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Bakalářská práce

**African American Satire: Analysis of Schulyer's
Black No More and Kelley's *A Different Drummer***

**Afroamerická satira: Analýza *Black No More*
George S. Schuylera a *A Different Drummer*
Williamama M. Kelleyho**

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Abstract

This thesis first overviews the treatment of Black people after the Civil War in the South historically, and outlines the biographies of the two African American novelists, George S. Schuyler (1895-1977) and William Melvin Kelley (1937-2017). Following a quick summary of satire generally, this thesis analyses two novels of racial satire from the two aforementioned writers, *Black No More* and *A Different Drummer* respectively.

Keywords

George Samuel Schuyler, William Melvin Kelley, *Black No More*, *A Different Drummer*, satire, race, racism, United States, the South

Anotace

Tato práce nejprve podává historický přehled o zacházení s černochoy na jihu Spojených států po občanské válce a nastiňuje životopisy dvou afroamerických spisovatelů, George S. Schuylera (1895-1977) a Williama Melvina Kelleyho (1937-2017). Po stručném shrnutí satiry obecně tato práce analyzuje dva romány s rasovou satirou od obou výše zmíněných spisovatelů, *Black No More* a *A Different Drummer*.

Klíčová slova

George Samuel Schuyler, William Melvin Kelley, *Black No More*, *A Different Drummer*, satira, rasa, rasismus, Spojené státy, jih Spojených států

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Introduction

African American history in the United States of America is a history of oppression. Black people in the U.S. have been treated differently to whites since the colonial era. A great victory for the freedom of Black people came in the abolishment of slavery following the Northern victory in the U.S. Civil War. However, full equality for Blacks was still far in the future. The 1900s were a period of great struggle for Black people but also of great progress. The main aim of this thesis is to analyse two novels by two lesser-known African American novelists of the 20th century and how they satirise events, people, and mindsets of this time.

The first chapter quickly overviews the treatment of Black people in the United States after the end of the Civil War. After that, the second chapter introduces the two authors whose novels are the subjects of the analysis. First, the Rhode Island born, novelist, journalist and social commentator George Samuel Schuyler (1895 - 1977) is introduced. Schuyler is known for starting out as a socialist in his youth before moving further and further to the political right and ending up as an ultraconservative critic of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. The second author is the New York born, novelist, short-story writer, and a professor, William Melvin Kelley (1937 - 2017). Kelley is perhaps not as well-known as Schuyler, but his writing offers a great look at the relations between races in the South. He, like Schuyler, criticised the Civil Rights movement and mainly its leader, Martin Luther King Jr.

Following a short summary of satire generally in the third chapter, the fourth chapter analyses the first of the two novels, Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931). It is Schuyler's first and most well-known novel. In it, Schuyler imagines the United States where race suddenly ceases to exist thanks to the invention of an African American scientist which turns Black people's skin white. Schuyler satirises the Ku Klux Klan, the NAACP, prominent figures of the time, and much more. *Black No More* is an anti-utopian novel and is also considered one of the first works of African American science fiction.

The fifth chapter of this thesis examines the second novel, Kelley's *A Different Drummer*. Kelley's first and most acclaimed work envisions a fictional state in the Southern United States where a Black farmer, Tucker Caliban, salts his land, sets fire to his house, and leaves, starting an Exodus of all the Black people in the state. The novel is

told from the perspective of white characters only and it gives background and context to Caliban's act. Kelley satirises the mindsets of whites in the South, the relationship between the races, white "fair-weather liberals", Black "leaders", and more.

1 After the Civil War

The Civil War, which still to this day remains the conflict that cost the United States the most lives, effectively ended on the 9th of April, 1865 when Confederate General Lee surrendered to Union General Grant at the Courthouse at Appomattox. African American slaves in the Confederacy were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln two years previously in 1863 but only with the collapse of the Confederate States would this edict really come into effect in all of the States. Following the war the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified which abolished slavery, except as a punishment for a crime, everywhere in the United States. Over four million enslaved black people were accordingly legally free.

The newly freed African Americans faced a new massive challenge, the Southern states, where the vast majority of them lived, have been utterly decimated by the war:

Fields were laid waste, cities burned, bridges and roads destroyed. Even most of the woefully inadequate factories were levelled, as if to underscore the unchallenged industrial superiority of the North...

... The economy of the South had been smashed, and local resources for rebuilding were meagre indeed. Thousands of white refugees wandered over the land, not certain that they had a home and even less certain of the treatment they would receive if they returned.¹

Succeeding the northern victory, the question arose of how to reinstate the eleven seceded states back into the union. What should be done with the former Confederate leaders? What is the legal status of the newly freed slaves? Should they be given the same rights as whites? These and many more questions were on the minds of the government officials in Washington D.C. The answer was supposed to be The Reconstruction.

The period of the Reconstruction began when the Civil War ended in 1865 and continued until 1877. President Abraham Lincoln laid the foundations for the Reconstruction before the war had even ended but he was assassinated on April 15, 1865 just five days after General Lee surrendered at Appomattox so he was unable to see through his vision. Lincoln was succeeded by his vice-president, a Democrat from Kentucky, An-

¹Franklin, John Hope. *Reconstruction After the Civil War: Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 1994. 2-3.

drew Johnson. Before ascending to the presidency, Johnson was a prominent supporter of the Union but not long after being sworn as the 17th President of The United States he quickly put into effect his own style of Reconstruction, resulting in his impeachment. He survived removal from office by just one vote in the Senate trial.

1.1 Jim Crow and segregation

Even though slavery was abolished following the Northern victory in the Civil War, Black people in the United States still faced discrimination. Following the Reconstruction and the political and economic gains by Black Americans, Southern States in the Union, dominated by white Democrats, started enacting laws segregating the races in all public facilities. The laws were nicknamed the “Jim Crow” laws after a derogatory character from a travelling minstrel show:

In one of the travelling shows, Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice, a white actor, portrayed an elderly black slave, Jim Crow. Rice appeared on stage in "blackface." He darkened his face and hands with burnt cork, wore shabby overalls, shuffled across the stage in bare feet, and carried a banjo. His routine included jokes and a song and dance number performed in a white version of a black dialect titled "Jim Crow."²

In 1892, a group of prominent Black New Orleans citizens called Committee of Citizens aimed to challenge Louisiana’s *Separate Car Act* of 1890 which mandated separate accommodations for Blacks and whites. Planning to bring a test case in front of the court, they selected Homer Plessy as the future plaintiff. As a seven-eighths Caucasian and one-eighth African, Plessy could easily pass as white, but under the term of the *Separate Car Act* he was still classified as Black. The Committee also hired a private detective Chris C. Cain to ensure that Plessy would be charged with violating the *Separate Car Act* and not just with a minor misdemeanour.³ A light-complected Homer Plessy, having bought a first-class ticket, boarded a train from New Orleans. A conductor instructed him to move to the coloured car, but Plessy refused. The conductor then stopped the train and as planned, detective Cain then boarded the car and arrested Plessy. Plessy was charged with violating the *Separate Car Act*, and after a night in jail he appeared before Judge John Howard Ferguson. Plessy was unsuccessful in arguing

²Tischauer, Leslie Vincent. *Jim crow laws*. ABC-CLIO, 2012. 1.

³"Homer Plessy". *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer_Plessy. 2 July 2022.

that the *Separate Car Act* violated his Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment rights so he appealed his case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court:

The Supreme Court ruling that followed on May 18, 1896, and that bore the names of Plessy and Ferguson (*Plessy v. Ferguson*) upheld the Separate Car Act, holding that the law violated neither the Thirteenth Amendment (because it did not reimpose slavery) nor the Fourteenth Amendment (because the accommodations provided to each race were equal). The decision solidified the establishment of the Jim Crow era, thus inaugurating a period of legalized apartheid in the United States.⁴

Every part of everyday life was affected by Jim Crow laws. Schools for white children and schools for black children were operated separately, with the black schools receiving less funding. In many of the Southern states, Blacks could not vote. Hospitals, prisons, restrooms, accommodations, churches, entrances, and even drinking fountains, all and more were subject to racial segregation. The facilities for Black people were of course, inferior to the facilities for whites. But Jim Crow did not only mean racial segregation enforced by laws, it also meant the belief that whites are superior to Blacks in all important aspects of life. Non-codified etiquette norms worked in conjunction with legislation to keep Black people at the bottom of social hierarchy. Blacks had to address whites by courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Sir, Ma'am) whereas whites referred to Blacks by their first names. Blacks were always introduced to whites, never the other way around. Black couples could not show affection toward each other in public.⁵ In his book *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.*, author Stetson Kennedy touches on several rules, non-whites had to follow when conversing with white people:

1. Never assert or even intimate that a white person may be lying.
2. Never impute dishonourable intentions to a white person.
3. Never suggest that the white is of an inferior class.
4. Never lay claim to, or overtly demonstrate, superior knowledge or intelligence.
5. Never curse a white person.
6. Never laugh derisively at a white person.⁶

Blacks had to follow these, and many more, rules or risk their homes, livelihood or even their own lives.

⁴Urofsky, Melvin I. "Homer Plessy". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Homer-Plessy>. 2 July 2022.

⁵Pilgrim, David. "WHAT WAS JIM CROW". *Ferris State University*. 2012. 2 July 2022.

⁶Kennedy, Stetson. *Jim Crow guide to the USA: The laws, customs and etiquette governing the conduct of nonwhites and other minorities as second-class citizens*. University of Alabama Press, 2011. 216-217.

2 Biographies of the Authors

2.1 George S. Schuyler

The circumstances surrounding the birth of George Samuel Schuyler, a prominent African American journalist, author, and social commentator of the 20th century United States, are uncertain. Schuyler himself claims in his autobiography, that he was born on February 25, 1895, in Providence, Rhode Island, but an inquiry by Oscar R. Williams⁷ reveals that this statement is unsupported by the state's census records of that time. Schuyler also asserts that his ancestors had been free from slavery and he uses this fact to look down on other African Americans who had not been so lucky. A close examination of Schuyler's ancestry by Williams, however, uncovers a very real possibility that his great-grandparents may have been slaves.⁸ What is not disputed, is the fact that he spent most of his childhood in Syracuse, New York.

His father, George Francis Schuyler, who worked as a head chef at a local hotel, died when young George was only three years old. His mother, Eliza Fisher Schuyler, who was of Malagasy origin, was a domestic labourer for several white families in Syracuse. Owing to the lack of opportunities for African Americans in the early 1900's United States, Schuyler's family members were constrained only to low-status, unskilled professions. Schuyler was not spared this fate either, so he started working as a newspaper delivery boy. Despite all the artificial hurdles which society put on them, the African Americans in many cities throughout the United States still maintained a certain class structure which revolved around a workforce of common labourers and domestics. Due to his father being a chef described by Schuyler as, "an aristocrat in the colored community" who "affected baronial living, insisted on a good table, and dressed well"⁹ and his mother cooking and working as a housekeeper for wealthy white families, the Schuyler family was among the top class of African Americans in Syracuse.

Schuyler's mother taught George to read and write and shown him the world of books.

⁷Williams, Oscar Renal. "The making of a Black conservative: George S. Schuyler". Dissertation. The Ohio State University. 1997. 16.

⁸Williams, "The making of a Black conservative: George S. Schuyler", 18.

⁹Schuyler, George Samuel. *Black and Conservative: The Autobiography of George S. Schuyler*. New York: Arlington House, 1966. 8-9.

