FROM BLACK TO WHITE: A STUDY OF GEORGE SCHUYLER’S BLACK NO MORE

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Abstract: The examination of George Schuyler’s Black No More has enabled me to find out how black characters are humiliated, mocked, punished, beaten, rejected, and victimized by their white counterparts because of their blackness in the United States. The influence of the white man’s ideology restricting the right of freedom to white skin urges them to have their dark skin bleached as a process of acceptance and integration in the American society. Such is the case of the protagonist Max Disher, who needs to enjoy the full fruition of the American democracy and accepts to have his dark skin bleached by Dr. Crookman. However, this bleaching process does not meet his demands, because he experiences racial injustice from Whites, who call him “whitened Negro”. Blacks are always refused by their white peers, who oppress them to remember their inferiority, despite their new appearance after discovering their true identity. I acknowledge that Schuyler has succeeded in linking history and fiction in his narrative by taking account of the social reality of the Blacks in the white man’s world.

Key words: George Schuyler, Black No More, Blacks, Whites, Rejected, Victimized, Bleached.

INTRODUCTION

The expression “from black to white,” in the context of George Schuyler’s Black No More, refers to black characters’ bleaching process to integrate the American society, which rejects them because of their blackness. This bleaching is certainly what pushed the author to entitle his novel “Black No More.” Published in the United States of America by the Macaulay Company in 1931, Schuyler’s narrative is about a young black man named Max Disher, rejected by a racist white girl, Helen Givens. When dancing herself in the Honk Tonk Club, she refuses to dance with Max for the simple reason that he is black. This rejection urges him to consult Dr. Crookman, the inventor of the “Black-off machine” and the man in charge of bleaching Blacks, to have his black skin white to integrate the American society. After his bleaching process, Max Disher, who now appears as a pure-white American, is no longer called Max Disher, but Matthew Fisher. This new identity makes him consider himself as a new-born person in the United States.

Black No More’s choice for this paper is significantly linked to black characters’ racism experience, urging them to have their dark skin bleached to be full American citizens. The novel is based on the author’s memory of these characters’ discrimination and struggle for social integration, leading many critics to find their interest. Sonnet Retman, for example, considers it as “a narrative which offers a complex and prescient understanding of racial capitalism in the interwar period”. In almost the same way, Joseph Mills argues that “in many ways, Black No More demonstrates satire’s democratic potential. Mockery becomes the great leveler, and by ridiculing all, the novel calls into question racial and class hierarchies”.

As it can be seen, these quotations evidence the presence of racial conflicts in Georges Schuyler’s Black No More. These racial conflicts are observed between black characters and their white counterparts who are vehemently opposed to the conception of mixing races in the United States where all Blacks are not allowed to enjoy the same rights as Whites because of their skin color.

My main interest in writing on Black No More is incredibly and significantly linked to Schuyler’s reconstruction of Blacks’ rejection and bleaching process, which urges me to question: What are the causes of Blacks’ bleaching in Georges Schuyler’s Black No More? I hypothesize that white American characters’ non-acceptance of Blacks as full American citizens urge the latter to have their black skin whitened as a process of integration in the white man’s world.

Being concerned with a novel based on the experience of Blacks in the American society, I find it better to resort to the sociological approach to examine the social relationships between Blacks and Whites in the United States, for “literature is the consequence of the moment, the race, and the milieu” (Herder, quoted by Scott: 1962, 69). This means that this approach helps me examine Black No More’s social context concerning relationships observed between Blacks and Whites.

Two main points are analyzed in this paper. The first is linked to black characters’ motivation for their bleaching process. The second examines the dark skin's bleaching as a final step of their integration into the United States.

1. BLACK CHARACTERS’ MOTIVATION FOR THE BLEACHING PROCESS

Being mocked, insulted, humiliated, oppressed, rejected, and victimized by their white counterparts because of their skin color, black characters need to integrate the American society and seek to have their black skin turned white. They find a solution to end racial conflicts thanks to Dr. Crookman’s invention of the “Black-off machine,” which consists in whitening a Black’s kin color in three days. The novel reads that after studying in Germany, where he learned how to invent this incredible machine, the black Doctor went back to his country, the United States, precisely in New-York, where he announced his discovery through the press. This announcement, which now spreads throughout the United States, urges many journalists to come to Harlem, the black Doctor’s native neighborhood located in Northern Manhattan, in order not only to know more about his miraculous discovery but also to be clarified about his motivations to invent such the machine, as he explains it in these terms:
During my first year at college, I noticed a black skin girl on the street one day who had several irregular patches on her face and hands. That intrigued me. I began to study up on skin diseases and found out that the girl was suffering from a nervous disease known as vitiligo.[... ] It removes skin pigment, and sometimes it turns a Negro completely white, but only after a period of thirty or forty years. It occurred to me that if one could discover some means of artificially inducing and stimulating this nervous disease at will, one might solve the American race problem (BNM, p. 9).

