

Reconstructing black identity

--Multiculturalism trap in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

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1. Introduction

Toni Morrison (1939-2019) was the first African-American Nobel Laureate for Literature. Slavery, racial discrimination, and childhood trauma have always been the main focuses of her writings. Her latest novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), is often compared to her debut work, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), since both protagonists are black girls with severe childhood traumas. Unlike her first work, this latest novel is also significant for Morrison's interpretation of cultural change and the conflicts lurking in the multicultural American society. This presentation will focus on the conflicts between whites and blacks, especially the conflict between the protagonist and her mother in this novel, to analyze the multiculturalism trap in America. Also, this presentation will examine Morrison's attitude towards racism and her ideas about how African Americans can survive and develop in a multicultural society, based on several present criticisms but hoping to go beyond them.

2. The conflict between white and black

The protagonist, Bride, is both a victim and beneficiary of her black skin color. As a child, she is mentally abused by her mother for her skin color. When she grows up, she becomes an attractive and successful woman because of the cultural change, as witnessed during the period after the "Black Power" and "Black Is Beautiful" agendas during the 1970s and 1980s. Bride's mother, Sweetness, loves her child. However, she cannot accept her daughter's black skin. She is proud of her light skin, which allows her to pass as white. Also, she hates white people. When Bride testified against the white teacher who was convicted as a child molester, she was proud of Bride. She considers it as a victory for black people. Sweetness is happy for Bride's success. At the same time, she worries about Bride because she knows the world has not changed much.

3. Conclusion

Morrison expresses her deep concern for the colorism hidden in American society in this novel. "Black Is Beautiful" is a cultural movement started in the 1960s, aiming to dispel the racist notion. However, even in the 21st century, Bride is not beautiful as an African American should be. In contemporary America, whites and blacks have an ambivalent attitude toward each other. The reason is that black

supremacy is just another version of racism, and it has no help to ease the relationship between blacks and whites. At the end of the story, Bride develops a friendship with a white girl because they can see each other beyond skin color. Also, Bride decides to forgive Sweetness, for she finally understands why Sweetness has distanced her. It can be viewed as a reconciliation between white and black people. Only when people realize that skin color is something a person is born with, rather than something to be proud of or ashamed of, can blacks and whites reach reconciliation.

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