From a very young age Schuyler learned conservatism from his mother. She shared a characteristic occasionally found within African Americans in the northern states of the Union, a preconception towards southern African Americans. Schuyler describes his mother's position concerning her southern kin:

She felt that they were uncouth. They were never invited to our home. They had no standards, she charged, and didn't know how to act. On the other hand, she was quite friendly with a couple of white families that lived across the fields on another street. . . . These families were Yankees, and my mother said they were her kind of people.¹⁰

When he reached seventeen and was working several menial jobs in town, Schuyler started feeling that there would be no positive career path for him in Syracuse, so he did what many young men did at the time to escape an unwanted fate; he joined the United States Army. Schuyler's first stint in the army started on July 18, 1912 and ended July 17, 1915 when he was honourably discharged. While serving in the army, Schuyler was stationed in Hawaii which is where he returned after leaving and where he started operating a car shuttle service. The business did not last long however, and after falling on financially hard times he re-enlisted in November 1915.

Schuyler's second stint in the Army is much more noteworthy than the first. Firstly, he impressed his commanders with his clerical skills, leading to his promotion to Corporal. Secondly, Schuyler started establishing the foundation for his career to come when he commenced writing satirical editorials for a military journal called *The Service*. In the spring of 1917, the United States officially entered the First World War after which a separate training camp for African American military officers was established in Fort Des Moines, Iowa. In total, 1250 applicants were chosen for the program and among them was George S. Schuyler. Four months later Schuyler was given commissions and promoted to 1st Lieutenant of Infantry.

During his stay in the army, Schuyler personally experienced the deep-rooted racism of that time. He was falsely accused of rape by a white woman and released only after a white lieutenant testified with an alibi for Schuyler. He witnessed a race riot, and when he had gone for drinks with other soldiers to a bar their glasses were smashed on the floor after they finished their beverages. Schuyler protested the abysmal treat-

¹⁰Schuyler. *Black and Conservative*. 12.

ment of African Americans, first by staging a stand-in at the above-mentioned bar but also through his pen. His struggle with racism culminated in the summer of 1918, in Philadelphia. Williams describes the event:

While waiting in a train station to return to Fort Dix, Schuyler stopped at a bootblack stand to have his puttees shined. He was refused by the operator of the stand, a Greek immigrant, who said loudly that he would not serve "a nigger." Humiliated and angered, Schuyler muttered aloud "I'm a son-of-a-bitch if I'll serve this goddamn country any longer!" . . .
. . . Carrying a suitcase of civilian clothes, he purchased a ticket to Chicago, boarded the train, changed into his clothes, and quietly deserted the U.S. Army.¹¹

After three months, Schuyler gave himself up to the authorities and served nine months of his one-year sentence because of good behaviour.

He moved back to Syracuse, where joined the local Socialist party. However, he quickly grew tired of Syracuse and moved to New York. There he got a job as a writer for a magazine titled *The Messenger*. Writing satirical articles and columns he quickly established his journalistic career. He wrote articles satirising famous Black figures, such as W. E. B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. In 1925, Schuyler was asked by the editor of the well-known newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier* to tour the South for a series of articles for the paper. Schuyler accepted and during the nine-month tour, Schuyler experienced the Jim Crow segregation in the South. In 1927, Schuyler met a white woman, Josephine Codgell and the two quickly fell in love and married soon after. 1931 became an important year for Schuyler. His first and only child was born, a daughter Phillipa, and his first novel *Black No More* was released and proved to be a critical success. The same year, Schuyler released his second novel, *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia* which exposes the country's domestic slavery.

As he got older, Schuyler moved away from socialism and became more and more conservative. In 1937, Schuyler became the business editor of the NAACP magazine *Crisis*, he held this position for seven years. Schuyler's conservative outlook would lead him to contribute to *American Opinion*, a journal of the far-right, anti-communist John Birch Society. He also supported Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade of the 1950s. Schuyler's right wing, conservative views were in

¹¹Williams. "The making of a Black conservative: George S. Schuyler". 65-66.

staunch opposition with the predominantly liberal ideology of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. As a result, Schuyler became a prominent Black critic of the movement. In 1964, Schuyler wrote a column criticizing the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Martin Luther King Jr., which was published in the ultraconservative journal *Manchester Union Leader*. The late 1960s turned out to be disastrous for Schuyler. First, he lost his only daughter in a helicopter crash and then, two years later, his wife committed suicide. Schuyler died eight years after his wife, on August 31, 1977, aged 82.

2.2 William M. Kelley

William Melvin Kelley, an African-American novelist and short-story writer, was born on the 1st of November, 1937, in the Bronx, New York. Kelley grew up in the Bronx, in an Italian neighbourhood where Kelley's family was the only black family in a predominantly white community, and this early exposure to racial divisions in America had a great impact on his later writing. In a 2019 interview, Kelley describes the moment when he first thought about the concept of race:

The first time I ever really realized there was any such thing as race, was Sally Canale, a Sicilian kid, had gotten as brown as me! And the one German kid on the block, and you don't want to say that racism runs in his blood, but he points out, he says, "Hey, Sally's as brown as Billy!" And Sally blushes. He's embarrassed. And I'm saying to myself, "Why is Sally blushing? Why is he embarrassed to be the same shade as me? Why is he the same shade as me? Why is he brown, and why am I brown, but why is he white and why am I black?" That's the first I'd ever realized. I could see people came in different shades, but I didn't realize there was this thing called race.¹²

According to Kelley, his father was three quarters African and one-quarter European but after coming back from college where he stayed only half a year because he did not have enough money, he utterly expunged his African American accent. Kelley's father trained his voice to sound just like a white man which had some unforeseen consequences:

He sounded like a white man. He had the same problem I had: he could call up on the phone and get through, and then, when we showed up at the place, suddenly they realized we were African, or African American. Because on the phone we could sound white. . . .
. . . He could call up on the phone, everything would be all right, he would show up at the place, "Oh. . . oh, wow. . . um, we're awfully sorry that you had to come down here, but the job is filled now." That kind of thing.¹³

Apart from learning to speak like a white man, Kelley's father also had also taught himself how to write and he became a news reporter and later on and editor of a newspaper for African American people called the *Amsterdam News*.

Kelley had at first attended a public school in New York City but then his father's ex-wife had heard of a liberal, predominantly white, private school, called Fieldston

¹²Blec, Yannick. "Story of a Life: A Conversation with William Melvin Kelley". *GRAAT On-Line Occasional Papers* (2019): 6.

¹³Blec. "Story of a Life: A Conversation with William Melvin Kelley". 3.

School, that was open to admitting African American students. They gave Kelley an IQ test and according to him his IQ was 151.¹⁴ He was therefore admitted in to the school. Even though he was the only African American in his class, he became the president of the student council and the captain of the track team. Because he was the student council president at Fieldston, Kelley was later welcomed into the prestigious Harvard University in Massachusetts. Kelley was intent on becoming a lawyer but after taking a writing course and studying under the famous novelist John Hawkes, he fell in love with writing. His mother died in the course of his sophomore year and his father while he was a senior. Kelley's studies at Harvard came to an end in 1960, six months before graduation when he dropped out to become a full-time writer. Two years after leaving Harvard, Kelley published his first novel *A Different Drummer*.

After leaving Harvard University Kelley began spending most of his time outside the United States of America. He lived in Rome for a year before returning to New York to teach at the New School for Social Research, but it was not long before he was away again this time to France where he tutored in American Literature at the University of Paris. Following the 1968 killing of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, both prominent supporters of equality for African Americans in the U.S., Kelley and his wife came to the conclusion that the U.S. was not suited for raising their family so they decided to move to Jamaica where they stayed until 1977 before finally relocating for the last time, back to New York. In 1989, Kelley began teaching fiction at Sarah Lawrence College in New York where he stayed for nearly three decades. He died aged 79, on the 1st of February, 2017, in New York.

¹⁴Blec. "Story of a Life: A Conversation with William Melvin Kelley". 7.

3 Satire

Satire is a kind of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.

Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books* (1704)

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines satire thus:

Satire, artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.¹⁵

Many people believe that it is the main focus of satirical texts to be humorous, however, that is quite often not the case. The deeper purpose is habitually a critique of the established social order by the author and the wittiness is just a means to make the content more attractive to the audience.

The most common subject matter of satire is politics. This topic presents the biggest challenge to the satirist, but it also brings with it the biggest reward when well executed. However, politics is not the only issue which has found themselves targeted by a satirist. Literature, art, sport, relationships, science, business and religion are just a few themes which have not escaped the critical appraisal of a satirist. Any aspect of the human condition has been held up to mockery at some point in literary history.

Because the disposition to criticize and mock every aspect of our lives has been present in human beings for millennia, we can find examples of satirical works as far back as Ancient Egypt. Modern researchers consider the Greek dramatist Aristophanes as one of the earliest true satirists in Western civilization.

Any example of satire can vary greatly from the next and satire is also very hard to categorise. Despite all this, three main styles of satire may be described. First type is called Horatian after the Roman satirist Horace. The character of satire in this category is very mild, playful, and light-hearted. Examples include *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift which humorously pokes fun at the travelogues common at that time. The wildly popular animated show *The Simpsons* serves as a recent example. The second type is known as Juvelian satire, titled after the Roman satirist Juvenal. The satire

¹⁵Elliott, Robert C. "Satire". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/satire>. 28 March 2021.

in this class is darker and its goal is to incite a political or societal change. The object of ridicule in Juvelian satire is harmful or evil even. Some representatives of Juvelian satire works are *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and the 1960s film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* by Stanley Kubrick. The third and final category of satire bears the name Menippean after the Greek satirist Menippus. The main difference between afore mentioned types of satire and Menippean is that the object of Menippean is less a specific person or a group of people and more an idea, a mental attitude, or a stance. Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Bobok* or Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* fall into this style of satire.

4 *Black No More (1931)*

4.1 Plot

On New Year's Eve in 1933, in New York, a Black man, Max Disher and his friend Bunny Brown go to a club, where Max asks a beautiful, white, blonde girl from Atlanta for a dance; she rejects him because of his skin colour. Afterwards, Bunny informs Max about a newly discovered treatment, capable of turning Black people white, called "Black-No-More". As the treatment happened to be conceived by an old friend of his, Max gets to be one of the first people to undergo the change.

Droves of Black Americans line up to change their skin colour and escape discrimination. Society is changing. Black businesses are losing customers and traditionally black neighbourhoods, like New York City's Harlem, are losing residents. Max is one of the people leaving Harlem and he heads South to Atlanta, to find the blonde girl who rebuffed him.

Black and white elites alike are working to shut down "Black-No-More". Whites are worried about their racial purity, while Blacks fear losing support and financial donations for the "Back-to-Africa" and other anti-racism organisations. Crookman and his associates bribe politicians to avoid losing what has become an incredibly lucrative business.

Max, changed his name to Matthew Fisher. He arrives in Atlanta and recognizes white people's growing alarm whereby he sees a possible profit. He meets with the Reverend Henry Givens, a founder of a white supremacist group called the "Knights of Nordica", and posing as an anthropologist, he becomes Givens's second-in-command. At a "Knights of Nordica" rally, Matthew spots the blonde from the New York club and learns that she is actually Givens's daughter named Helen. He courts and marries her. Thus, an African American man marries a white woman in the South; both belong to a racist organisation. Schuyler is satirising the fact that some leaders of racist organisations are not "aryan". For example, Daniel Burros, who was a member of the American Nazi Party while being Jewish.

Bunny arrives in Atlanta, recently becoming white himself. Matthew hires him as an assistant and together they work to draw out the fight between supporters and oppo-

nents of “Black-No-More”. This way the “Knights of Nordica” gain more members and as a result Matthew earns more money. He also takes bribes from factory owners to stop the workers’ organizing efforts. By spreading rumours that there are unrecognisable Black people among them, he uses racism to his achieve his ends.

