejudiced, racially discriminated against, and ill-treated in comparison to white citizens. Systemic racism encompasses racist ideology, attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and institutions. In fact, systemic racism is much more

than a question of racial prejudice and individual bigotry. It is a material, social, and ideological reality that is firmly anchored in the daily life of Americans as well as within American official institutions (Feagin, 2).

Gee and Ro (2009) depict systemic racism as the hidden base of an iceberg. They believe that it looks like a social problem rather than a well-planned policy to restrict African Americans. It is an iceberg whose face looks like discrimination, while its hidden part is racial ideology and institutional policies.

Through a process of legality that progressively oppressed the exploited people whom the dominant group, i.e. the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs), perceived as the other, racism became institutionalized in the culture and structure of the United States. (Tourse et al., 25). All American psyches were formed in large part as a result of racial scaffolding. It aids in creating the mentality that defines a person. Tourse et al. add that 'exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, culture imperialism, and violence are held in place in the scaffolding by the rungs: colonialism, capitalism, class and legal structures, the distribution of privileges and benefits, intellectual thought, and scientific theory' (61). These various qualities served as a scientific rationale for Europeans to accept the concept that other racial groups were biologically and physically inferior due to phenotypic characteristics, such as hair, nose, lips, and colour. The extensions of such thought, whether knowingly or unknowingly, create an imbalance in American culture. Whites and blacks experienced racial internalization as a result of the social construction of race. (Tourse et al., 62)

Therefore, membership in a racial group is a crucial component of identity formation in the United States. Moreover, because of the nation's emphasis on racial characteristics as prerequisites for receiving rewards and being the object of punishment, it relates to an individual's sense of self. Then racial identification becomes the psychological internalization

of perspectives based on social and environmental cues that permeate a person's thought process. (Tourse et al.,62)

1.1. Internalization of White People against People of Colour

The evolution of white people in America implies dominance over other races. White people believe that their mores, beliefs, and traditions are the most important. These conventions are correct, and they are surprised and irritated when their beliefs and cultural perspectives are challenged. Based on an individual from the dominant group's internalization repertoire, the forms show the various ways racism can present itself (Tourse et al.,63).The dominant group's conscious and unconscious caused them to perceive people of colour as inferior and confirm that black people are inferior and do not understand. The sense of self (superiority) in the white psyche was a result of historical proof of the rightful superior ranking. The black people, on the other hand, paid for the pressure they were under. It is then claimed that non-white racial groups have been spiritually, emotionally, and physically oppressed. The black oppressor's self-perception may resemble the white oppressor's. This relief was the product of the internalization of social beliefs, which made the black psyche feel constrained in its vision, creative power, and sensitivity to their needs. (Tourse et al.,63-64)

1.2.The Promotion of White Supremacy by Stereotypes

Stereotypes support all presumptive perspectives of whites as dominating, deserving privileges and benefits based on superiority. Within the racialized system, white people adopt and encourage degrading stereotypes that frequently depict groups of colour. Such depictions aid in the internalization and reinforcement of distorted beliefs about racial groupings, which become norms polished by past and current popular culture representations.The internalization of attitudes and ideas that have continued to support racial discrimination or

racism is aided by stereotypes that promote superiority, privileges, domination, and power, which induce to the continuation of the racial scaffolding. The American psyche was shrouded in racial prejudice. Many followers of the dominant group worked to demonstrate white supremacy over the black community and to distinguish themselves from blacks through their stories. (Tourse et al.,65)

2. Colourism

The concept of colourism describes a hierarchical system that gives light-skinned people privileges over dark-skinned people when they belong to communities of colour (Hunter,176). According to the American Counselling Association (ACA), 'colourism has traditionally focused on the manner in which African Americans define blackness based on skin colour' (436). For the ACA, skin colourism is used by African Americans to differentiate between each other, the lighter skinned nearly resembles the European standards while the dark-skinned are sadly punished and continually struggle for more equality.

Second, colorism is the distribution of advantages and disadvantages based on the lightness or darkness of one's complexion. This approach was practised by favouring lighter skin over blue-blacks, as evidenced by a person's appearance as proximal to a white phenotype (Hughes,79). Many people believe that colorism in current African American society stems from perceived hatred between house slaves and field slaves in antebellum America, although the situation is far more serious and multifaceted. These preconceptions made it easy for people to believe that colourism was developed by black people. (Eric et al., 19)

2.1. Skin Tone between Benefits and Punishments

The privilege of being light-skinned over dark-skinned was first introduced and regularly strengthened by the white Europeans in authority, who regarded light skin as more

valuable for a variety of reasons. This case was utilized throughout the colonial era and continues to be implemented in the twenty-first century (Eric et al., 19). This type of lookism promotes power imbalances by providing unearned privilege to individuals with favoured skin tones. Skin colour stratification is a pigment-based hierarchy that favours light skin and devalues dark skin (Hughes,79). The preference for lighter skin caused skin colour stratification. It was the result of lighter-skinned and mixed-race people gaining disproportionate financial benefits. The latter, whether consciously or unconsciously, divided themselves into far-flung settlements and discriminated against blue-blacks (Rockquemore et al.,79).

Since the dominant whites have always held power, they have not only established the concept of colourism but institutionalized it as well in the United States(Tharps,19). These two concepts have been introduced because they are important to the study of Morrison's novel *God Help the Child* which is a journey of the development of the identity of the African American individual from childhood to adulthood.

3. Lula's Abusive Childhood

Lula Ann is the protagonist of the story. She struggles against pain and obstacles that she faces within her black community. The latter community resembles a white world very much. The novel narrates Lula Ann's life: her birth, childhood, and adulthood. She is rejected from her own community because of her dark skin. She is even rejected by her parents who are light-skinned and wish to have a light-skinned baby. Lula's parents believe that with the birth of a light-skinned baby, they will grasp ample opportunities in life as well as gain the respect and acceptance of the white dominant community. The latter is the explanation of the black community's alienation in American society.