Through this passage, one sees how Doctor Crookman comes to find a solution to gangrene American society’s racial problems. His idea to get involved in the study of human skin color comes from the irregular patches he finds on his black sister’s face, known as “vitiligo disease.” This means that his invention of the “Black-off machine” is linked not only to the mercy he has on his black fellows who suffer from such a disease, but more generally to the desire they all have to integrate the American society. For, in American society, the white color is a symbol of acceptance, whereas the black one contains an implicit reference to Blacks’ invisibility and rejection. However, what they seem to ignore is that their black skin’s bleaching will never make Whites consider them as belonging to the white race because, for Whites, to belong to the white race, is to have the white blood running in one’s veins. This implies that even though Blacks may have their black skin turned white, they are doomed to endure wrongful treatments from their white counterparts who will see them not as pure Whites but merely as whitened individuals whose objective to change the color of their skin lies in the desire to live as free citizens capable of enjoying the same opportunities as pure Whites in the American society.

The novel reads that the miraculous discovery of Dr. Crookman becomes the main gate for black characters to get rid of racial injustice that prevails in the United States. The insults hurled at them and the humiliations they are victims of because of their blackness urge them to accept Dr. Crookman’s “Black-No-More treatment”. This is illustrated in the novel through Max Disher, who is insulted and humiliated by a white American woman named Helen after refusing to dance with him for the simple reason that “she never dances with Negroes” (BNM, p. 6). Max Disher’s experience of this racial rejection makes him think of what Stein calls “the need to find solutions to the puzzle of being a black man” (Stein, 2011, 7). He believes that if he can see Dr. Crookman for the bleaching treatment, he will be the first African American to find a solution to the racial conflicts in the United States. For, there will be no rejection of Blacks; no “Jim Crow Laws,” as evidenced in this passage:

Then a sudden resolution seized him. He looked at the newspaper account again. Yes, Crookman was staying at Phyllis Wheatley Hotel. Why not go and see what there was to this? Why not try to be the first Negro to try out? Sure, it was taking a chance, but think of getting white in three days! No more Jim Crow. No more Insults. As a white man, he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at least… and probably be able to meet the girl from Atlanta. What a vision! (BNM, p. 8).

Through this passage, one sees how Max Disher, in need of being accepted as a full citizen of the United States, resorts to Dr. Crookman’s bleaching treatment. He praises the latter’s technology for its capacity to heal this “sick nation”. Crookman’s discovery also contradicts the white man’s view of the black man as “brain-washed,” and joins Malcolm X’s statement “the black man is morally, spiritually, and intellectually superior to the white man” (Malcolm X: 1963, 21). The author demonstrates Blacks’ new form of struggle through the bleaching of the skin and their capacity to contribute to the social and economic development of the American nation. From this perspective, one may argue that Crookman’s invention of the “Black-off machine” is a tremendous, outstanding achievement for himself and all black Americans who are still viewed by Whites as inferior people incapable of achieving social achievements. However, this achievement, which can be analyzed from a literary angle as the climax of Blacks’ intellectual capacities, is, for black characters, a weapon to fight back racial disparities. When the author, for example, writes that “as a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last,” he raises the issue of racial segregation which gangrenes the American society, for he demonstrates that there is a prohibition made to Blacks to go anywhere they want. This means that there are limits where the white man is never ready to receive his black counterparts peacefully. Then, he points out the question of liberty in the making of the decision. He means that the right to decide what to be on American soil is denied to Blacks because they are viewed as inferior individuals doomed to live under the white man’s domination in all the United States’ spheres. Finally, he recalls the question of freedom in the doing of things. Here, too, he shows that, as second zone citizens, Blacks are not allowed to do whatever they can for the simple reason that they are deprived of freedom in all its aspects because of their blackness. What motivates them to accept the “Black-No-More treatment” is the desire they all have “to be free to build their own lives, not in a racist country, but in a world where they will be considered as human beings with all rights and facilities” (N’zambi-Mikoulou, et al.: 2016, 1822).