The next presidential election is drawing near. Conservative Southern Democrats fear a Republican victory, carried by the formerly Black people who now have better access to voting. Matthew convinces the Democrats to nominate Rev. Givens for president and the head of the wealthy “Anglo-Saxon Association”, Arthur Snobbcraft for vice president. Snobbcraft funds the campaign and the “Knights of Nordica” bring in the votes. To help sway people to their side Snobbcraft comes up with a plan. He asks a statistician Samuel Buggerie to compose a report on people’s ancestry. The Aim is to release the report just days before the election hoping it will shock people to vote for the Democrats.

The support for Democrats grows and it looks like they will win the election. The Republicans learn of Buggerie’s ancestry research and to stop him from publishing it, they plan to steal it. Only two days from the election, Buggerie reveals to Snobbcraft the results of the research. It shows that a number of the foremost politicians have Black ancestry, including Snobbcraft and Givens. Accordingly Snobbcraft orders the research not be released to the public, however when they arrive to the vault where it is kept they realise that the report has been stolen.

The day before the election, Helen gives birth to a Black baby boy. Matthew has been fearing this eventuality ever since he learned about the pregnancy. Before he can reveal his identity, Givens bursts in with a newspaper containing his and Snobbcraft’s ancestry. The conclusions of the findings from the stolen Buggerie’s research has been published. Matthew reveals that he used to be Black but Helen, now aware of her own heritage, forgives him. Matthew, Helen and the baby, Bunny, and Givens take a plane out of the country to escape an angry mob.

Snobbcraft and Buggerie, attempting to escape to Mexico via a plane, crash in Mississippi. To avoid being recognised they blacken their skin using shoe polish. Posing as two Black people they come upon a town of Happy Hill, Mississippi. Unfortunately for them, Happy Hill is notorious for lynching Blacks and to make matters worse, a

pastor named Alex McPhule has told the town to expect a sign from God on Election Day. The townspeople attack Snobbcraft and Buggerie thinking they are black, intending to lynch them. When they pull off the men's clothes and reveal that they are in fact white the attack stops. Snobbcraft and Buggerie then wash off the shoe polish of their faces causing the townspeople to recognize them from the newspaper. Because of their Black ancestry, they are brutally maimed and burned alive.

The election is won by the Republicans in a landslide. A couple of years afterwards, Dr. Crookman reveals that the "Black-No-More" treatment actually turned people a shade or two whiter than "pure" white people. Following this announcement, white people develop a trend to darken their complexion. Racial division returns. Schuyler satirises the use of "sun tan oil" on the beach by white people to get darker skin while at the same time discriminating against black people because of their pigmentation.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Characters

Max Disher/Matthew Fisher

The protagonist of the novel Max Disher, who after undergoing the “Black-No-More” treatment, changes his name to Matthew Fisher, is a Black man living in New York City’s Harlem neighbourhood. He faces discrimination because of his skin colour, evident for instance when a white woman turns him down at a club. To escape this prejudice, he changes his skin colour to white using, Dr. Crookman’s, newly discovered machine. He enjoys his freshly found freedom, but he also finds white society underwhelming. Schuyler presents a look into the psyche of Black Americans of early 20th century who after being told that they are inferior to whites all of their lives started to believe it:

As a boy he had been taught to look up to white folks as just a little less than gods; now he found them little different from the Negroes, except that they were uniformly less courteous and less interesting.¹⁶

Max is smart and resourceful so he quickly starts exploiting racism to gain wealth and power. Using the racist organisation the “Knights of Nordica” he gains money through bribes and donations and he even marries Helen, the woman from the club who had rebuffed him at the beginning of the novel. By stoking white people’s fears he increases “Knights of Nordica’s” power and influence culminating in Max being at the forefront of the Democratic presidential campaign. Through Max, Schuyler shows how people take advantage of racial divisions to gain capital and authority.

Even though Max has completely integrated into white society and risen to the top of the biggest racist group in the United States, he still remembers he is Black. Max constantly worries about his identity and people finding out his past, as he says: “I know I’m a darky and I’m always on the alert.”¹⁷ His fear escalates when Helen becomes pregnant. When he learns that Helen has Black ancestry, he feels comfortable revealing his true identity.

Dr. Junius Crookman

¹⁶Schuyler, George Samuel. *Black No More*. New York: Collier Books, 1971. 63.

¹⁷Schuyler. *Black No More*. 138.

Dr. Crookman invented the “Black-No-More” treatment which turns Black people’s skin white. He creates this “therapy” to help his fellow Black Americans escape oppression and to give them the same opportunities as their white counterparts. As more and more Black people undergo his treatment, Crookman and his associates become incredibly rich. Charging \$50 for each procedure, they make \$70,000 in two weeks alone. Now operating as a corporation “Black-No-More, inc.” they open branches all over the United States as well as lying-in hospitals where women give birth to their mixed-race babies who are given the treatment to turn them white immediately. He is ultimately appointed by the U.S. President to serve as the U.S. Surgeon General. At the end of the novel he reveals that the “whitened” Black Americans are in fact several shades whiter than the “pure” whites. This discovery causes chaos in society, yet Crookman, who did not undergo his own treatment himself, seems unphased by this. He enjoys his wealth, becoming yet another example of elites profiting off of racial divisions in America.

Reverend Henry Givens and Arthur Snobbcraft

Rev. Givens and Snobbcraft are leaders of racist groups. Givens is head of the “Knights of Nordica” and Snobbcraft presides over the “Anglo-Saxon Association”. Givens has previously been a member of the Ku Klux Klan and where, importantly, he has: “. . . been a very hard worker in withdrawing as much money from its treasury as possible.”¹⁸ Once again Schuyler presents the theme of exploiting racism to amass wealth. Both Givens and Snobbcraft represent the ignorance of racists. Givens’s lacking intellectual capabilities are exposed when he needs to look up the word “anthropology” in the dictionary after talking to Max, and again when he is giving a speech on the radio where he is discussing many subjects: “. . . of which he was totally ignorant.”¹⁹ Givens and Snobbcraft run for President and Vice-President respectively and, by stoking racial tensions they gain support. In Schuyler’s satirical twist of fate, both of them are revealed to have Black ancestry. Givens flees the country and Snobbcraft is lynched, both succumbing to the white fear they themselves helped create.

Dr. Samuel Buggerie

Samuel Buggerie serves as a figure representing the white intellectuals. Buggerie is :

¹⁸Schuyler. *Black No More*. 68.

¹⁹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 149.

“... highly respected among members of his profession and well known by the reading public.”²⁰ In spite of his popularity, all of his previous research has been shown to be utter nonsense:

His well-known work, “The Fluctuation of the Sizes of Left Feet among the Assyrians during the Ninth Century before Christ” had been favorably commented upon by several reviewers, one of whom had actually read it. An even more learned work of his was entitled “Putting Wasted Energy to Work”, in which he called attention, by elaborate charts and graphs, to the possibilities of harnessing the power generated by the leaves of trees rubbing together on windy days.²¹

Through *Buggerie*, Schuyler highlights the lack of any knowledge the intellectual and political leaders of white America possess.

Caricatures of real life personalities

An interesting thing about *Black No More* is that not only does it satirize white society, but it includes parodies of several real life Black distinguished individuals. In the fifth chapter of the novel the “National Social Equality League” (a stand-in for the “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People” or the “National Urban League”) holds a meeting in which they discuss the “Black-No-More” treatment and its effect on the Black populace. Their goal is to stop Black people from transitioning and keeping the pride in their own race. Their motives are not as pure as they might imply, rather they are mostly worried about losing profits off of the oppression of Black people:

While the large staff of officials was eager to end all oppression and persecution of the Negro, they were never so happy and excited as when a Negro was barred from a theater or fried to a crisp. Then they would leap for telephones, grab telegraph pads and yell for stenographers; smiling through their simulated indignation at the spectacle of another reason for their continued existence and appeals for funds.²²

Schuyler satirizes W.E.B. Du Bois through the character of Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard. Beard is a graduate of Harvard, Yale, and Copenhagen, the founder of “N.S.E.L.”, and writes for a journal called *The Dilemma*. Du Bois graduated from Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin, was a founding member of NAACP, and wrote for a journal called *The Crisis*. Beard sports the same facial hair as Du Bois.

²⁰Schuyler. *Black No More*. 155.

²¹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 155-156.

²²Schuyler. *Black No More*. 88-89.

Schuyler believes Du Bois to be hypocritical and elitist:

For a mere six thousand dollars a year, the learned doctor wrote scholarly and biting editorials in *The Dilemma* denouncing the Caucasians whom he secretly admired and lauding the greatness of the Negroes whom he alternately pitied and despised. In limpid prose he told of the sufferings and privations of the downtrodden black workers with whose lives he was totally and thankfully unfamiliar. Like most Negro leaders, he deified the black woman but abstained from employing aught save octoroons. He talked at white banquets about “we of the black race” and admitted in books that he was part-French, part-Russian, part-Indian and part-Negro.²³

Another Black personality that Schuyler takes aim at is Marcus Garvey, using the character Santop Licorice. Marcus Garvey funded the Universal Improvement Association which arranged the immigration to Africa for Black people who wanted to “return” there. Likewise Santop Licorice is the leader of the “Back-To-Africa Society” which encourages Blacks to return to Africa. Schuyler points out Garvey’s hypocrisy as he never visited Africa himself and had no intention of emigrating there:

It was outrageous, after all the talking he had done in favor of Negro racial integrity. Mr. Licorice for some fifteen years had been very profitably advocating the emigration of all the American Negroes to Africa. He had not, of course, gone there himself and had not the slightest intention of going so far from the fleshpots, but he told the other Negroes to go.²⁴

Another character of ridicule is the businesswoman Sisseretta Blandish. She condemns the Black Americans who have undergone the “Black-No-More” treatment for lacking pride in their race. However she herself has made her fortune selling products that portray white features as the archetype:

Because of her prominence as the proprietor of a successful enterprise engaged in making Negroes appear as much like white folks as possible, she had recently been elected for the fourth time a Vice-President of the American Race Pride League.²⁵

Blandish mirrors Madam C. J. Walker, a self-made Black millionaire, who became rich off of cosmetics and hair conditioning especially that made Black people look more like white people. Again, Schuyler is highlighting the irony in promoting Black race pride while simultaneously undermining it.

²³Schuyler. *Black No More*. 90.

²⁴Schuyler. *Black No More*. 101-102.

²⁵Schuyler. *Black No More*. 59.

4.2.2 Race

The claim that Caucasians and Blacks are different species of humans, differing physiologically in facial features, intelligence, and other qualities has been widely used by racists all around the world. In the United States proponents of slavery referred to several pseudo-scientific studies by early anthropologists, such as Samuel George Morton, which claimed to scientifically prove polygenism²⁶. With the belief that the races were different from each other came the principle that people belonging to one race, namely the Caucasians, were naturally superior to others. On the 21st of March, 1861 at the Athenaeum in Savannah, Georgia, Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens presented this very idea in his so called “Cornerstone Speech”:

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.²⁷

In 1926 Schuyler wrote an article titled “The Negro-Art Hokum” in which he criticises literature which presents blacks as different from whites. He takes issue as well with the notion that black literature must be inherently different from literature of white authors. In the article Schuyler presents his belief that Blacks are not characteristically dissimilar from their Caucasian neighbours:

Aside from his color, which ranges from very dark brown to pink, your American Negro is just plain American. Negroes and whites from the same localities in this country talk, think, and act about the same.²⁸

In *Black No More*, the same convictions, which Schuyler described in “The Negro-Art Hokum”, can be found. Over the course of the novel he presents his arguments against racial differences, and satirises the people who believe it and the pseudo-scientists who came up with it.