4. The Alienation of the Black American Community

The birth of Lula is a curse to her parents because they cannot believe that this very black baby is their own. Their shock is the result of the whites' beliefs in the importance of colourism and racial classification that have been engraved in the blacks' minds. This means that if you are a light-skinned person, you will be valuable, privileged, educated, benefit from health service, and live peacefully. On the contrary, if you are a blue black, you will be punished and treated less than a human being. Therefore, white racists' actions and behaviour towards people of colour have created an internal discrimination between the light-skinned and the blue blacks within the black community. This internal discrimination is amply illustrated by the attitude of Lula's parents. For instance, Lula's mother is embarrassed by Lula's birth and presence, and she wishes she did not come to this life. The mother explains the dark colour of the child as a genetic heritage from the father's side. Lula's father, Louis, does not recognize her as his own baby. He describes the child as the fruit of the mother's betrayal with another man. DuBois describes this attitude: 'We would always, if possible, be many lighter-hued people so as to have children who are not identified with the negro race, and thus solve our racial problem' (194). People of colour have believed that the only way to be treated decently in American society and end this racial dilemma is to be light-skinned. Colourism was planned by the white man to create an internal conflict in the black community.

Because Lula's father is unable to accept the fact of the birth of a dark-skinned girl in his household, he leaves home. As a result, Lula's mother raises her alone, but with a glimpse of hate. The mother wants to abandon her on the church steps, but she cannot. Sweetness, the mother, would rather hide Lula and raise her as if she were not her child. Actually, Lula calls her mother 'Sweetness' rather than 'Mother'. Because of the fear and complexes that racism has planted in American society as a whole and the black community in particular, Lula has

been raised without love from her mother. Instead, Lula's parents see her as a heinous sin, and have abused her on the grounds of her skin colour and on the basis of racial colourism. Lula's childhood is psychologically abusive and painful.

5. The Ambivalence of Sweetness

Sweetness, the mother, is also abused by the whites. This made her become particularly harsh to her child. Sweetness struggles desperately to accept her baby. Sweetness feels deep fear and develops a persecution complex because of her experiences of sadism and racism at the hands of the whites. The construction of the black race in general and African American identity more particularly is due to the whites' actions and maltreatment of people of colour. Sweetness says,

Things got better but I still had to be careful. Very careful in how I raised her. I had to be strict, very strict Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave how to keep her head down, and not to make trouble. I do not care how many times she changes her name. Her color is cross she will always carry (Morrison,18).

Sweetness becomes absolutely convinced by white standards that dark colour is a terrible curse. Moreover, the cruelty of Sweetness towards Bride is not an act of hatred, but an instance of internalized racism that is created in the black community. Yancy contends that 'the white colonialist strategy is to get the colonized black to undergo a process of epistemic violence, a process whereby the black begins to internalize all of the colonizer's myths, to begin to see his/her identity through the paradigm of white supremacy/Eurocentricity' (244). This is the strategy that was adopted by American white supremacists in American history, and whose goal was to dismantle the blacks' minds.

The whites' cruel punishment and sadism during the history of both slavery and segregation created the inferiority complex in the African American psyche. Sweetness forces

Bride to lie to her teacher Sofia. The latter is convicted of child abuse and jailed because of Lula's lie. Lula lies to save her mother and to make her mother love her.

6. The Adult Lula Ann and Brooker

When Lula Ann grows up, she changes her name to Bride. This name change is willed by Lula Ann because she wants to create her own self, her own identity. She starts wearing white clothes as someone told her so that she can accentuate her beauty. She becomes successful and has her own cosmetics that she names 'GIRL YOU' products. Then she begins dating a boy called Brooker.

Brooker is another victim of child abuse. His brother, Adam, has disappeared, and months later has been found dead: sexually abused and killed by a molester. The scene of Adam's death continues to haunt Brooker. This made Brooker act aggressively and violently against people. As a result, he leaves home and family. He cannot stay in the place where Adam has been killed. He also leaves Bride without an explanation. The only thing he tells her is 'you are not the woman I want'. Although Bride becomes successful in life after growing up, her parents have believed that her existence means their perpetual exploitation and abuse.

7. The Ramification of Segregation

The black community in American society was segregated, had less opportunities, and was less considered than the white majority. So, have been Lula's (Bride's) parents. The birth of Bride is a continual exploitation, abuses, and violent for them. They have experienced the whites' gaze and the cruelties of the white majority against people of colour. The rejection of Bride by her own family, community, and the whites has made her struggle more to be accepted in a racist American society. Sweetness has made Bride a victim of colorism. Indeed, Bride's maltreatment at the hands of her mother is meant to prepare Bride for the

reality that she will face when she grows older. Because American society is constructed by colourism, skin colour plays an essential role in living either an easy and peaceful life or a life of torment and unease. Macombe contends:

Little by little, the American capitalist socio-political structure compelled Black folks to internalize its negative stereotype of their material conditions and their color of skin which represented Black people as soul-less poor depraved, uncultured, irrational, and savage. And finally caused the Black people 'self-hatred' and their efforts to live like the powerful bourgeois white. (8)

8. Complexes, Less Self-Esteem, and Unhealthy Growth

The real inferiority complex of black people is incarnated by Bride's parents. They refuse to belong to the black race. However, they swell with great pride when they belong to the light-skinned because they accept the whitened world. This problematic situation made them experience cultural and social alienation in both the black and white communities. In addition, because of this sense of alienation, they exude self-esteem. This strong sense of self-esteem is more salient when they look at their dark-skinned daughter. *God Help the Child* describes why black people hate their blackness. They even bleach their skin by cremes to earn the acceptance of the white man and earn a value in his eyes. The same feelings are experienced by Bride in the beginning as if she has got it as inheritance.

In American society which has become a microscopic whitened world, those who are light-skinned are more accepted and better treated than the dark-skinned who seem to the white man to have polluted blood. For example, Big Bill Broonzy's song which is entitled 'Black, brown, and white' the three dimensions that colourism has created in American society are clearly described. The song says: 'If you was white, should be all right/If you was brown, stick around/But as you black, oh brother, get back get back get back' (Keith, 43).