Max Disher’s insistence on having his black skin bleached is not merely to get rid of the white man’s atrocities but to help build a peaceful nation and win Helen’s heart. This character’s view is undoubtedly to fight against racial barriers and the miscegenation system. Max Disher’s eagerness to integrate the American society urges him to make several turns to Dr. Crookman’s Sanitarium in Harlem to check whether he is ready to start bleaching his black fellows’ black skin: “The impatient Max Disher saw him as often as possible and kept track of developments. He yearned to be the first to be treated, and no want to be caught napping. The two objects were uppermost in his mind: To get white and go to Atlanta” (BNM, p. 12).

Max Disher’s determination to change his skin color for acceptance reveals how Blacks are tired of racial disparities and how eager they are to get rid of this servitude. For, he thinks, with white skin color, he will no longer experience racism. When he thinks of winning Helen’s heart, it is merely seeking protection from her, breaking racial barriers, and being accepted as equal to the white man. Max Disher’s wish to have his skin bleached illustrates the different forms of struggle for integration Blacks have initiated in the American society. This form of struggle here is quite similar to that of Pecola, a black female character in Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye, who is eager to change her eyes from black to blue to be accepted by white sisters and brothers in all social places, as illustrated as follows: “I cannot go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me (...). My eyes (...). I want them blue” (Morrison: 1970, 174). As it can be seen, “Pecola does not look at studies as a process of integration, but her eyes” (N’zambi-Mikoulou & Massala: 2019, 197).

The novel portrays that Max Disher is not the only black character in the novel who wants to change his skin color because other black characters are also ready to resort to this solution to solve racial relationships in this part of the world. Indeed, after the success of Dr. Crookman’s “Black-No-More treatment” with his very first patient Sandol, the Senegalese he bleached in Germany before his return to the United States of America, many other black Americans become more interested and determined to go to Dr. Crookman’s sanitariums to have their black skin turned white. In Harlem, for example, where the first Sanitarium is built, the author shows how Blacks no longer doubt about Dr. Crookman’s “Black-off machine.” They are
convinced that, with this machine, the whole American society will be white, and, indeed, the problem of racial conflicts will come to an end. Here is how the author describes the crowed black community before Dr. Crookman’s Sanitarium:

In front of the Sanitarium milled a half-frozen crowd of close to four thousand Negroes. A riot squad armed with rifles, machine guns, and tear gas bombs maintained some order semblance. Teel cable stretched from lamp post to lamp post the entire length of the block kept the struggling mass of humanity on the sidewalk and out of the traffic path. It seemed as if all Harlem were there (BNM, p. 24).

What the novelist develops here is what Stein calls “the alienation of Blacks by claiming a new sense of trust in the collective future of the country” (Stein: 2011, 2). This means that I vehemently condemn Blacks’ incapacity to fight for their integration with their black color. Changing their skin color simply means that they have accepted to forget about their origin, ancestors, and history. Policemen’s agreement to protect and cover Dr. Crookman’s bleaching activities shows the white man’s will to destroy the African American’s heritage:

A moment or two later, Max found himself the center of a flying wedge of five or six husky superior police officers, cleaving through a milling crowd of colored folk. From the top step of the Sanitarium, he had noticed the crowd spread over the sidewalk, into the street, and around the corners. Fifty traffic policemen strained and sweated to keep prospective patients in line (BNM, p. 12).

This passage foregrounds the white man’s determination to help clean the American society's black skin color. This means that “Whites” support the latter if white officers accept to secure Blacks during the bleaching operation. This shows that America’s problem is not the problem of race but skin color. For many black characters in the novel, the black skin color dirties the American society, and that this dirtiness should be swept up to make America a clean and safe place for full citizens of this great nation. However, the motivation to become white to integrate the American society inhabits black characters to the extent that they start withdrawing all their money from different banks to afford all prescriptions given before and after the bleaching process. The novel relates that on the eve of Christmas, one sees how Blacks come to the Douglass Bank of Harlem to withdraw their money from their bank accounts to afford the “Black-No-More treatment.” Being numerous, they form a long queue extending down one side of the Bank, in the front door, and around the corner of the Bank before having access to their bank accounts. None of them comes to depose money but to withdraw it, as evidenced in this passage:

Meantime there was feverish activity in Harlem’s financial institutions. At the Douglass Bank, the tellers were busier than bootleggers on Christmas Eve. Moreover, they were short-handed because of the mysterious absence of Bunny Brown. A long queue of Negroes extended down one side of the Bank, out of the front door and around the corner, while bank attendants struggled to keep them in line. Everybody was drawing out money; no one was depositing. In vain, the bank officials pleaded with them not to withdraw their funds (BNM, p. 36).