Schuyler first deals with the notion that blacks possess a completely different set of facial characteristics, an idea which unsurprisingly Schuyler finds preposterous. In the

²⁶Theory which hypothesises that the human races are of different origins.

²⁷“Cornerstone Speech”. *American Battlefield Trust*. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/cornerstone-speech>. 12 February 2022.

²⁸Schuyler, George Samuel. “The Negro-art hokum”. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader* (1926): 25.

very first chapter of the novel, Dr. Junius Crookman, the discoverer of the scientific treatment which turns blacks into whites, is explaining to his associates why blacks who change the colour of their skin should have no problem passing as white:

Well, there are plenty of Caucasians who have lips quite as thick and noses quite as broad as any of us. As a matter of fact there has been considerable exaggeration about the contrast between Caucasian and Negro features.

...

... Black up some white folks and they could deceive a resident of Benin. Then when you consider that less than twenty per cent of our Negroes are without Caucasian ancestry and that close to thirty per cent have American Indian ancestry, it is readily seen that there cannot be the wide difference in Caucasian and Afro-American facial characteristics that most people imagine.²⁹

In the same passage Dr. Crookman also refutes the assertion that blacks speak a different dialect than whites:

There is no such thing as Negro dialect, except in literature and drama. It is a well-known fact among informed persons that a Negro from a given section speaks the same dialect as his white neighbors.³⁰

the same rebuttal by Schuyler can also be found in “The Negro-Art Hokum”. Schuyler’s feelings about this matter appear to be quite strong. Throughout the novel he uses several literary devices, apostrophes and truncated words, to signify the use of a dialect by the speaker, and both black and white characters speak in dialects.

The fact that the main character of the novel, Max Disher, and all of the black people who undergo the “Black-No-More” procedure, which only changes the colour of their skin, can pose as “real” whites and not be immediately recognized, as Schuyler writes: “There was no way, apparently, of telling a real Caucasian from an imitation one.”³¹, is proof that the perceived biological superiority, or in fact any real difference beyond a superficial one between Caucasians and Blacks is non-existent. Consuela Francis explains why Schuyler finds this so important:

By eradicating difference, Schuyler paints racial individuality as a tool of racist ideology, and, supposedly, removes any obstacle in the way of the African Americans’ full participation in American democracy.³²

In fact, not only is Max able to easily blend into white society, he is also presented

²⁹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 31-32.

³⁰Schuyler. *Black No More*. 31.

³¹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 118.

³²Consuela, Francis. “(Re)Making a Difference: The Harlem Renaissance and the Anxiety of 1926”. *The Langston Hughes Review* 17 (2002): 55.

by Schuyler as being “better” at being white and overall smarter than the Caucasian characters in the novel. For example, when Max first meets with the leader of “The Knights of Nordica”, Reverend Henry Givens, he easily fools him into believing Max’s made up story. If the notion that white people were superior, and more importantly smarter than Blacks, surely this would not be possible. Today it is widely accepted fact that, besides a few surface level appearance characteristics, there are extremely few biological dissimilarities between the races, certainly none which would render one superior to others.

After a couple of years, most of the Black American population has undergone the “Black-No-More” remedy. Only a very few Black people still possess black skin, effectively eradicating the Black race. Even though Black Americans have become fully integrated into white society, largely without being found out, white people try more than ever to find differences between themselves and the “imitation” whites. Schuyler demonstrates how American society is fixated on race. A difference between the two races that appears and which very much frightens the whites, is that the “Black-No-More” therapy does not transfer on any offspring, meaning babies are still born Black or mixed-race. An excerpt from a newspaper captures the feeling of white people: “THE OFFSPRING OF THESE WHITENED NEGROES WILL BE NEGROES!”³³ In the 1930’s, the southern states in the United States of America, where majority of the novel takes place, all enforced anti-miscegenation laws. They remained in effect until the Supreme Court of the United States unanimously ruled anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional in the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* landmark decision.

³³Schuyler. *Black No More*. 50.

most Americans have some Black ancestry, seems to eliminate racism. Max's wife Helen, who previously was quite racist, upon giving birth to a Black baby and learning that Max used to be black reacts positively at the news:

Helen felt a wave of relief go over her. There was no feeling of revulsion at the thought that her husband was a Negro. There once would have been but that was seemingly centuries ago when she had been unaware of her remoter Negro ancestry. She felt proud of her Matthew. She loved him more than ever. They had money and a beautiful, brown baby. What more did they need? To hell with the world! To hell with society! Compared to what she possessed, thought Helen, all talk of race and color was damned foolishness. She would probably have been surprised to learn that countless Americans at that moment were thinking the same thing.³⁷

However, in the novel's epilogue titled "AND SO ON AND SO ON", which takes place four years later, Dr. Crookman discovers that the Blacks who underwent the "Black-No-More" treatment are in fact "... from two to three shades lighter than the old Caucasians..."³⁸ This discovery leads to "... the entire country to examining shades of skin color again."³⁹ Whites begin darkening their skin and discriminating against their lightskinned counterparts. The fact that white people now want to be darker, completely reversing their earlier skin-colour preference just to feel superior to others is a clear example of Schuyler's satire. Racism is back, signalling Schuyler's cynicism. Schuyler believes that race and racism are so ingrained into American society that it is impossible to truly get rid of them.

4.2.3 Ignorance and religion

An important target of Schuyler's satire in *Black No More* is ignorance. Dana Carluccio argues that Schuyler believes that most Americans, Black and white alike, are ignorant:

At one of his most cynical moments, Schuyler speculates in "The Negro-Art Hokum" that the best account of people's refusal to reject race is that most Americans, white and black alike, are simply and constitutionally incapable of reasoned thought...⁴⁰

In the novel he predominately spotlights the ignorance of the "white masses". Schuyler

³⁷Schuyler. *Black No More*. 192-193.

³⁸Schuyler. *Black No More*. 218.

³⁹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 219.

⁴⁰Carluccio, Dana. "The Evolutionary Invention of Race: W. E. B. Du Bois's "Conservation" of Race and George Schuyler's *Black No More*". *Twentieth-Century Literature* 55.4 (2009): 530.

illustrates how people who thoughtlessly accept any ideology are taken advantage of by charlatans, and how ignorance can often devolve into violence.

A good example which presents the ignorance of racists happens in the fourth chapter of the novel when Matthew meets with the leader of “The Knights of Nordica”, Rev. Henry Givens. Matthew infiltrates the group to use it to make money. Givens does not at all understand Max when he presents his arguments using scientific words, but the Reverend believes him because Max says what he wants to hear:

“Lemme see, now,” he muttered aloud. “Anthropology. Better git that word straight ’fore I go talkin’ too much about it.... Humn! Humn!... That boy must know a hull lot.” He read over the definition of the word twice without understanding it, and then cutting off a large chew of tobacco from his plug, he leaned back in his swivel chair to rest after the unaccustomed mental exertion.⁴¹

Next Matthew attends his first “Knights of Nordica” meeting and he is astonished at the members’ ignorance: “He quickly saw that these people would believe anything that was shouted at them loudly and convincingly enough.”⁴² He recognizes the opportunity presented to him. Matthew starts using the ignorance of the attendees, riling them up about the “Black-No-More” treatment, causing the membership of the “Knights of Nordica” to rise. Every new member brings in a membership fee of \$5 and Matthew gains a high-up position in the organization. Schuyler demonstrates how people’s ignorance is taken advantage of by the higher classes to gain wealth and power.

In the Presidential election which takes place in the second half of the novel, ignorance of white people is used as the main political weapon to win the presidency. Matthew once again uses people’s ignorance to his advantage:

“You can’t deport citizens, silly,” Bunny remonstrated.
“That don’t stop you from advocating it. This is politics, Big Boy.”
“Well, what else is on the program?”
“Next: We start a campaign of denunciation against the Republicans in The Warning, connecting them with the Pope, Black-No-More and anything else we can think of.”
“But they were practically anti-Catholic in 1928, weren’t they?”
“Seven years ago, Bunny, seven years ago. How often must I tell you that the people never remember anything?”⁴³

⁴¹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 71.

⁴²Schuyler. *Black No More*. 77-78.

⁴³Schuyler. *Black No More*. 145-146.

Givens takes advantage of people's ignorance as well. He goes on to give radio addresses to gain support for the Democrats. In his address he speaks similarly to Matthew at his first "Knights of Nordica" gathering, he: "...successfully avoided saying anything that was true..."⁴⁴ Despite the deceitfulness of his words, he gains enough political party support to enable him to run for President. Schuyler again makes plain how ignorant and prone to fabrications people are. The inciting of ignorant masses culminates with the burning down of one of the "Black-No-More" birthing centers, killing twelve babies. Ignorance eventually leads to violence. The dead babies signify the loss and corruption of innocence.

Throughout the novel, Christians or more specifically faux-Christians who do not accurately practice the religion are also often a target of Schuyler's satire. Schuyler's mocking of Christians ranges from light-hearted jabs at their annoying nature:

Mrs. Givens was a Christian. There was no doubt about it because she freely admitted it to everybody, with or without provocation.⁴⁵

He offers more serious and unsettling variety of satire as well. Schuyler often links the ignorance which leads to racism with Christianity. For example, Givens' radio address, full of white supremacist ideology, invokes Christianity and even ends with: "In the name of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Amen"⁴⁶ Schuyler sporadically passes judgement on Black Christians as well. For instance, when Matthew attends his first "Knights of Nordica" assembly, he observes that the meeting is quite similar to the "religious orgies of the more ignorant Negroes"⁴⁷. Schuyler is insinuating that religion is used to influence Blacks and whites alike.

The thirteenth and final chapter of the novel contains the most violent and shocking scene in the story, and it is here where Schuyler's condemnation of faux-Christians is the most pronounced. This chapter introduces the reader to the town of Happy Hill, Mississippi and its residents. Schuyler establishes the town's inhabitants as "blue-blooded Caucasians" who are deeply religious:

They were more proud, however, of the fact that Happy Hill was the home and birthplace of the True Faith Christ Lovers' Church, which made the

⁴⁴Schuyler. *Black No More*. 149.

⁴⁵Schuyler. *Black No More*. 73.

⁴⁶Schuyler. *Black No More*. 149.

⁴⁷Schuyler. *Black No More*. 77.

prodigious boast of being the most truly Fundamentalist of all the Christian sects in the United States. Other things of which the community might have boasted were its inordinately high illiteracy rate and its lynching record—but these things were seldom mentioned, although no one was ashamed of them.⁴⁸

In this excerpt, Schuyler once again links Christianity, ignorance (illiteracy rate) and violence. It is especially ironic that Happy Hill boasts of being fundamentalist Christians yet they seem to completely ignore one of the most important of Jesus' teachings; the Golden Rule. The townspeople see themselves as superior to Black people and make threats against them:

... there had been a sign nailed over the general store and post office reading, "NIGER REDE & RUN. IF U CAN'T REDE, RUN ENEVHOWE." The literate denizens of Happy Hill would sometimes stand off and spell out the words with the pride that usually accompanies erudition.⁴⁹

Schuyler points out the hypocrisy of Happy Hill condemning Black Americans for not being able to read, as they themselves cannot spell the simplest words like "read".

