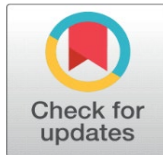
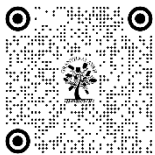


REPRESENTATION OF RACIAL SEGREGATION: A STUDY OF COLSON WHITEHEAD' S THE NICKEL BOYS

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ABSTRACT

The United States of America has a very long history of racial conflicts between whites and blacks. Particularly concerning the Jim-Crow era, Blacks experience a larger level of discrimination that can be seen in novel “The Nickel Boys”. This paper explores the portrayal and impact of racial segregation in “The Nickel Boys” by Colson Whitehead. Key points such as the historical context of Jim Crow laws, the way racial segregation is depicted in the novel, and the broader implications for understanding the effects of institutionalized racism will be explored. It may also touch on the author's narrative choices and the significance of the title in conveying the enduring influence of racial segregation.

Keywords: Segregation, Apartheid, Prejudice, Narrowness.

The Nickel Boys is set in the mid-1900s Florida and narrated through the eyes of a ten-year-old protagonist named Elwood Curtis who believes in the power of law, struggle, race and its repercussions. By using the event of Arthur G. Dozier massacre as the stimulus for *The Nickel Boys*, Colson Whitehead shows how slavery and racism have been modernized and as destructive and oppressive as ever but an intersectional analysis of this novel also shows the change that an individual can bring. Black existentialism is a philosophical alternative to European existentialism to humanistic practices in addressing racial and social inequality. Elwood was inspired by records of black existentialist Martin Luther King's Speech and started to believe that blacks “are as good as anybody” (Whitehead 10) even though they are segregated by repressive laws like Jim Crow.

Prologue of the novel shows details of the excavation happened when a secret graveyard found on the school ground. An inspection team finds “fractures and cratered skulls, the rib cages riddled with buckshot... no white crosses, no names. Just bones waiting for someone to find them” (Whitehead, 3). This event revokes the statement that it was merely a graveyard for black students. Different scenarios make it worse as long as analyzing the protagonist Elwood Curtis who stood against discrimination in Nickel Academy when, a black boxer named Griff defeated a white boxer in annual sports match and his corpse was found under a tree two days after the match later buried somewhere. The exhumation of each buried body is a question mark on the American imperative and a rereading of American history that is filled with

massacres and unsaid apologies. Every day Harriet takes Elwood to the Richmond Hotel where she works as a cleaner, and Elwood thinks of that time when a black man would sit at this place without having a mop in his hand.

The students at the Nickel Academy are segregated by race. Black boys face even worse treatment than their white counterparts. This segregation reflects the broader racial dynamics of the era, where systemic racism was deeply entrenched. Elwood Curtis, one of the main characters, ends up at the Nickel Academy after being wrongly accused of car theft. His experiences at the institution expose him to the inescapable quagmire of violence and lawlessness faced by Black individuals during that time. The novel draws inspiration from real events, particularly the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Florida. An excavation team discovered dozens of human bodies at the Dozier School, victims of America's racial politics. Through eyes of Elwood, readers witness the horrors of racial segregation and violence. Colson Whitehead masterfully weaves this narrative, shedding light on the enduring legacy of racism and the resilience of those who fought against it. His exploration of history and race continues to resonate with readers, making *The Nickel Boys* a significant addition to American literature. Whitehead also shows how racial segregation permeates not only institutions like the Nickel Academy but society as a whole. The stark divide between the experiences of Black and white characters throughout the novel underscores how racial identity shapes every aspect of their lives, from education to justice to basic human dignity.

Patricia Hill, in her book *Intersectionality*, talks about the duality of law. It is both "a site of repression and a site of social justice" (Patricia, 89). Elwood does not understand the repercussions of living in a white man's world and still believes in the supremacy of the law. He wants the world to know about the abuse happening at the school and, therefore, writes everything in a notebook with the aim of giving it to the inspection committee once it arrives. During the day of inspection, everything is made the way it is actually supposed to be. Elwood succeeds in giving the notebook to the inspection committee but, to his surprise, he is taken to the white house, locked in a dark chamber, and gets beaten every day. The second beating turns out to be an epiphanic moment for him and he understands how the system works. After a few days, Turner comes to his rescue because he has learned that they are going to take Elwood "out back" (Whitehead,) after which he will simply disappear like many other students before, and they both decide to run away that night. Elwood got wounded from gunshot during their escape and died while his friend survived. For the rest of his life, he named himself Elwood Curtis because he could not bear the truth that he cannot speak to anybody about what happened at school. He was forced to bury his own identity for the sake of his life. Through the experiences of Elwood and his friend Turner, *The Nickel Boys* powerfully illustrates the ways in which racism dehumanizes individuals and forces them into constant resistance, making the novel a critical reflection on the long-lasting effects of racial segregation in America

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Nickel Boys* serves as a powerful narrative that not only exposes the brutality of racial segregation and systemic injustice but also reflects the resilience of individuals like Elwood Curtis who endure such oppressive systems. Colson Whitehead's portrayal of the harrowing experiences at the Nickel Academy offers a poignant commentary on America's troubled history with race, making the novel an essential work in understanding the enduring impact of racism in society. The story underscores the importance of remembering and confronting painful truths to pave the way for change. Colson Whitehead masterfully intertwines historical events, such as the Arthur G. Dozier School massacre, to underscore how racism, though transformed, remains just as pernicious and dehumanizing. The haunting excavation scenes in the prologue serve as a poignant reminder of the burial.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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