As it can be noticed, the withdrawal of funds here attests to black characters’ motivation to have their black skin bleached to be counted among full American citizens who enjoy the full fruition of the American democracy. Even though the bank agents plead them not to withdraw all their money, the only idea they have in mind is withdrawing their funds to go to “Black-No-More sanitarium” for their bleaching. Knowing why they are all withdrawing their money, bank agents start blaming Blacks vainly to prevent them from reaching their goal. But the eagerness to become white and benefit from the advantages of whiteness in the United States finally makes Blacks reject any piece of advice from any White who wants to make them change their minds:

Negroes were adamant: they wanted their money, and they wanted it quick. […] At first, efforts were made to bulldoze and intimidate the depositors, but that did not succeed. These people were in no mood to be trifled with. A lifetime of being Negroes in the United States finally makes Negroes reject any piece of advice from any White who wants to make them change their minds:

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The sentence “they wanted their money, and they wanted it quick” shows black characters’ determination to get rid of their blackness, depriving them of several opportunities in the white man’s world. The money they withdraw from different banks is not to invest in any economic activity but to afford the “Black-No-More treatment.” Their bleaching process’s main objective is their desire to belong to the United States as full American citizens judged not according to their skin color but the content of their knowledge as human beings. This means that they are tired of living in a society where the most outstanding advantages are only given to Whites because they are white. Their pressure on bank agents is not merely to become white but to build a peaceful nation. They will be accepted with this white color, and conflicts that gangrene the country will no longer be observed. Thus, seen as a new form of freedom struggle, bank agents’ opposition to the Blacks’ withdrawal of their money from their bank accounts can be perceived as the Whites’ defense to protect the American economy. “Mon, whutcha tahlib ah? scoffed a big, black British West Indian woman with whom an official was remonstrating not to draw out her money, Dis heah’s mah mahney, ain’t it? Yuh use mah mahney all time, aintcha? Whutcha mean, Ah should not draw out? … You gimmeh mah mahney or ah broke up dis place!” (id..).

As it can be noticed, the black woman’s utterance “you gimmeh mah mahney or ah broke up dis place” attests not only of her anger against the white bank agent who wants to prohibit her from drawing out her money but of her determination to be part of those who are willing to have their dark skin whitened to avoid all forms of discrimination and segregation inflicted on them in all the sphere of the United States. The fact that this black female character dares to frighten the white bank agent fearlessly shows that Blacks are no longer ready to accept any abuse from the white man who takes them for granted. The author’s account for such a black woman’s courage is a way to evidence black women's participation in the struggle for Blacks' integration in the United States.

Schuyler’s efforts to account for black characters’ motivation for the bleaching process are also evident when he shows how some Blacks who are short of money sell their furniture to second-hand stores to afford the “Black-No-More treatment”: “Many of the colored folk, it was said, had sold their furniture to second-hand stores and vanished with the proceeds into the great mass of white citizenry” (BNM, p. 37). The selling of furniture shows poor Blacks’ eagerness to integrate the American society, which does not credit them. It shows how they are determined to appear white and be recognized as full American citizens who deserve respect and value throughout the United States. To reach this shared objective, the poor Blacks
who cannot find fifty dollars, the amount required for the bleaching process, are helped by the rich ones. This solidarity is what enables many of them to succeed in having their black skin whitened, as demonstrated in the section below.

2. BLACK CHARACTERS’ BLEACHING

In Black No More, George Schuyler depicts the United States as a country composed of two different categories: Pure-white Americans and whitened ones. The first category represents those Americans who were born white with white parents. The second category, however, stands for Blacks who appear white after having their dark skin bleached. They are also known as “impure-white Americans” because of the bleaching process they endure and the black blood which runs in their veins. The novel reads that this bleaching process is possible thanks to Dr. Crookman’s “Black-off machine.” They do it to get rid of the “Jim Crow Laws,” which separate them from their white counterparts because of their blackness. After creating “Black-No-More Organization” with its diverse sanitariums in every part of the United States, the black Doctor invites all black Americans to come to his sanitariums and have their black skin whitened, as suggested to him by his teacher of Sociology: ‘My sociology teacher had once said that there were but three ways for the Negro to solve his problem in America […] To either get out, get white or get along.’ Since he would not and could not get out and was getting along only differently, it seemed that the only thing for him was to get white’ (BNM, p. 9).