This is how colourism/racism has affected the black community in America. Khama names the social and psychological phenomenon a ‘double marginalizing process’ (29-33) towards the black-skinned people. More importantly, colourism has engendered an acrimonious split within the black race, creating discrimination.

9. Internalized Racism, Double Marginalization, and Childhood Trauma

Internalized racism has brought about discrimination by the light-skinned against the blue blacks. For the light-skinned, this is a natural reaction sparked off by the views of the white supremacists on the blue blacks. The light-skinned react this way to shun the supremacists’ reactions. Blanchard claims:

There are three main effects that internalized racism can generate questions and doubt in the minds of people of colour placed in a white setting. Second internalized racism can lead people of colour to question their own thinking and judgement about racism. Third internalized racism can be a divisive force, creating a desire in people of colour to be white. (13)

This results in the self-alienation of the blacks. This, in turn, contributes to the mapping out of the white supremacists’ strategy of oppression and dominance over the whole black community, whether light-skinned or blue black. Blanchard adds: ‘Internalized racism arises when African Americans accept negative racist stereotypes about their own race. This shows the reminiscent of racism, colourism, and racial hierarchy through decades on Black folks’ (19). In sum, the use of colourism in *God Help the Child* highlights the racial hierarchy and discrimination against the blacks.

The novel expresses forcefully how childhood trauma, in the African American community, is able to shape a black person’s identity. During slavery, the abolition of slavery, and the era of discrimination/segregation, people of colour in American society have

suffered from an inferiority complex. This terrible complex has been a result of the various physical and psychological abuses that the blacks have been subjected to by the whites.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the central issues of racism, segregation, and discrimination against African Americans as presented in the novel under study *God Help the Child*. In addition, this chapter has introduced and framed two fundamental concepts in African American history and literature, i.e., colourism and systemic racism. Systemic racism is the belief of the white man in the inferiority of the black man at all levels. However, colourism is a split between two categories within the black community, namely light-skinned blacks and blue blacks. Notwithstanding this serious split, not one category is favoured by the white man. On the contrary, both categories of the African American community remain penalized and rejected by the white man's standards.

Chapter Three

Colourism/Systemic Racism as a Hierarchical-Oppressive System in Contemporary America

Introduction

Through *God Help the Child*, Toni Morrison raises the burning issue of colourism/systemic racism in the contemporary African American community. The members of this community have exercised a sort of racism on each other. This has been due to the racist ideology of the white man, who has practised it on them in the United States for centuries. This sort of racism between the light-skinned blacks and the blue blacks is known as colourism. First, the whites have practised colourism on blacks, seeing their own acts as a reparation for the complexes that the whites have given to the blacks. This chapter will examine how a few characters in *God Help the Child* represent the black community, and whether their complexes are the result of their racial inferiority or a consequence of other external factors.

1. Escalating Racism across American History

The entire project aimed to describe the history of African Americans, beginning with the colonization of the British of large parts of Africa and ending with the warping of the minds of the black people. Through acculturation and forcing black people into following Christianity, the white man subjugated the blacks. This contributed to the slave trade. Once on the American continent, the slave population was oppressed by white landowners, especially in the plantations. In the nineteenth century, more and more people were advocating the

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emancipation of slaves in America. Their movement was known as the abolitionist movement. Frederick Douglass, an African American, and Abraham Lincoln, an American president, were two major figures of this movement. President Lincoln emancipated the slaves in America, and this caused the American Civil War (1861-1865). Even though slavery was outlawed after the end of the Civil War, racial segregation continued until the advent of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The civil rights movement, which had been initiated by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. effectuated the enactment of several acts in the American Constitution for the protection of the civil and political rights of African Americans.

The novel *God Help the Child* amply illustrates the lingering effects of segregation's protracted history. The novel is an illustration of the later effects of Jim Crow laws in contemporary America. These laws segregated strictly between blacks and whites in every aspect of daily life. Moreover, they segregated between blacks themselves according to skin colour. Actually, these laws were very restrictive, harsh, and unjust; in addition, they recognized formally the inferiority of the black man. The segregation practised by the white man engendered another type of segregation within the black community. The result of this was the marginalization of blue blacks by more light-skinned people.

The result of all this is a double marginalization of blue blacks. In the minds of white people, those with a lighter complexion deserve more consideration and enthusiastic welcome in American society. Blue blacks, however, were seen as less valuable, and were more dehumanized. The whites' strategy has caused the light-skinned people to feel superior to the blue blacks. Furthermore, it has deeply estranged them from their own race. As a result, the light-skinned blacks have started acting in a racist manner. This sort of subtle racism, which has been termed in the previous chapter as 'colourism', has generated a schism within American society in general, and the African American community in particular.

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In effect, Morrison's *God Help the Child* describes how skin colour is a crucial aspect of American society, whether it is welcomed or punishable. Through racist attitudes, emotions, habits, behaviour, and institutions, systemic racism has impacted the daily life of Americans. Through legalizing the oppression of 'less' white people in America, racism has become entrenched in the culture and structure of the United States.

Racial scaffolding, which includes colonialism, capitalism, and class systems, has created a severe imbalance in American society. Racial internalization occurred in both white and black communities, making racial group membership a critical component of identity construction in the United States. For instance, the focus on racial qualities as criteria for rewards and punishment in the United States is related to an individual's sense of self. In fact, racial identification becomes the psychological internalization of viewpoints based on social and environmental factors.

Besides, with systemic racism, colourism becomes a hierarchical system that grants light-skinned individuals many privileges in non-white communities. It is the white Europeans who established and reinforced the tradition of granting more advantages to light-skinned people in comparison with those of darker complexion. This has resulted in power disparities and skin colour stratification. This preference resulted in disproportionate financial rewards for lighter-skinned and mixed-race people, who formed settlements and discriminated against blue-blacks. The result has been 'lookism', which is still prevalent today.

