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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Literary Image of Los Angeles in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*
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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zabývá zachycením literárního obrazu města a občanů Los Angeles v románu *The White Boy Shuffle* amerického autora Paula Beattyho. V úvodu studentka stručně nastíní relevantní historicko-kulturní kontext USA, také nastíní sociální a rasové problémy spojené s městem Los Angeles. Důraz bude kladen na dobové zasazení románu. Studentka v práci nedefinuje základní pojmy, se kterými bude pracovat (např. co se týče stereotypů, rasismu, segregace, či otázek maskulinity atd.). Dále autorka zmíní hlavní postavu/postavy a její začleňování do nového sousedství (např. i do bělošské či černošské komunity, vč. pohledu na černošskou maskulinitu a další spojená témata).

V práci také bude zmínka o žánrovém zařazení románu a širším literárním kontextu a použitých literárních prostředcích.

Cílem práce je okomentovat zachycení obrazu města Los Angeles ve výše zmíněném románu, vč. pojednání nad sociálními a rasovými problémy.

V závěru práce studentka vyvodí obecnější závěry.

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis describes social and racial problems in Los Angeles in Paul Beatty's novel *The White Boy Shuffle*. It further analyzes the historical context of the second half of the 20th century in the U.S. The thesis mainly focuses on racism, race and additionally portrays stereotypes, satire, and irony. Subsequently discusses the integration of the main character into the white and Black community.

KEY WORDS

racism, *The White Boy Shuffle*, stereotypes, Paul Beatty, satire, irony

NÁZEV

Literární obraz Los Angeles v románu Paula Beattyho *The White Boy Shuffle*

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce popisuje sociální a rasové problémy v Los Angeles v románu Paula Beattyho *The White Boy Shuffle*. Dále analyzuje historický kontext druhé poloviny 20. století v USA. Práce se zaměřuje především na rasismus, rasu, a navíc zobrazuje stereotypy, satiru a ironii. Následně pojednává o integraci hlavní postavy do bílé a černošské komunity.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Rasismus, *The White Boy Shuffle*, stereotypy, Paul Beatty, satira, ironie

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	8
1. The American History of the Second Half of the 20 th Century.....	10
2. Race and Racism	14
3. Black's Stereotypes	27
4. Satire and Irony	33
5. Conclusion.....	40
Resumé.....	42
Bibliography	45

Introduction

The White Boy Shuffle is a satirical novel written by an American poet and writer Paul Beatty. In this book, Beatty created a Black young boy named Gunnar who deals with racism on a daily basis. Gunnar's journey from the predominantly white community of Santa Monica to the mainly Black community of Hillside is analyzed and captured in this particular novel. The aim of this thesis is to comment on racial and social problems in Los Angeles where the foremost part of the story takes place. The novel contains situations involving racism in the second half of the 20th century as well as stereotypes toward Black people.

This thesis contains four chapters of theory and analysis. The first chapter explains the historical and cultural context of the U.S. in the novel. It focuses on two exceptionally important people in history – Rodney King and Martin Luther King, Jr. Firstly it characterizes the infamous 1992 Los Angeles Riots and further focuses on the role of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his leadership.

The second chapter explains the usage of capitalized “B” in the word Black which is applied throughout the whole thesis. The chapter focuses mainly on racism although there is a mention of races as well. The terminology of racism and colorblindness is explained together with the racist situations the main character endures every day. Gunnar's integration into the predominantly Black community of Hillside is included as well as the differences between the white and Black community. The history of racism includes the beginnings when the term was started to be used in Germany around the 1930s. Racist situations involving law enforcement in the novel are analyzed as the main character deals with the police on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the third chapter introduces the clarification of stereotypes by the infamous author of *Public Opinion* Walter Lippmann. Additionally, the research on metastereotypes is included in the chapter. Authors Sigelam and Tuch explained this term as to what Black people think the whites conjecture about them.¹ The authors also incorporate their analysis of the study focused on metastereotypes. The stereotypes of sports for Black people are analyzed as well as discussed from the occurrences in *The White Boy Shuffle*.

Lastly, the final chapter aims to illustrate satire and irony. It offers explanations of each term and further mentions and describes African American satire in the U.S. The concept of colorblindness is analyzed from the view of satire. In spite of the fact that the main character of

¹ Lee Sigelman, and Steven A. Tuch, “Metastereotypes: Blacks’ Perceptions of Whites’ Stereotypes of Blacks,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (1997): 89.

the novel is Black he in particular situations does not feel comfortable in being in the presence of Black people and as a result satire and irony portray these occurrences.