With the arrival of the "Black-No-More" treatment and the resulting "disappearance" of much of the Black population, the residents of Happy Hill have lost their custom of lynching any Black person who is unfortunate enough to find themselves in town. Therefore the residents of Happy Hill needs a new stimulant:

Now there was nothing left to stimulate them but the old time religion and the clandestine sex orgies that invariably and immediately followed the great revival meetings. So the simple country folk had turned to religion with renewed ardor.⁵⁰

They are given a new faith by Alex McPhule. McPhule is a religious charlatan whose new faith is ploy to gain personal prominence in the town. He tells the town that he has founded a new religion which will save them from an "Evil One". Because of his impressive theatricality, the residents accept the new faith with great enthusiasm. Before long McPhule becomes the de facto town leader. He even takes sexual advantage of the town's women:

As usual with gentlemen of the cloth, he was especially popular with the ladies. When the men were at work in the fields, the Man of God would visit house after house and comfort the womenfolk with his Christian mes-

⁴⁸Schuyler. *Black No More*. 203.

⁴⁹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 204.

⁵⁰Schuyler. *Black No More*. 205.

sage.⁵¹

McPhule believes that in order to convert everybody in the country to his flock, he will need the aid of a message straight from Heaven. He has an idea what the sign should look like: “If the Lord would only send him a nigger for his congregation to lynch!”⁵² He prays, but no Black person makes an appearance. Then, a bat flies through his window, circles his room, and flies out again. McPhule interprets this as a sign that God will send him a Black person to lynch on election day. When that day comes, Arthur Snobbcraft and Samuel Buggerie are fleeing an angry mob in airplane when they crash-land nearby. To avoid people recognizing them they disguise themselves using shoe polish. When they reach Happy Hill, the townspeople and McPhule are ecstatic, for the Lord has answered their prayers. Snobbcraft and Buggerie are brutalised and burned alive. Schuyler reinforces how ignorant people could be easily whipped up into mob violence using religion. His general dislike of religious ministers, represented by McPhule, is clearly presented. The ulterior motives of McPhule become even clearer after the burning:

Tomorrow his name would be in every newspaper in the United States. God had indeed answered his prayers. He breathed again his thanks as he thrust his hand into his pocket and felt the soothing touch of the hundred-dollar bill he had extracted from Snobbcraft’s pocket. He was supremely happy.⁵³

4.2.4 Class and labour

Schuyler clearly believes that the concept of race is artificial, or as scholars today put it, race is a social construct. Meaning that “somebody” manufactured it and is therefore stoking racial division present in American culture, as an excerpt from a newspaper in *Black No More* shows: “Day by day we see the color line which we have so laboriously established being rapidly destroyed.”⁵⁴ In *Black No More*, Schuyler reveals who is fuelling the racial divide in America and especially why they are doing it.

A central theme of the novel is that race is used as a distraction from more important issues:

⁵¹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 207.

⁵²Schuyler. *Black No More*. 208.

⁵³Schuyler. *Black No More*. 218.

⁵⁴Schuyler. *Black No More*. 50.

He saw in his great discovery the solution to the most annoying problem in American life. Obviously, he reasoned, if there were no Negroes, there could be no Negro problem. Without a Negro problem, Americans could concentrate their attention on something constructive.⁵⁵

For example, businessmen fan the flames of racism to divide and distract the working classes, thwarting their organizing efforts, and keeping their wages low and their working conditions poor. They do this to keep the cost of labour down, inviting new businesses and as a result enriching themselves:

... that unorganized labor meant cheap labor; that the guarantee of cheap labor was an effective means of luring new industries into the South; that so long as the ignorant white masses could be kept thinking of the menace of the Negro to Caucasian race purity and political control, they would give little thought to labor organization.⁵⁶

Schuyler depicts ordinary whites in many ways oppressing and being oppressed almost as much as Blacks. Without the “problem of race” they might feel kinship with their fellow Black countrymen and join together to improve their quality of life. The elites can not allow that to happen, so they divide and conquer the races:

They had first read of the activities of Black-No-More, Incorporated, with a secret feeling akin to relief but after the orators of the Knights of Nordica and the editorials of *The Warning* began to portray the menace confronting them, they forgot about their economic ills and began to yell for the blood of Dr. Crookman and his associates.⁵⁷

In chapter seven, Schuyler demonstrates how racial resentment is exploited to turn white workers against black workers and away from class-consciousness. Max Disher, alias Matthew Fisher, at this point a high-ranking member of the “Knights of Nordica”, receives a report that workers in a South Carolina plant aim to unionise to collectively fight against unfair wages and long hours. Matthew first calls the workers into a meeting where he lays the groundwork of his plan by reminding white workers that nothing is more important than maintaining white supremacy. He plants the idea in the workers minds that there might be some Black people in their midst. By insinuating that these Blacks would be harmful to the proposed union, he steers the white workers into a fight against their supposed Black co-workers instead of a fight against their real enemy, the rich factory owners. Matthew’s plan does not end here however. Next he sends a cou-

⁵⁵Schuyler. *Black No More*. 54.

⁵⁶Schuyler. *Black No More*. 65.

⁵⁷Schuyler. *Black No More*. 109.

ple of secret operatives to the factory who's job is to spread false rumours about the leader of the unionising effort, Swanson. Before long an allegation that Swanson is a former Black man turned white begins to circulate amidst the workforce. For recently whipped up white workers, this notion has a profound effect. Swanson's next strike meeting is attended by almost no one:

In a day or so it began to be noised about that Swanson, leader of the radical element, was really a former Negro from Columbia... When he called another strike meeting, no one came except a few of Fisher's men.⁵⁸

He is ignored and called a "nigger" which causes him to leave the city entirely. Some workers try to continue with the organising efforts but they are discredited in a similar way. Matthew is successful in crushing any chance of a worker's union getting formed by stoking racial resentment:

The mill hands kept so busy talking about Negro blood that no one thought of discussing wages and hours of labor...
... There were no rumors of strikes. The working people were far more interested in what they considered, or were told was, the larger issue of race.⁵⁹

It is quite ironic that the workers were agitated to oppose being led by a Black person in the union, yet it is Matthew, a Black man, who leads and fuels their hatred.

⁵⁸Schuyler. *Black No More*. 125-126.

⁵⁹Schuyler. *Black No More*. 130-131.

5 *A Different Drummer (1962)*

5.1 Plot

The novel opens on a short description of a fictitious southern state. As an imaginary, unnamed state it represents the South as a whole, and it being the only southern state unoccupied by the Union forces, it also serves as a symbol of the south's resistance towards more enlightened views. General Dewey Willson, a character symbolising the strong, unmoving, southern man is introduced as well. Afterwards, Kelley tells the story of the African, a symbolic character contrasting the General. The African is brought in chains on a slave ship to New Marsails. As the story is retold over generations it grew into a legend leading to the African's description being exaggerated. He is portrayed as a giant, more beast than man, carrying a baby in his arms. The African represents the strong-willed Blacks who refused to become slaves and resisted the dehumanising system until their deaths. Kelley contrasts the African with the slave auctioneer's Black assistant. The young assistant perfectly imitates his white master. He walks, talks and dresses just like the white auctioneer. He lacks any principles, only following money: "I'm an American; I'm no savage. And besides, a man's got to follow where his pocket takes him, doesn't he?"⁶⁰ He only follows the winner. First, he is with the white men, then he joins the escaped African's band, and later he betrays the African for a monetary reward. Kelley satirises the Blacks who betrayed their race and worked with their oppressors for personal gain.

The father of the General, Dewitt Willson is at the docks to pick up a grandfather clock shipped from Europe, but when he sees the African, he is stunned and proceeds to buy him. The African escapes together with the auctioneer's assistant and begins freeing slaves around the state with Dewitt Willson hunting him. The African keeps evading capture until he is betrayed. Guided into the African's camp by the assistant, Dewitt sees the African and understands that he will never be able to conquer him, so he shoots and kills him. Before his death, the African attempts to kill his own baby but Dewitt saves the child and takes him back to the farm. The child is named Caliban by young Dewey Willson and the relationship between the two families is born. After

⁶⁰Kelley, William Melvin. *A Different Drummer*. New York: Bantham Books, 1964. 17.

some years, the grandfather clock is given to the Calibans. The clock symbolises the connection between the Willsons and the Calibans, and whites and Blacks in the South generally. It is also a symbol of the European culture that was forced on Black people by their masters.

Next, Kelley describes the event which sparks the exodus of Black people from the state. Following their usual routine, several white men are sitting on a porch in town one morning when a driver of a truck loaded with salt stops and asks them for directions to Tucker Caliban's farm. The men point him in the direction where he wants to go and when he leaves, they speculate why Tucker ordered the salt. Later, Stewart, a white man, speedily drives his wagon into town and tells the men on the porch that he saw Tucker salting his land. The men, led by the old man Mister Harper, quickly hop on the wagon and make their way to Tucker's farm. Once there, they see Tucker throwing salt all over his farm. After he is done salting his fields, he kills his horse and cow before destroying the grandfather clock and cutting down the tree which marked the boundary of the Willson plantation, thereby severing all the bonds between the Willsons and the Calibans. Tucker and his wife Bethrah ignore the white people. They even refuse any help offered by a Black man, Wallace Bedlow, introducing the primary theme of the novel; individualism. Every individual must free themselves without outside help.

The day after Tucker's departure, other Black people in Sutton begin leaving and heading north. As they see more and more Blacks depart, the white people in the town become progressively more curious:

Some of these were even so dull as to ask Mister Harper why the Negroes were leaving (which they should have known) and where they were going (which did not matter and could not be answered unless they were to ask each Negro individually)...⁶¹

The white people naively believe that the Blacks are happy in their current situation and as such should have no reason to want to leave. The same day Reverend Bennett T. Bradshaw arrives in Sutton. He attempts to reconstruct the events of the previous day and he is unhappy to learn that Blacks in the South are freeing themselves.

The rest of the novel is told from the perspective of the white Willson family. Dewey

⁶¹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 49.

Willson returns home from university and is bewildered when he learns from his family about Tucker destroying his land and leaving the South. Not believing their account, he goes to find out what really happened. At Tucker's farm he meets Bradshaw and together they drive to the New Marsails Municipal Depot where they ask one of the Blacks leaving the State about his reasons for departing. They learn that, inspired by Tucker's actions, Blacks have realised that they are free to liberate themselves.

Dymphna Willson recalls her relationship with Tucker's wife Bethrah. The two first meet when Bethrah comes to the Willson house to apply for a job as maid. Through her friendship with Bethrah, Dymphna becomes more aware of the difficulties faced by Black people in the South. Bethrah eventually marries Tucker. One year into their marriage they have a baby, but Bethrah admits to Dymphna to not understanding Tucker. As a highly educated woman, Bethrah thinks before she acts whereas Tucker simply acts without thinking. After a while, Bethrah begins to see that Tucker's way is correct and she supports him when he decides to leave.

The antepenultimate chapter tells the story of Camille Willson and her marriage to David Willson. Camille tells the story of their courtship and the beginning of their marriage. Camille loved David very much, always wanting to be near him. Even though she did not fully understand him, she trusted him and that was enough for her. When she became pregnant with Dewey, David was fired from his job. Camille admits she did not fully comprehend the situation, but was still willing to move to New York with David; he, however, was not. David becomes part of the system he despises. As a result of David's broken conscience his marriage falls apart. David and Camille rarely talk to each other, and Camille starts feeling like a stranger in the Willson house. One day, she asks young Tucker whether a princess should leave her prince who has become cold towards her. To her surprise Tucker understands that the story reflects real people, and he says that the princess should stay with the prince because, one day, the prince would be himself again.