One understands that among the three ways suggested to the black Doctor by his teacher to end racial conflicts in the United States, he chooses the second, which is getting white. Two main reasons justify his choice: The first is his awareness of being born in this country built with his ancestors' blood and sweat. In fact, this awareness urges him to reject his teacher’s suggestion of either “getting out of it” or “getting along.” The last reason is linked to the habit he already has to share life with his black sisters and brothers on the American soil. The author’s reference to the teacher’s talk with Dr. Crookman is a way to tell the reader that the latter has been fighting against racism in the United States for years. His decision to end such a barbaric practice, which appears as “a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit” (King: 1967, 41) is that of an individual who has taken time to investigate this matter of racism before acting. He finally understands that whatever Blacks can do to please white Americans will never eradicate the different problems observed between the two races in the American society.

The novel reads that as news about the “Black-off machine” spreads all over the United States, Dr. Crookman becomes the most spoken and attractive person in this country. In Harlem, for example, everybody talks about his invention. All journalists from New-York and those from other states of the country are behind him. They want to have interviews with him every single day. But, knowing Americans’ selfish behavior, he refuses to reveal his secret. The only purpose he has in his mind is to create a new America where no one will endure any racist system:

The next day the newspaper carried a lengthy account of the interview with Dr. Junius Crookman interspersed with photographs of him, his backers, and the Senegalese who had been turned white. It was the talk of the town and was soon the talk of the country. Long perspectives written about the discovery, learned societies besieged the Negro biologist with offers of lecture engagements, and magazines begged him for articles, but he turned down offers and refused to explain his treatment. This attitude was decreed as unbecoming a scientist, and it was insinuated and even openly stated that nothing more could be expected from a Negro (BNM, p. 11).

As it can be seen, the sentence “it was the talk of the town and was soon the talk of the country” attests of the black Doctor’s visibility in the United States. That is to say that Blacks who were invisible in the white man’s world become “the core speeches” in the American society. Crookman’s invitation by American journalists is not only a chance for him to gain popularity but an achievement for the whole black community, which wanted the national and international community to pay attention to Blacks’ matters. From the Doctor’s interviews with journalists, the whole “damn world” is aware of the Blacks’ achievements or discoveries. Thus, the latter are no longer viewed as “boys,” but people matured enough to meet society’s expectations. Doctor Crookman’s invention is the communication cord to the white man who still thinks of the black man as an infant incapable of participating in a nation's development. His refusal to share his secret with white Americans urges the latter to claim that he is not a scientist as a way to demotivate him. But, this demotivation does not matter to him, for he continues to bleach his black fellows. It is only, as the novel reads, after the journalists’ pressure that he decides to give some details of the functioning of his treatment to reassure his black fellows that there is nothing risky in taking the “Black-No-More treatment,” mostly when it is correctly done: “I naturally cannot divulge the secret any more than to say that it is accomplished by electrical nutrition and glandular control. Certain gland secretions are greatly stimulated (id.,).”

This passage shows Dr. Crookman’s refusal to share all secrets about his treatment to the journalists who, he thinks, work like spies hunting information and putting them at the white racist government’s disposal. When he argues that “It is a powerful and dangerous treatment but harmless when properly done,” he simply persuades all black Americans to come and take it fearlessly. This persuasion urges the protagonist Max Disher to go to the Doctor’s Sanitarium to experience “the Black-No-More treatment.” The novel reads that when he finally reaches the Sanitarium, he is a bit reluctant and afraid of the consequences this treatment may generate. The only case of the Senegalese who underwent the treatment does not convince him of its perfection. For example, when he enters the Sanitarium's operating room, he starts trembling, fearing the risks he runs with this “Black-off machine treatment.” Then some negative ideas inhabit his mind. He thinks of what may happen if the black Doctor fails in his surgery. However, some moments afterward, with the remembrance of all their different sufferings he has already endured in the American society because of his dark skin, he accepts to have his black skin bleached for freedom and acceptance in the white man’s world:

Max was trembling with excitement and anxiety. Suppose something should go wrong? Suppose Doc should make a mistake? He thought of the Elks’ excursion every summer to Bear Mountain, the high yellow Minnie and her colorful apartment, the pleasant evenings at the Dahomey Casino doing the latest dances with the brown belles of Harlem, the prancing choruses at the Lafayette Theater, the hours he had whiled away at Boogie’s and the Honky Tonk Club, and he hesitated. Then he envisioned his future as a white man, probably as the husband of the tall blonde from Atlanta, and with firm resolve, he entered the door of the mysterious chamber (BNM, p. 14).