While reading the protagonist's painful story in *God Help the Child*, the powerful impact of colourism on the black community appears immediately. This colourism created a split within the African American community between the light-skinned and the dark-skinned; moreover, it occasioned a deep-seated prejudice towards the blue blacks. In America, the issue of skin colour within the black community began in the era of slavery and continued after the

emancipation of African American slaves in the second half of the nineteenth century. White landowners and slaveholders treated light-skinned people better than darker-skinned people since they offered them more opportunities, such as reading, writing, owning property, etc. This put forward the idea and strengthened the conviction of the light-skinned people of their own superiority, compared to the dark-skinned people in the African American community. This, in turn, led the light-skinned to treat the dark-skinned people the same way the whites had always treated non-whites. Accordingly, this gave the dark-skinned blacks an overwhelming feeling of double marginalization at the hands of white supremacists as well as light-skinned people, leading to the weakening of the black community in the end.

2. The Fragility of the Black Community

Toni Morrison elaborated on the concept of colourism in her Norton lectures at Harvard University. She lectured about the use of colourism in shaping identity. She told the audience a story of a black town called Ruby, in Oklahoma. The inhabitants of that town called themselves black. Morrison noticed that not all of them were black; in fact, the town is a mixture of light-skinned and dark-skinned people. However, she described them as blacks. Those inhabitants fled to free land, established their way of life, and decided about their ranking and colour hierarchy. The problem is that those people were using the same social ranking and hierarchal classification due to skin colour as the whites. This shows the fragility of the blacks which is caused by their complex. This inferiority complex is engendered by their dark colour, their rejection by American society, their dehumanization by the white supremacists. Morrison's story ends with the establishment of a town for blacks only because they harboured the fervent desire of controlling themselves rather than being controlled. (Morrison, *Origins* 55-59)

If we project the story of Ruby with the black community in *God help the Child*, it will be similar to the whites' treatment of black people. Furthermore, this made the light-skinned people experience increasing alienation and feel bitter hatred for the blue blacks. Of course, this is because the light-skinned people are deeply influenced by the whites' attitude towards the blue blacks. For example, Bride's painful story of social non-acceptance and her struggle for social approval in a whitened world. Morrison's desire to reconfigure black African Americans was because these acts of internal racism were a ramification of a long history of racism and colourism against people of colour.

3. The Story of Sweetness and Margaret Garner

The position of Sweetness in *God Help the Child* is nearly the same as Margaret Garner's tragic life. The latter is a slave mother who offers her children and herself salvation from the abuses and exploitation of the whites by killing her own offspring. She would rather murder them rather than let them suffer slaves. This shows the sadistic and cruel abuses of the whites for the purpose of controlling blacks as property. Morrison argues that what happens to Garner is because of the whites' stereotypes about black people. (Morrison, *Origins* 76-80)

Sweetness treats her daughter Bride likewise, but she is less harsh than Margaret Garner. Bride's mother is severely abused in her childhood. This makes cruel to her daughter. This cruelty is not just because of skin colour: on the contrary, it is to save her child from the socio-racial construction. In fact, Sweetness's treatment of her daughter is reminiscent of the Jim Crow era of segregation, oppression, and violence against the black community. The current study has demonstrated the deep effects of colourism and racism on the black community, both socially and individually. For the purpose of restricting the blacks in America, they have become the victims of well-planned and institutionalized strategies that

have aimed to dismantle and distort their images not only in the minds of whites, but also in their own minds.

4. Instinctive Versus Established Colourism

Nowadays, the concept of colourism remains debatable between African Americans and white supremacists, especially concerning who is responsible for the issue of the inferiority complex within the black community. Some argue that colourism is the creation of the African American mind, as if inferiority were instinctive in the African American individual. However, others contend that colourism is the result of white oppression and racism against people of colour. For example, in *White over Black*, Jordan mentions that the first European settlers described the blacks as savages and beasts, comparing them to apes (61–81). Jablonski claims that ‘skin colour comes from several substances,’ but history did not describe black people with exactness. It just followed a theory that had no evidence. For Tharps, a good number of people ‘assume that colourism in contemporary African American society is a result of perceived animosity between house of slaves and field slaves in Antebellum America’. (9)

Furthermore, Emanuel Kant believed that human separation and social hierarchy are due to people’s physical appearance. Kant claimed that skin colour also denoted qualities of personality and morality. Therefore, he was convinced of the inferiority of the blacks (Jablonski, 17). So, the study has demonstrated that these distinctions between humans through classifications and hierarchy made white people act in a racist manner towards people of colour. These acts engendered the inferiority complex in the black psyche through a deliberate and systematic process of self-hatred and low self-esteem (Brunious, 21). Brunious sums up the history of colourism/racism: ‘Significant to life in America were the negative images assigned to blacks by white Americans, and that was fostered from generation to

generation, creating resounding effects of establishing a caste structure based on colour' (23). Therefore, what this research has sought to do is demonstrate the role of played by colourism/racism in shaping the black man's identity and psyche preying on his mind. Eventually, the inferiority complex did not appear from anywhere, but from a planned strategy to damage the black man's identity.

5. The Well-Institutionalized Ideology

This study has concluded that the issue of colourism/racism in American culture is not just a social invention, but also a deeply ingrained worldview. This ideology is manifested in institutions, literature, research, and education. Additionally, internalized racism results from decades of prejudice and discrimination. Both light-skinned and dark-skinned people are oppressed, segregated, and punished. This oppression is reflected in the black community when the light-skinned people oppress, in turn, the blue blacks. In other words, conflict in the black community is a result of the inferiority complex felt by the blacks vis-à-vis the whites. This behaviour fosters an alienated identity that aspires to whiteness, and is shaped by both special privileges accorded to the light-skinned by the whites. Subsequently, the light-skinned become racially insensitive and embarrassed about their own ethnicity.

People of colour employ colourism as a means of social stratification, and blame white people for being racist. Nonetheless, the whites considered their mistreatment of people of colour to be entirely and religiously justifiable. To define this systemic racism, Fraye uses the bird cage metaphor to describe the interlocking forces of oppression. Each wire depicts a hegemonic power technique used against people of colour. One wire cannot be beneficial in limiting the bird's existence, but when numerous wires intersect at the same spot, it is effective in limiting the bird's movements. The wires symbolize the policies and techniques used to oppress the black community. Among these, there were theories, pseudo-sciences,

literature, and legislation (7-10). The intersection of these wires represents the politics that rule the United States. While the bird represents the black person and the cage represents systemic racism. When you see the bird in the cage, you could think it is its place or that it has chosen to be there. Indeed, it is a prisoner of these wires.