The penultimate chapter takes the form of a series of excerpts from David Willson's diary. While studying at Harvard University, David attends a socialist meeting where he meets a Black man, Bennett T. Bradshaw. The two become friends and they discuss social issues together. Bradshaw has to move back home to New York before being

able to finish school but he finds a job at the National Society for Colored Affairs. After graduating, David starts writing liberal articles and sends them to Bradshaw who gets them published in various newspapers. After a while, David is fired from his job and smeared as a communist. Bradshaw writes to David telling him to move to New York where he will be able to find new employment but even though Camille urges him to go, David is scared and unwilling to make the move. David and Camille instead move back in with David's family and David starts collecting rents for his father.

The novel ends similarly to *Black No More*, on a violent lynching. As the last of the Blacks have left the state, the white men on the porch are pondering the impact the Black Exodus will have on their lives. At first, they figure that they will be better off without Black people:

“Sure! What we need them for anyways? Look what’s happening in Mississippi or over in Alabama. We don’t have to worry about that no more. We got us a new start, like the fellow says. Now we can live like we always lived and don’t have to worry about no nigger come a-knocking at the door, wanting to sit at our supper tables.”⁶²

But then one of the men, Loomis, points out that menial labour will now have to be done by whites:

“I just ain’t sure it’s all to the good. You never had no WHITE folks sweeping around in stores, only colored. You getting a job sweeping now, Stewart? That’s the only job you really good for.”⁶³

The satire of white people in the South thinking of Blacks only as servants and unskilled labourers can be found throughout the book. A different man, Bobby-Joe, then declares that it is “that nigger preacher”, Bennett Bradshaw, who is responsible for the departure of all Blacks from the state. After some back and forth, most of the men agree with him and Bobby-Joe threatens violence if he sees Bradshaw again. At that moment Bradshaw and Dewey arrive into town, the men see Bradshaw's car and Bobby-Joe runs after it screaming. The chauffeur, thinking he had hit something, stops the car. The men surround the car, open the door and drag Bradshaw out of the vehicle. Dewey attempts to reason with them, telling the men that Bradshaw had nothing to do with the Blacks leaving, but none of the men listen to him. Bradshaw is first beaten but then Bobby-Joe says that since Bradshaw is their “last nigger, ever” they should

⁶²Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 168.

⁶³Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 169.

make him sing an old plantation song. As he is being humiliated by this mob of racists, Bradshaw finally understands why Black people have left without needing any organisation or leadership. Because of his British accent, Bradshaw sings the song without a hint of a “traditional” Black inflection which the men do not like. They load Bradshaw into the car and speed of toward Tucker Caliban’s farm. In the very last scene in the novel, Mister Leland is awakened by sounds of the lynching. He hears screams and men laughing and he imagines that Tucker is back and having a party. He plans that in the morning, he and his younger brother Walter will walk over to Tucker’s farm and have a happy reunion with Tucker. His fantasy is a sharp contrast to what is actually happening at the farm.

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 Characters

Tucker Caliban

Tucker Caliban, a Black man of small stature is seen only through the eyes of whites. The essence of Tucker's character is individualism. In the chapter "Dymphna Willson" at a party with Bethrah's friends, the question of race comes up. One of Bethrah's friends is a officer in the local chapter of the "National Society for Colored Affairs" (a substitute for the NAACP). Bethrah had let her membership lapse and wants to renew it:

Bethrah said, "Tucker, give him a dollar for me, will you please?" Tucker just sat there, his face angry-looking and said, "No."⁶⁴

Bethrah at first attributes Tucker's refusal as him worrying about money, but Tucker quickly makes his true feelings known:

"They ain't working for my rights. Ain't nobody working for my rights; I wouldn't let them."...

... "Ain't none of my battles being fought in no courts. I'm fighting all my battles myself."

"You can't fight all this alone. What battles?"

"My very own battles... all mine, and either I beat them or they beat me. And ain't no piece of cardboard making no difference in how it turns out."⁶⁵

Tucker believes that every individual must act towards his own freedom, not wait until someone else does it for them nor wait for any collective organization. Tucker mocks the work of Civil Rights groups in America as he sums up all of their work as merely "a piece of cardboard". Tucker's dismissal of the Civil Rights battles fought in the courts is important as well. Kelley satirises the "legal arm of the NAACP", the Legal Defense and Educational Fund and its founder, Thurgood Marshall. The LDF, led by Marshall, successfully argued several landmark Civil Rights cases in front of the Supreme Court of the United States, the most famous one being *Brown v. Board of Education* which ended racial segregation in public schools.⁶⁶

Tucker is the great-great-grandson of "the African", an African chief who was brought

⁶⁴Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 96.

⁶⁵Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 97-98.

⁶⁶"Thurgood Marshall". *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thurgood_Marshall. 1 July 2022.

to America to be sold into slavery. Numerous references to biblical myths throughout the novel apply to the African. Because of his great size and strength, the African is likened to Samson, an Israelite leader who was betrayed in his sleep and enslaved.⁶⁷ The African has twelve followers, one of whom betrays him, echoing Jesus's Twelve Disciples.⁶⁸ The African also attempts to kill his own baby son mirroring Abraham ordered by God to sacrifice his son Isaac.⁶⁹ Biblical undertones continue with Tucker. Tucker is not a giant like his African ancestor. He is small, with a high-pitched voice. He is the modern David slaying the Goliath of racial oppression in the South. The surname "Caliban", given to the son of the African by "the General", is a reference to a character from William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Caliban in the aforementioned play is a son of a sorceress; half man, half monster. After the death of his mother, Caliban is enslaved by Prospero. Caliban hates having to serve and is constantly rebelling against his master. Prospero represents a "civilised coloniser" and Caliban serves as an image of an "uncivilised native" of an island either off the coast of Africa or in the Caribbean.⁷⁰ By having the General, who embodies the South, give the surname Caliban to the African's son, Kelly satirises the view of racist white people that Blacks are "crude barbarians" in need of refinement. Howard Faulkner offers another possible reason behind the surname Caliban:

From another myth comes Tucker's last name, Caliban; the source word from which that name derived leads to a further connection with the like-sounding name Hannibal. Before Tucker leads blacks from the South, he salts his land and burns his house. It is as of the land in this new Carthage has become too corrupt to continue to bear life. Twice Kelley refers to Tucker's forces as herds of elephants which complacent white people do not see.⁷¹

Tucker Caliban symbolises the new Black man in America. He is a determined fighter, cognizant of the injustices committed against him and his family, and retaining a con-

⁶⁷"Samson". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samson>. 11 June 2022.

⁶⁸"Apostle". *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Apostle>. 11 June 2022.

⁶⁹"Binding of Isaac". *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binding_of_Isaac. 11 June 2022.

⁷⁰"Significance of Caliban in Shakespeare's The Tempest". *bachelorandmaster.com*. <https://www.bachelorandmaster.com/globaldrama/significance-of-caliban-in-tempest.html>. 12 June 2022.

⁷¹Faulkner, Howard. "THE USES OF TRADITION: WILLIAM MELVIN KELLEY'S 'A DIFFERENT DRUMMER'". *Modern Fiction Studies* 21.4 (1975): 539.

nection to his African roots.

The Willsons

Through the character of David Willson, Kelley presents a satirical look at a failed white liberal. David tries to fight against the oppression of Blacks in the South and his heritage but ultimately fails and becomes a part of the system he despises. While studying at Harvard, David attends a socialist meeting where he meets Bennett Bradshaw. David is surprised to find a Black person that is intelligent, friendly, and sounds British:

I suppose it was a combination of the following: (1) that he seemed to feel exactly as I felt about the uselessness of the meeting, (2) that he, a negro, should lean over and speak to me so brazenly, so openly, so friendly, (3) or that he was such an (this word may not be exactly right) exotic figure with his British accent.⁷²

Liberal thinking white people in the South still carry prejudices concerning Black people. The two strike a friendship and through Bennett, David learns a great deal about the race issue in America. Still David never fully overcomes his southern background. For instance, he only dates southern women. When he first meets Camille, he even comments about his dislike of the liberal, “hippie”, Northern women:

She was not like the others there at all, not noisy or a Bohemian. She hardly opened her mouth.⁷³

David does not want to be a part of the system oppressing Blacks in the South, as he writes in his diary: “I do not want to go home and collect rents for my father.”⁷⁴ For a little while, he succeeds. After graduating, David returns home and works as a news reporter, writing anti-racism articles under a pseudonym. However, when his employers find out some of his writings have been published in a Communist newspaper, he is fired from his job, smeared as a Communist, and becomes unable to find new employment. Coupled with the fact that Camille is pregnant, David is unwilling to move North personally and free himself like Tucker will later do. He dismisses Camille’s willingness to move:

But I suspect this is just her concept of stoic and unwordly southern womanhood. I do not think she really wants to go. I think she is more afraid

⁷²Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 139.

⁷³Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 153.

⁷⁴Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 141.

than I am, if this is possible.⁷⁵

Hiding behind Camille, attributing her with the lack of courage to renounce their comfortable, Southern life, David and Camille move back in with David's family. A one sentence long entry in David's journal perfectly captures the tragedy of David's character: "I collected rents for my father."⁷⁶ He has given up on all of his earlier principles, and himself. What further cements David as a failed fighter against his heritage is his children's names. When Camille becomes pregnant with their first child, David notes: "If I am going to be a Daddy, I think I will break with Willson tradition, will not give the child a name beginning with "D."⁷⁷ In Kelley's ironic twist of fate, David ends up giving both of his children names beginning with "D". He names his daughter Dymphna, and his son Dewey III, which not only begins with a "D" but is also the name of the General, Dewey Willson, a character who symbolises the South's racism. David continuously wrestles with his conscience, especially when he receives letters from Bradshaw reminding him that he has forsaken his ideals. Kelley satirises the "fair-weather liberal" who may not be prejudiced against Blacks, yet discriminates against them anyway. When Tucker asks to buy a piece of land from David, Tucker answers David's question in an angry tone and David responds like one of the Southern white supremacists:

Perhaps I'm a southerner after all because his almost surly attitude got to me and I snapped at him. "You shouldn't speak that way, Tucker. It can get you into serious trouble."⁷⁸

Dymphna Willson has a contrasting character to her brother Dewey III. She starts out similar to Dewey, holding stereotypical views about Black women and not otherwise really noticing the Black people around her. However, unlike Dewey she manages to overcome some of her shortcomings through her friendship with Bethrah. Dewey and Tucker never develop any sort of a friendly relationship because Dewey only sees Tucker as a servant, and he is not interested in Tucker's state of mind. Dymphna on the other hand, gets to know Bethrah, becoming more aware of the difficulties that Blacks face in the South. Named after the Christian Saint from Ireland, St. Dymphna was the daughter of the petty king Damon. Similarly, Dymphna Willson is the daughter

⁷⁵Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 156.

⁷⁶Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 158.

⁷⁷Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 155.

⁷⁸Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 162.

of David Willson who, as the head of the Willson family, holds considerable power in the State, like the petty Irish king. St. Dymphna took a vow of chastity and died defending it⁷⁹; Dymphna Willson also defends her virginity when a boy sexually assaults her.