Through Max Disher’s fear of the bleaching treatment, the author shows the Blacks’ lack of esteem for their inventions. If the operation and the treatment were the white man’s work, Max Disher would not certainly doubt nor have a fear of them. This means that the problem of Blacks’ integration lies in the credit they have to grant themselves and their achievements. As a black man’s made or invention, the “Black-off machine” still
creates doubt and fear within the black community, which is an obstacle to the movement for integration for many black Americans. Max Disher’s reasoning is quite similar to that of a slave who refuses to run away from the plantation to fear being killed. These conceptions, which do not rhyme with the spirit of the struggle, block the process of integration. Despite a long moment of hesitation, Max Disher finally accepts the treatment, and three days later, he appears white. He feels so joyful because everything has happened as expected. But, he is a bit tired as he gets out of the room, slowly held on the other side by an attendant. Max Disher does not feel well at the end because of the long moment he has passed on the electric chair of the “Black-off machine”:

He felt weak, emptied, and nauseated; his skin twitched and was dry and feverish; his insides felt very hot and sore. [...] He felt so thankful that he had survived the ordeal of that horrible machine so akin to the electric chair. A shudder passed over him at the memory of the hours he had passed in its grip, fed at intervals with revolting concoctions. However, when they reached the elevator and saw himself in the mirror, he was startled and overjoyed (BNM, p. 17).

Through this passage, the author shows some effects of the “Black-off machine” on the protagonist. The sentence “he felt so thankful that he had survived” is very significant. For, it attests not only of his gratefulness to Dr. Crookman, who has succeeded in bleaching his black skin, but also of his happiness and joy to appear white as a process of integration in the United States. This joy even pushes him to lose self-control as he starts shouting after seeing himself in the mirror. He now thinks that he has integrated the American society because he now has white skin like all white Americans: “White at last! Gone was the smooth brown complexion. Gone were the full lips and Ethiopian nose. There would be no more air whiteners, no more discrimination, no more obstacles in his path. He was free!” (id.). As it can be seen, the expressions “white at last” and “no more discrimination” are very significant for his integration. For, both evidence the protagonist’s successful bleaching process which makes him white and accepted as well. Through this success, the author describes the American dream’s achievement by this character who no longer experiences “obstacles” in his path; no more discrimination. One understands that Schuyler’s account for black characters’ freedom through Max Disher is a way to present the latter as the embodiment of all black Americans who have accepted to have their dark skin whitened for integration. For, the joy he expresses after being bleached is shared by all whitened Americans.

The novel portrays that after having their dark skin bleached, whitened Americans see their living conditions improved. As whitened people, they think of changing their lifestyle to be equal to pure-white Americans. For example, the protagonist starts speaking after pure-white Americans' fashion to avoid any possible suspicion that may be sorrowful for him. When he notices that he can never be recognized as a black man thanks to his white skin and speaking manner, he decides to go to Atlanta to meet the blond racist girl Helen who first refused to dance with him because of his blackness. He considers his bleaching process as a blessing from God because it helps him achieve his dreams and live without any disturbance in the American society:

After all, he thought, it was a glorious new adventure. His eyes twinkled, and his pulse quickened as he thought of it. Now he could go anywhere, associate with anybody, be anything he wanted to be. He suddenly thought of the comely miss he had seen in the Honky Tonk on New Year’s Eve and the greatly enlarged field from which he could select his loves. Yes, indeed, there were advantages to being white. He brightened and viewed the tightly-packed black folk around him with a superior air (BNM, p. 26).