6. Beyond American Society's Racial Disparities

The findings of the current research reveal that the inferiority complex that black people suffer from is neither instinctive nor a creation of their own. In fact, it is the generalization of the oppression that they have experienced during their history in the United States. Thus, white Americans believed that people of colour should be under their control because they were inferior. Both black and white Americans become victims of systemic racism. The latter refers more generally to racism that informs a society's norms, rules, and laws. It results in unequal distributions of social, political, and economic assets to various minorities (Henry, 56), especially African Americans. This type of racism is embodied in many social and governmental services, such as Criminal justice services, health care services, banking, and education. Its purpose has been to restrict the blacks.

Another finding of the research is that systemic racism seems incredibly powerful because it is well-planned. It has successfully and negatively created inferiority complexes and complexed mentalities that it is hard to get rid of. Its main effects have been profound ambivalence, double-marginalization, and self-alienation.

In an interview in 1993, Toni Morrison blamed the whites for being racist and showed that the concept of racism originated from them.¹ However, the segregation in public facilities

¹<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/books/a28621535/toni-morrison-white-supremacy-charlie-rose-interview-racism/>

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caused by Jim Crow legislation demonstrates that if these obstacles and policies had not existed, people would have been able to interact with one another. On the other hand, Samuel Cartwright contends that 'blacks have mental illnesses that render them inferior and in need of our supervision' (Morrison, *Origins* 3-4). His claim is one of many that have lacked supporting evidence, but is considered as a strategy to support white supremacy.

Conclusion

Colourism allowed the whites to segregate between races, especially to marginalize blue blacks. By the means of systemic racism, the whites were able to gain control of America. Indubitably, both black and white Americans were victims of this system. This system instilled racist views about the black race in the minds of the whites, rendering them victims as well. Further, the system contributed to the formation of a racially stereotyped and complicated society. To sum up, the issue of the inferiority complex felt by the non-whites is not innate, nor is the ideology of white supremacy, but rather institutionalized in order to keep both the blacks and the whites under control.

General Conclusion

This study sought to determine who was to blame for categorizing black people as inferior. The study also aimed at demonstrating whether the racial divide and prejudice in the United States were social constructs or part of systematic racism. The key finding of the research is that racial disparities and colourism were not a social construct, but rather part of structured racism, which is well-designed in American institutions. Another significant finding of the research reveals that the supposed inferiority of black people was not a genetic trait, but rather an internal condition. The third interesting finding is that systemic racism was the reason behind creating an oppressor and oppressed by serving the white race, and rewarded the latter. However, this system restricted black people at all aspects of daily life.

The principles outlined in this study did not allow for the use of science to demonstrate or disprove the inferiority of black people. The time limitation of the course of this study did not permit to analyse another novel in a comparative study. The latter task is made arduous by the wide issues under study, hence much more time is needed to verify the notions that were introduced in this study. solidify the notion.

Ultimately, further research ought to analyse more data with a prime focus on these notions, whether in favour of or in opposition to the views adopted in the current study.

Appendix 1



ARTS & HUMANITIES Capturing the Life of Toni Morrison by Julia Joy, fall 2019

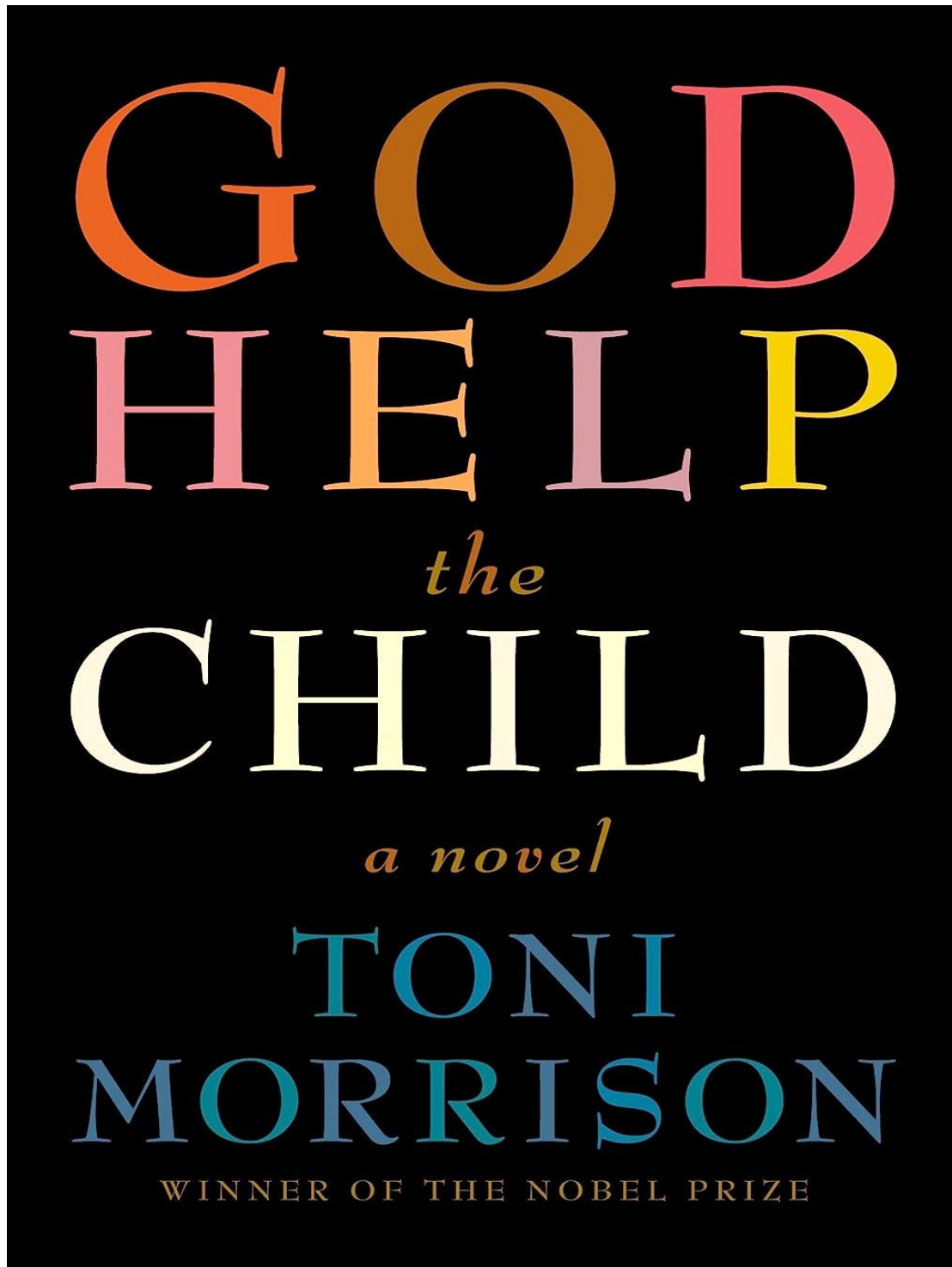
Source : <https://magazine.columbia.edu/article/capturing-life-toni-morrison>