Reverend Bennett T. Bradshaw

Like David Willson, Bradshaw is a tragic character, a Black counterpart to David. While studying at Harvard, Bradshaw pledges to fight the oppressive system. Interestingly, he not only criticises the white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan, but also denounces Black leaders such as Martin Luther King:

My people, too, need something new, something vital. In my opinion, their leadership has followed in the footsteps of the negro overseers of plantation times. Each is out for himself and money is the thing.⁸⁰

After losing his mother, Bradshaw is forced to leave Harvard to take care of his siblings. He joins the staff of the National Society for Colored Affairs. For a while, Bradshaw keeps to his ideals. In Kelley's satirical twist of fate, like David, he loses his job because of affiliations with a communist newspaper, Bradshaw becomes what he once hated, a Black "leader":

*After the NSCA gave him the gate, finding all other gates closed to him, Bradshaw decided to sneak in by the back door of race relations: religion. Says he: "It's true that I received my calling soon after my forced resignation from the Society, but I assure you, one thing has nothing to do with the other."*⁸¹

In the chapter titled "Mister Leland", Bradshaw arrives in Sutton to find out about Tucker Caliban. When he appears in Sutton, he is shown to possess influence akin to wealthy white families like the Willsons. He has a chauffeur, chrome plated car, golden sunglasses and a golden cross on a gold chain. He also ignores the protocol established for Blacks in the South because he does not use "Sir" when addressing white characters. Bradshaw mainly addresses Mister Leland, disregarding the older men on the porch. He is showing his disdain for the "Old South" as he recognises Mister Leland as a representative of the new Southern society, one which will hopefully treat Blacks with dignity and respect. When Mister Leland describes Tucker's destruc-

⁷⁹"St. Dymphna". *Catholic Online*. https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=222. 20 June 2022.

⁸⁰Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 140.

⁸¹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 158.

tion of the grandfather clock, Bradshaw shows his contempt toward the uneducated, lower-class Blacks: “Isn’t that gloriously primitive!”⁸² His vocabulary “primitive” is akin to a white supremacist. In the article “The Ivy League Negro”, Kelley expands on these attitudes of the “educated” Blacks.⁸³ When talking to Mister Leland, Bradshaw also demonstrates his expertise in manipulating white people. When Mister Leland refuses to reveal the content of his final conversation with Tucker, Bradshaw drops his British accent and uses language that Mister Leland is used to hearing from Black people:

Then miraculously, the Negro began to talk almost like Wallace Bedlow or Tucker himself would have talked. “I won’t make you tell no tales out-a-school, Mister Leland. What your friends tells you in secret is supposen to stay secret.” He paused and added, “Don’t you reckon that’s so, Mister Leland?”⁸⁴

Later on in the novel, Bradshaw and Dewey visit a depot where they ask one of the Blacks about his reasons for leaving the South. He tells them that he and all of the other Black people have simply come to realise that they are free to leave. Tucker’s actions have already become a legend; however, Kelley makes it clear that the Blacks are not sheep just following their leader Tucker, but that every individual had freed themselves. Because of this, Bradshaw is convinced that he has become useless. All of his material luxuries came from the need for Black leaders, but now such need is gone:

The day is fast coming, Mister Willson, when people will realize there isn’t any need for me and people like me. Perhaps for me that day has come already. Your Tuckers will get up and say: I can do anything I want; I don’t need to wait for someone to give me freedom; I can take it myself. I don’t need Mister Leader, Mister Boss, Mister President, Mister Priest, or Mister Minister, or Reverend Bradshaw. I don’t need anyone. I can do whatever I want for myself by myself.” . . .
 . . . “But this is what you always wanted, what you Negro leaders worked for. These are your people and they’re freeing themselves.”
 “Yes, and they’ve made me obsolete. How would you like to awake to find yourself obsolete? It’s not particularly heartening or pretty, Mister Willson. Not pretty in the least.”⁸⁵

Kelley criticises Martin Luther King Jr. Bradshaw is a caricature of King. The sim-

⁸²Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 58.

⁸³Kelley, William Melvin. “The Ivy League Negro”. *Esquire* 60 (1963): 54-56.

⁸⁴Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 58.

⁸⁵Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 118-119.

ilarities between them are apparent: both attend Harvard University and Bradshaw becomes a reverend same as King. King advocated for a non-violent resistance against discrimination and “loving your enemies”⁸⁶. Kelley does not agree with this approach, he believes that Black people should be angry and act individually to free themselves. Tucker Caliban’s successful step which frees him and others who follow his example is fundamentally a violent act. Tucker’s destruction of his farmland and killing of his livestock can be seen as a stand-in for violent activism, and it succeeds where Bradshaw fails. Kelley is against King as he does not believe in Black “leaders”, he aligns more with Malcolm X, as he does not see him as a “leader”.⁸⁷ However, Kelley’s view that King’s non-violent approach is fruitless is unfounded. King was extremely effective. His activism was crucial to the desegregation of Montgomery public bus service, the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and more important victories for Black civil rights.⁸⁸

Harry and Harold Leland

The Leland’s are important characters as they represent Kelley’s hopeful outlook on the future of the South. Among the group of men gathered on the porch, only Harry is at least partially aware of the mistreatment of Blacks in the South. By raising his son, Harold, to be respectful and polite towards Black people, Harry is trying to do something. For instance, he teaches his eight-year-old son Harold, nicknamed Mister Leland, not to use the term “nigger”:

“You remember why?” Harry did not want to sound too stern: *It’s hard for him. Everybody uses it hereabouts. It’s even hard for me not to use it.*
 “You said it was a bad name and that you don’t call nobody a bad name unless you want to hurt them.”⁸⁹

Harry recognises that the South is changing, and he prepares Harold for a new, better society:

“Someday, when you get to be my age, things may not be the same as they is now, and you got to be ready for that, you see? If you’re like some

⁸⁶King, Martin Luther, Jr. ““Loving Your Enemies,” Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church”. *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church>. 30 June 2022.

⁸⁷Blec. "Story of a Life: A Conversation with William Melvin Kelley". 27.

⁸⁸"Martin Luther King Jr.". *Wikipedia*. 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King_Jr.. 30 June 2022.

⁸⁹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 29.

of my friends, you won't be able to get on with all kinds of folks. You understand?"⁹⁰

However, like David Willson, Harry has his weaknesses. Harry lacks the courage to confront people, which becomes apparent when he is sent by his wife to visit the sickly Miss Rickett, but sends his son instead. When Harold uses the phrase "good nigger" when referring to Tucker, Harry's unwillingness to oppose people prevents him from lecturing his son immediately, as they are not alone. However, despite all his faults, Harry is a positive character. Harry understands that Tucker is not crazy: "*Craziness ain't driving him.*"⁹¹, and he also defends Tucker's rights: "It's his land. He can do anything he wants to it."⁹² Furthermore, Harry describes the departure of Blacks from the South as a courageous move:

I reckon they making what we called in the Army a STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL. That's when you got thirty men and the other side got thirty thousand and you turn and run saying to yourself, 'Shucks, ain't no use in being brave and getting ourselves killed. We'll back up a ways and maybe fight some tomorrow.' I reckon them Negroes is backing up all the way." "Don't that make them scaredy cats, Papa?" "Don't think so. Seems like this time it should take more guts to go, boy."⁹³

Kelley presents Harold, together with Dymphna Willson, as the future of Southern, white society. He is addressed "Mister" same as Mister Harper, the old man symbolising the "Old South", signifying the eventual replacement of Mister Harper as the South's cultural representative by Harold. The renouncement of the "old", racist, Southern principles by the "new" generation of Southern whites is implied by Harold's dislike of Mister Harper: "*Funny how he don't like Mister Harper, who never done him no harm.*"⁹⁴ As Harold is exposed to contradictions to his father's liberal teachings, he still possesses some racist attitudes that surround him daily. For example, a few times he begins to say "nigger" only to correct himself to "ni-gro".⁹⁵ He is nevertheless far more tolerant than the older white characters and the Black characters recognise this as well. Harold is treated contrastingly to other white characters by Blacks on three different occasions. First, Tucker buys him a bag of peanuts and acknowledges the way

⁹⁰Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 29.

⁹¹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 36.

⁹²Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 36.

⁹³Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 51.

⁹⁴Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 28.

⁹⁵Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 56.

in which Harry is raising him: “Tell your pa I knows what he trying to do with you.”⁹⁶, later when Tucker is leaving after destroying his land, Harold is the only character that Tucker chooses to talk to, ignoring all of the other, older men. Lastly, when Reverend Bennett T. Bradshaw arrives in Sutton, he similarly ignores the older whites on the porch, addressing only Harold.

5.2.2 Race relations in the South

One of the main objects of Kelley’s satire in *A Different Drummer* is racism in the South. As the entire novel is told from the perspective of Caucasian characters only, Kelley cleverly captures how Blacks are lower caste citizens in the unnamed southern State and the American South generally.

In a flashback chapter titled “One Long Ago Autumn Birthday”, Kelley paints a picture concerning race relations in the South. In this chapter, the treatment of Blacks in Southern American society is depicted. On the morning of his tenth birthday, Dewey Willson III discovers his present, a new bicycle. Dewey, longing to learn how to ride it begins searching for Tucker, who is a servant of the Willson family. Tucker is only three years older than Dewey, yet he is already saddled with chores, such as helping his almost seventy-five-year-old grandfather: “Tucker was doing most of the work, though he was only thirteen and could barely reach the top of the car doors.”⁹⁷ The fact that the Black old man, who should already be retired, and the Black young boy are the ones working while the white boy is looking to play is important. Kelley is satirically pointing out the hierarchy between Black people and their “masters” in the South. Even though Tucker is busy with helping his grandfather, not once does Dewey think to ask somebody else, for example his own father. It is taken for granted that teaching him to ride a bike is a job for the Black boy. Here Kelley is describing the absence of a relationship between Dewey and his father. Black servants in the South were often tasked with raising their “master’s” children⁹⁸ so such dependence on Black help would not be uncommon.

Later that day, when Tucker is finished with his work, he takes Dewey to an empty

⁹⁶Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 42.

⁹⁷Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 67.

⁹⁸“More Slavery at the South”. *The Independent* 72.3292 (1912): 196-200.

parking lot to teach him how to ride the bicycle. The subservient role of Blacks is shown again as Tucker has basically no free time to himself. After working all day, he must still spend time with Dewey. After several attempts, Dewey finally rides the bike without falling. However, it has taken him so long that they return home late for dinner. Importantly, even though Dewey was the one who wanted to stay and keep trying to learn, it is Tucker who is punished:

He was supposed to be the responsible one; it was up to him to keep track of time, but he had not kept track of it or so it seemed to Dewey's father, who had spoken to John about it, who had instructed his daughter-in-law to make the punishment one to be remembered. And so as Dewey ate dinner that night, he could hear the smacking of the hot strap across Tucker's buttocks.⁹⁹

It is significant that Tucker is held responsible for white boy's tardiness. Tucker is a servant and as such cannot order Dewey around. Dewey also regularly ignores Tucker's advice, as evident by Dewey still wearing sneakers while riding despite Tucker suggesting otherwise. Kelley satirises the unreasonable demands placed on Black people in the South.

The very next chapter, dubbed "The Willsons", is told from Dewey's point of view. In it, Kelley satirises white people's inability to grasp the humiliation faced by Black Americans. Dewey, now eighteen-years-old, receives a letter from Tucker while at college:

Dear Dewey:

I hope you're well. I'm fine myself. So is Bethrah. So is the baby. The reason I wrote is because I wanted to ask you if you remember when I taught you to ride a bike? That was a very important day for you. I remember you wanted to learn a lot. I am glad I could teach you. But you would have learned anyway, because you wanted to learn so much. When you were home for Christmas you wanted me to write to you. Well, I wanted to ask you about the bike.

*Sincerely yours,
Tucker Caliban¹⁰⁰*

As Dewey himself finds: "it was the simplest of letters"¹⁰¹, yet Dewey cannot discern the meaning of Tucker's words: "Tucker's message, written in a code he could not

⁹⁹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 70.