From this passage, the reader discovers that the bleaching treatment was the only solution to the black race in the United States for black characters in the novel. With this new look that makes no distinction among Americans, whitened people now feel integrated and accepted as full American citizens with the right to enjoy all civil rights. When the narrator argues that “now he could go anywhere, associate with anybody, be anything he wanted to be,” he tells the reader of whitened Americans’ new conditions of life in the white man’s world. He also draws him back to what was prohibited to them because of their dark skin. The places which were of limit to them are now opened to them thanks to their new white appearance. This implies that the problem in the United States was not maybe the problem of race, but color. Hearing the protagonist’s testimony of his new lifestyle, one realizes that his stories of hope and freedom become the American dream’s achievement Max Disher is a way to present the latter as the embodiment of all black Americans who have accepted to have their dark skin whitened for integration. For, the joy he expresses after being bleached is shared by all whitened Americans.

Max Disher continues his propaganda to urge many Blacks to accept Dr. Crookman’s treatment. The sense of this propaganda, the narrator thinks, is not solely to promote the white man’s customs and civilization but to gain more freedom in a nation that still rejects them many centuries after their emancipation. If freedom fighters like Marcus Garvey suggested a return to Africa for more Blacks’ freedom, Schuyler proposes the bleaching of the black skin color, for he believes a white society will no longer raise the problem of racism. The possibility the protagonist now has to accomplish his former dreams that could not come true before due to his blackness leaves him with a joyful attitude, which finally leads him to look at himself in the mirror again and again as a way to appreciate his new physical appearance:

How good it was to be free, white, and to possess a bankroll! He fumbled in his pocket for his little mirror and looked at himself again and again from several angles. He stroked his pale blond hair and secretly congratulated himself that he would no longer need to straighten it nor be afraid to get it. He gazed rapely at his smooth, white hands with blue veins showing through. What a miracle Dr. Crookman had wrought! (BNM, p. 27).

This passage shows that whitened characters are proud of Dr. Crookman, for he has made it possible for them to become white like their white counterparts. This whiteness they now have, thanks to his endeavors in struggling against racism in the United States, enables them to live freely in this country and be considered and recognized as actual dedicated American citizens who deserve all human and civil rights. This means that black characters’ living conditions are no longer what they used to be because they are now capable of expressing themselves before the white man, going wherever they want, doing whatever they want, and talking to any white American freely. This skin color, which is now the same as that of pure white Americans, leaves the reader with the feeling that there is now equality between white and pure-white characters. For, there is no distinction between these two categories of individuals. If the pure Whites’ skin is white, and their veins are blue, whitened Blacks share the same features that
make them feel like any white American in the United States. Schuyler’s mention of whitened characters’ “blue veins” is a way to show the success of Blacks in having their dark skin bleached. This successful bleaching makes them consider Dr. Crookman as a black hero, a liberator, and the most significant outstanding scientist sent by God to save them from racial conflicts in the American society.

As the first black character to have his dark skin bleached in the United States, Max Disher becomes one of the country's most attractive persons. All journalists, reporters, and photographers want to have interviews and write articles about him. The novel reads that everybody is surprised to see a whitened person with necked eyes when getting out of the Sanitarium. They see that as a miracle because they cannot believe that a black Doctor could bleach a person’s skin. This success urges many Whites to put different questions to the first whitened American, as evidenced in this passage:

Finally, he reached the curb, exhausted from the jostling and squeezing, only to be set upon by a mob of newspaper photographers and reporters. As the first person to take the treatment, he was naturally the center of attraction for about fifteen of those journalistic gnats. They asked a thousand questions seemingly all at once. What was his name? How did he feel? What was he going to do? Would he marry a white woman? Did he intend to continue living in Harlem? (BNM, p. 18).

The phrase “as the first person to take the treatment” illustrates the protagonist’s bleaching process through Dr. Crookman’s “Black-off machine.” One sees here how he, as a black man, has paved the way for all his black fellows who want to get rid of discrimination in the United States through the “Black-No-More treatment”. The questions are put by journalists, reporters, and photographers who have trouble believing in the black man’s invention and its capacity to turn a black skin into white. For example, when they ask him whether he will marry a white woman or not, they want to discover his intentions in having his dark skin whitened. This means that some Whites are afraid of seeing their white sisters getting married to whitened Americans. They even fear losing their wives because of whitened Americans who now appear as white as them. The novel depicts how Max Disher rejects the idea of going back home and decides then to settle in a peaceful place where he hopes to have time to think about his new life as a whitened man: "While they were wrangling, an empty taxicab drove up. Pushing the inquisitive reporters to one side. Max leaped into it and yelled, "Central Park!" It was the only place he could think at the moment. He wanted to have time to compose his mind, to plan the future in this great world of whiteness” (BNM, p. 18).