Appendix 2

Born Chloe Anthony Wofford, in 1931 in Lorain (Ohio), the second of four children in a black working-class family. Displayed an early interest in literature. Studied humanities at Howard and Cornell Universities, followed by an academic career at Texas Southern University, Howard University, Yale, and since 1989, a chair at Princeton University. She has also worked as an editor for Random House, a critic, and given numerous public lectures, specializing in AfricanAmerican literature. She made her debut as a novelist in 1970, soon gaining the attention of both critics and a wider audience for her epic power, unerring ear for dialogue, and her poetically-charged and richly-expressive depictions of Black America. A member since 1981 of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she has been awarded a number of literary distinctions, among them the Pulitzer Prize in 1988.

Source: Toni Morrison – Biographical. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2023. Mon. 17Jul. 2023. <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/biographical/>>

Appendix 3



Source:

<https://www.amazon.com/God-Help-Child-Toni-Morrison/dp/0307594173>

Appendix 4

In *God Help the Child*, internationally acclaimed author Toni Morrison returns with a beautifully told, heart-wrenching story set in contemporary times — of Lula Ann Bridewell, a young black woman. Rejected by her mother because of her dark blue-black skin, Lula Ann has nevertheless built a successful life. Even if Pecola, the protagonist in Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, struggles against her appearance, desperate in her desire for light skin and blue eyes, Lula Ann embraces her blackness. She makes it part of her beauty — always wears white clothes and shortens her name to Bride. She is the brains behind a successful new cosmetics company and is in love with her boyfriend Booker.

But Bride's life will soon implode: First, Booker leaves her, saying only: "You not the woman I want." Also, when Bride was eight years old she was a key witness in a trial that resulted in Sofia Huxley, a teacher, being imprisoned for child abuse. Now Sofia is about to be released and Bride, in a decision she will come to regret, is naively determined to help her.

God Help the Child is the story of Bride's determination to find Booker and understand the reasons for his abandonment. Also, in her need to revisit the truth about the court case she was involved in as a child, the story becomes an emotional and physical voyage back to her own childhood. In a touch of magical realism that parallels her return to innocence and the truth, Bride's body returns to a child's form.

Although the novel is short, only one hundred and eighty three pages long, Bride's story is packed with incidents and an array of minor characters whose strengths and failings augment the central thrust of the story. Rain, a young girl Bride encounters on her journey, is a victim of abuse; Queen has had multiple husbands and children but lives alone. In many ways this is a sorrowful novel. Bride has suffered her mother's rejection: "I always knew she didn't like touching me," she says. "I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch." Booker has lost a brother in violent circumstances, murdered by a man whose neighbors considered him "the nicest man in the world." Yet the "nicest man in the world" also happens to have the names of six boys he has molested and killed, tattooed across his shoulders.

Morrison's characters are flawed but can also be heroic. Despite the trials they have faced, they move forward, and remain optimistic, sometimes naively so. Regardless of what these characters might believe, however, a tone of skepticism and mistrust remains perhaps warning readers that naivete and optimism are not the same thing. Life, as shown to us in *God Help the Child*, is hard and often painful, even if there is hope that circumstances can and do get better. Inhabiting her characters' lives and voices, in a story told from multiple perspectives, Morrison examines the beauty and ugliness in all our lives, in a memorable story, skillfully told.

The Nobel Laureate's novel explores issues of race and identity through the eyes of a dynamic African American woman

https://www.bookbrowse.com/reviews/index.cfm/book_number/3207/god-help-the-child

Appendix 5

In her latest novel, Toni Morrison asks a difficult question: what do we do with the sins of the child when that child's sins were engendered by a force against which she was powerless? Lula Ann Bridewell, who calls herself "Bride", is blue-black beautiful, the kind of woman who turns heads wherever she goes. She is tall, elegant, and dresses only in white, the better to reflect her beauty.

But Bride did not always know her beauty or how to wear it. As a child, her mother Sweetness punished Bride for her dark skin, which ended her marriage. Sweetness's husband Louis could not bring himself to love a child with skin as dark as Bride's. "We had three good years," Sweetness tells us, "but when she was born, he blamed me and treated Lula Ann like she was a stranger, more than that, an enemy." Her mother, meanwhile, insisted her child call her Sweetness instead of anything maternal.

Bride grew up without love, tenderness, affection or apology. Sweetness makes it clear she saw herself as protecting her child from a world that would be even more inclined to punish Bride for the darkness of her skin. While Sweetness will apologise for her child's dark skin, what she will not apologise for is how she sees the world and how she raises her child, saying: "Some of you probably think it's a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin colour – the lighter, the better – in social clubs, neighbourhoods, churches, sororities, even coloured schools. But how else can we hold on to a little dignity?" This is what makes it so difficult to judge Sweetness's choices. She should know better, but it is painfully clear her choices have been shaped by the realities of being black in a white world – a world where the lighter your skin, the higher you might climb.