¹⁰⁰Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 73-74.

¹⁰¹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 73.

remember or had never known, evaded him.”¹⁰² The “code”, however, is quite simple. Dewey’s bicycle represents the humiliation Tucker has faced the day he taught Dewey to ride it, and by extension it is a symbol of the humiliation he has faced all his life serving the Willsons. Through Dewey, Kelley is satirising white people’s complete lack of understanding of the indignity and injustice suffered by Blacks. This satire can be found throughout the novel. The white characters do not at all fathom the reasons behind Tucker salting his land, killing his animals, and burning his house. They come up with wild theories instead of reflecting on the way they treat Black people. They attempt to explain Tucker’s actions by genetics:

... But the way I see it, it’s pure genetics: something special in the blood. And if anybody in this world got something special in his blood, his name is Tucker Caliban.¹⁰³

As well as insanity: “Maybe we should call someone to come and take him away. He’s gone crazy.”¹⁰⁴

In the same chapter, Kelley also touches on the “invisibility” of Black people. Dewey arrives home by train. While he disembarks, a large number of Blacks are present at the station, preparing to leave the South. Later, when he is recalling how the station looked when he arrived. He cannot recollect the considerable crowd of Black people:

... he could not remember whether he had taken notice of the great number of Negroes on the platform, in the colored waiting room; could not remember the many thoughtful dark faces of the men or that they wore newly pressed suits and clean shirts or that most of them carried chipped leather suitcases or frayed cloth carpetbags or shopping bags crammed with clothing, sheets, blankets, and pictures;¹⁰⁵

The only Black people that Dewey remembers seeing are the Black porters working at the station:

He remembered there had been Negroes, there had always been Negroes at the depot, the porters in their gray suits and red hats, but he had not taken notice of the many others there that day or that most of them were boarding outgoing trains.¹⁰⁶

Dewey only notices the Black porters who are dressed accordingly for their job. He completely ignores Blacks who are dressed in their best attire. Using this contrast, Kel-

¹⁰²Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 73.

¹⁰³Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 5.

¹⁰⁴Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 36.

¹⁰⁵Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 74.

¹⁰⁶Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 75.

ley is satirising the habit of white people to completely disregard any Black individuals unless they are in service positions.

Kelley explores and satirises racist tendencies and stereotypes prevalent in the South. A chapter titled “Dymphna Willson”, told from Dymphna’s perspective, begins with Bethrah arriving to the Willson household to apply for a maid’s job. Right away her appearance stuns both Dymphna and her mother: “She didn’t look at all like a maid. Maids are fat and very dark and have thick Negro accents.”¹⁰⁷ Kelley’s ridicule of white people stereotyping Black women is clear here. As Dymphna is one the younger a more “progressive” characters, she and Bethrah become good friends. However, as forward thinking as Dymphna is, she still possesses some racial biases. She acknowledges the Southern society’s racist anti-interracial relationship stance, yet she selfishly believes that it is a good thing:

And a good thing about having HER for a friend was that she was colored and there wouldn’t be any competition between us as far as boys were concerned, because that kind of thing always makes girls enemies even if they’re very close.¹⁰⁸

Dymphna’s racist attitudes are more subtle, but they still exist. For example, when she asks Bethrah for advice on her personal life, she thinks: “It sounded really strange asking her opinion when she was colored.”¹⁰⁹ It does not matter to Dymphna that Bethrah is older, more experienced, well educated, and that they are good friends. The fact is, a white person asking a Black one for advice is “strange”. This theme is repeated later in the novel when Camille Willson is asking young Tucker for advice on her relationship with David:

He looked straight at me, like an old friend who knew about David and me and was telling me what to do. “Because the prince, he’ll wake up one of these days and he’ll make it all right.”
It made me feel nervous, and stupid, and a little crazy. He couldn’t know; he was only nine. But I felt nervous anyway.¹¹⁰

Kelley is satirising white people’s opinion that Blacks are not perceptive enough to understand the life and issues of white people. Kelley also ridicules the “master - servant” relationship of whites and Blacks in the South. Even though Dymphna and

¹⁰⁷Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 84.

¹⁰⁸Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 85.

¹⁰⁹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 88.

¹¹⁰Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 131.

Bethrah have become good friends, Bethrah still feels compelled to address Bethrah as “miss”:

... Good night, Miss Dymphna.” That sounded strange after we’d been so close.

“Bethrah, don’t you call me that. You call me Dee or Dymphnie like everyone else.”

“All right, but just when we’re alone. Your mother might not like it.”¹¹¹

It was common in the South for the Black servants to address, even very young, white children of their “masters” using titles, such as “Massa”¹¹² and there are more examples of Kelley poking fun at this habit. Such as at the beginning of the novel, when Harry and Harold Leland meet Wallace Bedlow, an old Black man:

*Like Papa is older than him, which ain’t so because when Wallace Bedlow takes off his hat, you can see crinkly gray hairs. Still he calls Papa SIR the same’s I’d call him or my papa SIR.*¹¹³

The chapter “Dewey Willson III” provides a great observation of race relations in the South and the mentality of white people. While trying to understand the reasons behind Tucker’s behaviour, Dewey recalls the day when Tucker’s grandfather, John Caliban, passed away. The way in which the news of John’s passing is delivered illustrates the subordinate position of Blacks and the lack of respect of white people towards them. Firstly, it is the Willsons, and specifically Dewey himself, who receives the call with the news, not John’s own family, the Calibans. Secondly, the manner in which the white bus driver delivering the news talks about John shows that he does not regard John as his equal, more so as property: “Got a nigger here in the depot, old man, dropped dead. What you want me to do with the body?”¹¹⁴ Dewey rides with the Calibans to pick up John’s body. Ironically, he even thinks: “I felt strange riding with so many Negroes, even though they were my friends.”¹¹⁵ Dewey is encroaching on and usurping what should be Tucker’s masculine role as the now oldest male member of the Caliban family. Furthermore, when they arrive at the depot police office, the bus driver only speaks to Dewey, ignoring the Calibans riding along, even though it

¹¹¹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 89.

¹¹²Davis, Ronald. L. F. “JIM CROW ETIQUETTE - SEPTEMBER 2006”. *Ferris State University*. <https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/question/2006/september.htm>. 22 May 2022.

¹¹³Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 48.

¹¹⁴Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 106.

¹¹⁵Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 106.

is their family member that had died. The bus driver also reveals why the Willsons received the call instead of the Calibans: “I went and found the PO-lice and they went through his clothes and come up with your number, was all.”¹¹⁶ It is significant that the only thing that John has on himself is the Willson phone number; even though slavery ended, Blacks in the South are still tied to their “masters”. Kelley is satirising the fact that because white people do not see Black people as competent enough to handle their own affairs, Blacks are therefore locked into a dependent role in Southern society.

During John’s funeral service, the preacher, recalling John’s life, is stressing John’s service to the Willson family:

Well, he never went into business; he worked all his life for one family, and I knows by the way he talked about them, he liked them, and he never felt like it was a job he was doing for them, almost like he would do it anyways, even if they didn’t pay him.¹¹⁷

It is ironic that the preacher is basically describing slavery. He also emphasises John’s sacrificial nature: “John Caliban was the kind of man would always sacrifice himself to help others.”¹¹⁸ All this angers Tucker, who stands up says in disbelief: “Sacrifice? Is THAT all? Is that really all? Sacrifice be damned!”¹¹⁹ Andrew Sargent explains why this moment is so important:

This pivotal moment explains why Tucker will go on to destroy his farm and leave The State: in expressing his “disgust” at his grandfather’s life of seemingly contented subservience—“Is THAT all? Is that really all?”—Tucker blasts an entire history in which African Americans are expendable commodities born to serve whites. Tucker has risen from his church pew not only to lament his grandfather’s wasted life but also to “damn” the banal normalcy of black sacrifice in a white supremacist culture.¹²⁰

Dewey recalling all of this still does not understand Tucker’s reaction to his grandfather’s death. The only thing he can come up with that was wrong is that John died on a segregated bus: “An old man dies, whom I too loved a great deal, and the last thing he sees is the COLORED sign on a segregated bus, but that is little more than

¹¹⁶Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 107.

¹¹⁷Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 108.

¹¹⁸Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 109.

¹¹⁹Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 109.

¹²⁰Sargent, Andrew. “To Counter a *Mockingbird*: Black Sacrifice, White Heroism, and Racial Innocence in William Melvin Kelley’s *A Different Drummer*”. *African American Review* 51.1 (2018): 41.

ironic.”¹²¹ Through Dewey, Kelley is ridiculing white people’s blindness to the suffering of Southern Blacks and the tragedy of black life.

¹²¹ Kelley. *A Different Drummer*. 110.

6 Conclusion

In this thesis I analysed two novels by two lesser-known African American novelists of the 20th century. The main focus of my analysis were the satirical elements of these novels. George Schuyler was writing *Black No More* while segregation was in full effect in the South. Black people want to escape the suffering of Black life and the white's bigotry they face every day. A scientific invention promises to deliver a utopia to Blacks that they always dreamed of, however, as *Black No More* is an anti-utopian novel, it does not work out in the end. Schuyler satire targets many different topics in this book. The main objects of ridicule are, of course, race and racism. But Schuyler also ridicules religion, the political system, and more. As Schuyler wrote *Black No More* during a time when he was aligned with socialist philosophy, the novel contains quite a lot of leftist ideas. Schuyler deeply sympathises with the labouring class, Black or white, and clearly supports labour union. He blasts the ruling class for using race to divide the workers. As Schuyler got older, he became more and more conservative and I believe some of his conservatism makes an appearance in *Black No More*, mainly his criticism of the Civil Rights movement. The caricatures of prominent Black leaders of 1930s, such as Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. DuBois are clear, but I think that the entire "Black-No-More" treatment can be seen as an allegory for forced integration using changes in law, something which Schuyler was vehemently against. Schuyler believed that using the force of law to compel the white public to change attitude toward Black people would not work¹²². In the novel, the "forced integration" of Blacks by changing their skin colour does not work either, in the end the issue of race still exists.

In comparison with Schuyler, Kelley's satire in *A Different Drummer* is narrower and much more subtle. The main target being white people's complete lack of understanding of the misery of Black life in the South. Using only white point of view, Kelley brilliantly portrays both conscious and unconscious racism. Interestingly, each of the two authors life situations come through in their respective works. Schuyler was quite successful author, his novels and articles sold well enough for him to make a decent living, and *Black No More* portrays the higher classes of American society, Black and

¹²²Ebeling, Richard M. "George S. Schuyler, Anti-Racist Champion of Liberty". *AMERICAN INSTITUTE for ECONOMIC RESEARCH*. 2019. <https://www.aier.org/article/george-s-schuyler-anti-racist-champion-of-liberty/>. 6 July 2022.

white. Kelley, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. Only his first novel *A Different Drummer* was marginally profitable, all of his later works failed to turn a profit. As a result, he lived most of his life near poverty, and *A Different Drummer* depicts lower class people. Like *Black No More*, I suspect that the message of *A Different Drummer* is Kelley's criticism of the Civil Rights movement. Through Tucker Caliban's violent act of self-emancipation, Kelley denounces Martin Luther King Jr.'s peaceful approach to equality.

Even though, I ended up disagreeing with some of the messaging in both of these novels, I very much enjoyed reading and analysing them. I think they both have a lot to say, and their themes are still relevant today. With the whitewashing of America's racist past by today's Republicans (such as the possible ban on teaching Critical Race Theory in several states), books like these become more and more important.

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