The character’s decision to move to a new place is not only to avoid boring questions from journalists, but more to avoid being identified as a whitened person. He thinks that getting back to the same living place will not grant him more credit before the people who have first known him as a black person. From Max Disher, the author demonstrates that bleached people were obliged to move to new places where they could not be identified as former Blacks who have changed their skin color just for their acceptance after the bleaching operation. The narrator’s expression “great world of whiteness” is indicative, for it suggests that to live a wonderful and peaceful life in the United States is to have white skin like that of all white Americans. For him, Max Disher, who has become white, should now plan for his future life rather than answering reporters’ questions, because whiteness is, for every American, the key that opens all the doors of happiness in the United States. Unfortunately, when Max Disher reaches the “Central Park,” he comes across a white woman journalist named Sybil Smith who succeeds in having a talk with him about his whiteness after giving him thousands of dollars as a way to corrupt him. He finds this sum of money as an opportunity to organize his life as a whitened man and afford a ticket for Atlanta, where he hopes to meet Helen, the woman of his dreams. However, after revealing some secrets to Sybil Smith in a restaurant, he is shocked to find out that a couple of hours later, the newsboys already hold a photograph of him, as evidenced in this passage:

He was annoyed, and a little angered. What did they want to put his picture all over the front of the paper for? Now everybody would know who he was. He had undergone the tortures of Doc Crookman’s devilish machine to escape the conspicuousness of the dark skin, and now he was being made conspicuous because he had once had dark skin! Could one never escape the plagued race problem? (BNM, p. 20).

The sentence “now everybody would know who he was” shows that after having his skin bleached, Max Disher finds it better not to reveal his identity to all Americans, be them Blacks or Whites, for fear of being recognized as a black man. This means that despite his bleaching process, he still lives under the pressure of the white man who, he thinks, will continue to oppress him if only he discovers that he is a whitened man. When the narrator questions that “could one never escape the plagued race problem?”, he means that whatever a man can do on earth to get rid of all racial conflicts will be in vain, he can have his dark skin whitened, but will not forget about his origins, customs, and traditions. From these predispositions, he will be identified as belonging to this or that community. That is why he finds it a waste of time for Max Disher to reject his race through the bleaching process. This waste of time he raises here is viewed as a call to Blacks’ consciousness concerning their race’s integrity in the white man’s world. However, Max Disher does not mind his bleaching process. What counts for him is the opportunity he now has to walk with all white Americans, as he does it with the white woman journalist:

They walk down Broadway in the blaze of the white lights to the dinner-dance place. To Max, it was like being in heaven. He had strolled through the Times Square district before but never with such a feeling of absolute freedom and sureness. No one now looked at him curiously because he was with a white girl, as they had when he came down with Minnie, his former octroon lady friend. Gee, it was great (BNM, p. 21).

Through this passage, one sees how the protagonist, who is the embodiment of all Blacks wanting to ban racial conflicts through the bleaching process, expresses the feeling of being freed thanks to his whitened skin. The fact that he can now go wherever he wants without being identified as a whitened person and do whatever he decides to do leaves him with the impression that he has integrated the American society. Unfortunately, this integration is not total because he fears being rejected by the same society if only pure-white Americans discover that he has become white after taking the “Black-No-More treatment.” This fear brings evidence that Blacks’ struggle for integration in the American society has not come true with their bleaching process, for they still endure the same experience of oppression from the white man who takes them for granted. They now consider
their bleaching process as “a simple claim for their American citizenship, because it has not met their demands” (N’zambi-Mikoulou: 2020, 56). But, what is essential to know is that if Blacks have been mistaken in accepting to have their skin bleached, “Whites’ social injustice against them has been, however, one of the main causes of the failure of the American Dream” (Massala & Mitati: 2019, 17).

CONCLUSION

A reading of Black No More helps the reader discover that George Schuyler accounts for black characters’ fight for integration in the American society mainly through his protagonist seen as the embodiment of all black characters who suffer the white man’s racist system. This cruel practice they endure for several years because of their blackness urges them to get involved in the bleaching process in order not only to appear white but more to be considered as full American citizens capable of enjoying the full fruition of American citizenship. However, this consideration appears as a nightmare because they are still rejected by their white counterparts, who, after discovering their true identity, oppress them to remind them of their inferiority despite their new appearance. I confess that in accounting for such a social experience of Blacks in the white man’s world, Schuyler has succeeded in establishing the intertwining between history and fiction in his narrative.

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