If colourism is what allowed black folk to hold on to their dignity, Bride was never going to be allowed any. With a mother who disdains her very existence, it comes as no surprise when Bride tells a lie that sends an innocent woman to prison just so her mother might see her, claim her, love her – so she might have some dignity of her own. Years later, as an adult, Bride has found a way to be somewhat comfortable in her own skin. She is a successful executive at a cosmetics company, making money, running with all the right crowds. And still, her past is with her. Bride tries to make amends for the terrible lie she told as a young girl but, in the process, her boyfriend Booker walks out on her and she learns that making amends does not always go according to plan. Bride sets out to find Booker, not necessarily out of love but because she is indignant at Booker leaving her. When she realises how little she actually knows about her lover, she says: "I never thought about that part of his life because what was important in our relationship, other than our love making and his complete understanding of me, was the fun we had." As with most things in her life, Bride is only concerned with how Booker interacts with her. His life beyond their relationship was, until she goes in search of him, of little concern. Her journey takes Bride to the woods of northern California, where she wrecks her car and must convalesce with a white family who have also taken in Rain, a young girl who has known her own brand of torment. All the while, Bride's body is changing in ways only she can see, shrinking and becoming hairless, as if she is regressing back to girlhood. These physical changes are the most interesting and undeveloped part of *God Help the Child*. Morrison flirts with the magical realism that imbued some of her earlier work but doesn't fully commit to the premise of Bride's inexplicably changing body. *God Help the Child* is the kind of novel where you can feel the magnificence just beyond your reach. The writing and storytelling are utterly compelling, but so much is frustratingly flawed. The story

carries the shape of a far grander book, where the characters are more fully explored and there is far more at stake.

As the novel stands, the only characters we know with any kind of depth or significance are Bride, Sweetness and, to a lesser extent, Booker. There are several others of whom we learn little when the narrative clearly demands much more. There is a subplot involving a devious co-worker and friend, Brooklyn, that accomplishes very little. One of the characters who might seem the ripest for further development, Queen, graces precious few of the pages.

Yet still, there is that magnificence, burning beneath the surface of every word. The language, shifts in point of view and the audacity of the novel's premise are overwhelming. Morrison remains an incredibly powerful writer who commands attention no matter the story she is telling. In *God Help the Child* we have a coming-of-age story for an adult woman in arrested development.

Source:<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/29/god-help-the-child-toni-morrison-review-novel>

Appendix 6

As children we have gentle, wordless expectations that the big people in our lives will endeavor to keep us from harm, or, at the very least, not harm us. It's the sacrosanct social contract: that adults will feed, clothe and protect us, that they will keep our bodies alive long enough for us to devise adult survival strategies of our own.

Child abuse cuts a jagged scar through Toni Morrison's "God Help the Child," a brisk modern--day fairy tale with shades of the Brothers Grimm: imaginative cruelties visited on children; a journey into the woods; a handsome, vanished lover; witchy older women and a blunt moral — "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget."

At the heart of the novel is a woman who calls herself Bride. Young, beautiful, with deep blue-black skin and a career in the cosmetics industry, she was rejected as a child by her light-skinned mother, Sweetness, who's been poisoned by that strain of color and class anxiety still present in black communities. "It didn't take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong," Sweetness says. "Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black."

Bride's father is also unwilling to accept the child's dark skin and walks out on the family, accusing Sweetness of infidelity. And so Bride grows up, pinched by hunger and shame, craving love and acceptance. "Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me," Bride says of her mother. "Rinse me, actually, after a half-hearted rub with a soapy washcloth. I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch. I made little mistakes deliberately, but she had ways to punish me without touching the skin she hated — bed without supper, lock me in my room."

But one mistake has devastating consequences. To get her mother's attention, Bride accuses an innocent woman of a terrible crime. As an adult, Bride sets out to make restitution to this woman but bungles it. She knows only how to turn heads and suppress emotions; she knows nothing (as yet) of kindness and compassion.

Strangely, Bride's desire to cleanse her conscience angers her lover, Booker, who abruptly abandons her. Bride seeks solace in drugs, drinking and sex, but she's haunted by Booker — "I spilled my guts to him, told him everything: every fear, every hurt, every accomplishment, however small. While talking to him certain things I had buried came up fresh as though I was seeing them for the first time." She takes to the road to track him down.

Miles from home, in Northern California logging country, she suffers a car accident and is taken in by a white hippie family. Their self-sufficiency and indifference to money startles her, and, as she recovers in their home for some six weeks, she becomes close to a child in their care named Rain, who was badly abused by her prostitute birth mother and her mother's johns. In Rain, Bride finds a friend; they understand each other in the easy way of children. The interactions between the two — one stark black, the other "bone white," one adult, one

child, but emotionally the same age — make for the still center of this furious story. For *Bride*, this episode is transformative and healing; for the reader, it's all too brief.

There's an important plot point I don't want to spoil (especially since the surprises in the book are disappointingly few), but there are ghostly developments throughout: *Bride* starts losing her body hair and her breasts. Her body becomes smaller and smaller, her period is strangely late. She nurses the "scary suspicion that she was changing back into a little black girl." Stranger still, this development is only apparent to our protagonist; no one *Bride* encounters acknowledges her peculiar transformation.

In this shape-shifting form, she eventually finds Booker in another part of the woods, living in a trailer near his eccentric aunt Queen. And we come to understand how violence has shaped Booker's own life, how his family has been shattered by tragedy.

Toni Morrison has always written for the ear, with a loving attention to the textures and sounds of words. And the natural landscapes in her books have a way of erupting into lively play, giving richness and depth to her themes. Her novel "Tar Baby" (1981) opens with this description of a river: "Evicted from the place where it had lived, and forced into unknown turf, it could not form its pools or waterfalls, and ran every which way. The clouds gathered together, stood still and watched the river scuttle around the forest floor, crash headlong into the haunches of hills with no notion of where it was going, until exhausted, ill and grieving, it slowed to a stop just 20 leagues short of the sea." The long arms of the story embrace you before you fully understand where you are or what is happening. You read with total trust, because in a place this alive, there's surely more to come.

In "God Help the Child," however, we get clipped first-person confessionals and unusually vague landscapes: "The road looks like a kindergarten drawing of light-blue, white or yellow houses with pine-green or beet-red doors sitting smugly on wide lawns. All that is missing is a pancake sun with ray sticks all around it." The settings feel flat, the tone cynical. There are swirls of brutal personal histories, hurried vignettes and blatantly untrustworthy monologues. ("It's not my fault," Sweetness protests. "It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not.") The reader is positioned as a judge over a cast of characters standing accused of the same crime: their inability (or unwillingness) to confront and take responsibility for the suffering of children in their care. Instead, like Sweetness, they choose self-righteousness. Or, like the hippie couple in the forest, they seem unable to face the crimes.

Morrison herself handles child abuse with a cautious disgust, not with the terrifying closeness of her first novel, "The Bluest Eye" (1970), in which an 11-year-old girl is raped by her father. The world of "God Help the Child" is crawling with child molesters and child killers — on playgrounds, in back alleys — but they remain oddly blurry, like dot-matrix snapshots culled from current headlines. When they join the scene, it's rarely as full citizens of the narrative, and this is a loss. As Booker notes of one predator: "Bald. Normal-looking. Probably an otherwise nice man — they always were. The 'nicest man in the world,' the neighbors always said. 'He wouldn't hurt a fly.' Where did that cliché come from? Why not hurt a fly? Did it mean he was too tender to take the life of a disease-carrying insect but could happily ax the life of a child?" The pity is that the book itself never struggles to answer the questions it poses

and keeps these men at the margins. There are many other characters I'd also like to know more about, whose strategies and coping mechanisms and pleasures I wanted to understand, but the novel withholds so much information. I found myself reading between the lines, sucking the marrow out of every sentence. It's even difficult to pin down when the book takes place: *Bride* sounds contemporary, but *Sweetness's* voice seems to belong to another era entirely. Curiously, the abundance of first-person confessionals does little to invite actual intimacy. They reminded me of reality TV — thin declarations of trauma followed by triumphant dismissals of enduring hurt. It's too easy for the reader to scratch at the superficial posturing and say, "That person is hiding something." Yes, pain, but what else

In the world of "God Help the Child," there are few caregivers or true friends, no therapists or social workers, and so the adult victims cultivate thin shells of resistance and scabble to seek justice. I was left with the bitter supposition that childhood is the perfect condition to be manipulated by adult power because it is self-perpetuating. Children become adults and carry with them a trauma imprinted on the body and memory. And there is always the fantasy that a new child means new life: "Immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness."

With cutting severity, Morrison touches on possibilities of redemption, only to yank them away again and again. "They will blow it," Queen observes of *Bride* and *Booker*. "Each will cling to a sad little story of hurt and sorrow — some long-ago trouble and pain life dumped on their pure and innocent selves. And each one will rewrite that story forever, knowing the plot, guessing the theme, inventing its meaning and dismissing its origin. What waste. She knew from personal experience how hard loving was, how selfish and how easily sundered. Withholding sex or relying on it, ignoring children or devouring them, rerouting true feelings or locking them out. Youth being the excuse for that fortune-cookie love — until it wasn't, until it became pure adult stupidity."

But every now and then, "God Help the Child" steps away from moralizing and yields to the slow, tender, dangerous art of storytelling. Morrison brings back her paintbrush and indulges the reader with color and dread as she vividly evokes *Booker's* tight-knit family and his idolized older brother: "The last time *Booker* saw *Adam* he was skateboarding down the sidewalk in twilight, his yellow T-shirt fluorescent under the Northern Ash trees. It was early September and nothing anywhere had begun to die. Maple leaves behaved as though their green was immortal. Ash trees were still climbing toward a cloudless sky. The sun began turning aggressively alive in the process of setting. Down the sidewalk between hedges and towering trees *Adam* floated, a spot of gold moving down a shadowy tunnel toward the mouth of a living sun."

So we are lured by beauty into a scene that ends in evil and horror. The best stories coerce us to live inside terror and instability, in the messiness of human experience. They force us to care deeply for everyone, even the villains. Morrison's obvious joy in language (especially evident in the passage above) entraps and implicates the reader, and we read ourselves into spaces that would make our better angels shudder.

But too often we get a curt fable instead, one more interested in outrage than possibilities for empathy. Like *Sweetness*, Morrison doesn't seem to want to touch *Bride* either — at least not tenderly. The narrative hovers, averts its eyes and sucks its teeth at the misfortunes of the characters.

And like *Bride*, I was left hungering for warmth. I wanted to be lured even deeper into that awful golden landscape. I wanted to tug at the sleeve of the storyteller and say, “Yes, yes, I know all that, I get the message, but the story is the thing; tell me the part about the trees again, and don't forget the sunlight.”

Kara Walker April 13, 2015 Toni Morrison's 'God Help the Child', *The New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/books/review/toni-morrison-god-help-the-child.html>

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ملخص

تسعى الدراسة الحالية إلى تقييم النبذة الجلدية والتحمل العنصري والتحقيق فيهما، باعتبارهما مسألة تدرج في إطار العنصرية النظامية في الثقافة الأمريكية. تعتمد هذه الدراسة نهجا تاريخيا وتحليليا ونوعيا. تبين النتائج الرئيسية للدراسة الحالية أن النزعة اللونية والعنصرية الداخلية ليست نتيجة للدونية العرقية والثقافية للسود في الولايات المتحدة، ولا هي نتيجة لسيطرة البيض في أمريكا. مع ذلك، فهي نتيجة العنصرية النظامية التي لم يلاحظها التاريخ الأمريكي. يسهم البحث في تبديد الصور النمطية للضحايا السود وسيطرة البيض في أمريكا.

كلمات مفتاحية: تمييز على أساس البشرة، عنصرية داخلية، تمييز عرقي، تمييز في المعاملة، صور نمطية، عنصرية نظامية.