1. The American History of the Second Half of the 20th Century

The *White Boy Shuffle* mentions two important figures of history, especially for Black people. This chapter is shorter due to the less significance of the events to this bachelor thesis. First, the event of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots is mentioned. As claimed by Bergesen and Herman, four white Los Angeles law enforcement officers who were accused of assaulting the Black driver Rodney King were found not guilty by a jury on April 29, 1992, in Simi Valley, California.² Since the Watts riots of 1965, civil strife had been brewing in Los Angeles according to James Delk. During the course of years, South Central Los Angeles had undergone barely any progress, and few larger business organizations had chosen it to redevelop or launch new companies. Police officers were suspected of engaging in a high-speed pursuit across the streets of Los Angeles before beating Rodney King, who was on parole for a burglary that resulted in him being armed. The trial, which was relocated to the predominantly white neighborhood of Simi Valley attracted a lot of interest.³ Bergesen and Herman argue that a mass of people gathered in South Central Los Angeles to object to the judgment nearly instantly. At the junction of Normandie Avenue and Florence Boulevard, there were claims of theft and assaults on drivers.⁴ According to Delk, despite having such faith in the outcome, the Simi Valley court gave the police plenty of time to prepare. To the dismay of the training seminar for the Los Angeles Law enforcement agencies, this was a pointless exercise. With the exception of officer Laurence Powell, for whom a verdict was announced on the only accusation of using unreasonable force “under color of authority,” the court found the accused not liable.⁵ Bergesen and Herman state that during the subsequent six days of rioting, eight thousand people were detained, almost two thousand and four hundred people were hurt, fifty-one people died, and more than seven hundred businesses were set on fire. About one billion in damage to the estate was believed to have occurred. Koreatown and South Central Los Angeles were the districts most severely affected. Following the riots which happened in the 1960s, it was the greatest race conflict outbreak to occur.⁶

An important historical event such as the 1992 Los Angeles riots is portrayed in *The White Boy Shuffle*. This event is mentioned when the main character Gunnar and his best friend

² Albert Bergesen, Max Herman, “Immigration, Race, and Riot: The 1992 Los Angeles Uprising,” *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 1 (February 1998): 39.

³ James D. Delk, “THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS OF 1992,” in *SOLDIERS IN CITIES: MILITARY OPERATIONS ON URBAN TERRAIN*, ed. Michael C. Desch (the United States: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2001), 89.

⁴ Bergesen, Herman, “Immigration, Race and Riot,” 39.

⁵ Delk, “THE LOS ANGELES RIOTS OF 1992,” 90-91.

⁶ Bergesen, Herman, “Immigration, Race, and Riot,” 39.

Nicholas Scoby were driving from basketball practice and suddenly Gunnar saw black smoke. Nick ignored it but the longer they drove the more smoke was appearing and suddenly drivers around them were violating traffic laws. This situation displays how the protests were starting after the verdict of Rodney King. The boys still did not know what was happening and asked a man standing on his porch for an explanation and he responded that it was regarding the verdict of King and that: “They let them racists go. I’m surprised the judge didn’t reprimand the peckerwood so-called peace officers for not finishing the job.”⁷ His response refers to how the three police officers out of four were acquitted of the charges. Gunnar’s reaction showed how disappointing and heart breaking the situation was for Black people. To illustrate the situation:

I never felt so worthless in my life. I looked out the window and saw a store owner spray-paint BLACK OWNED across her boarded-up beauty salon. I wanted to dig out my heart and have her do the same to it, certifying my identity in big block letters across both ventricles. I suddenly understood why my father wore his badge so proudly. The badge protected him; in uniform he was safe.⁸

Gunnar’s view on this situation was in all probability same for all Black people. They wanted to stand up for this inhumane treatment of Black people by law enforcement. The sad truth is that the only approach for Blacks to stay safe was to join the police force. Natalie Kalich believes that there are not many times when Gunnar feels inadequate in his role as an outsider poet, but he precisely did during the riots. Once Gunnar initially arrived in Hillside, he indulged in various things that kept him separate from the locals and soothed his feelings of estrangement. He cited well-known authors, created poems, and read extensively. Gunnar, on the other hand, starts to view Psycho Loco’s, who is in the gang Gun Totin’ Hooligans, brutality in a different perspective after seeing the arrogant white TV reporters proclaim the verdict on the broadcast. Psycho Loco’s aggression is quick and effective for Gunnar, who now sees his poem as absolutely insufficient and ineffective in the presence of such injustice.⁹ As a result, Gunnar and his friends joined the riots and showed their disagreement with the verdict resulting in them stealing a safe. In spite of the fact that stealing would never be a solution for Gunnar, he wanted to display his disagreement.

Apart from the 1992 Los Angeles riots *The White Boy Shuffle* mentions Martin Luther King, Jr. and his leadership. *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a

⁷ Paul Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle* (Great Britain & Australia, Oneworld Publications, 2017), 154-155.

⁸ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 155.

⁹ Natalie Kalich, “‘An Anthropological Rending of the Ghetto’: Intersections of High and Popular Culture in Paul Beatty’s *The White Boy Shuffle*,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 42, no. 1 (2009): 83-84.

social activist and Baptist who served as the leader of the American civil rights movements from the middle of the 1950s until his death in 1968. The achievement of the movement in abolishing the segregation laws of African Americans in the South and other regions of the United States was largely due to his leadership. As the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which supported peaceful procedures like the crucial March on Washington to advance racial justice, King attained public recognition. In 1964, he won the Nobel Peace Prize.¹⁰ According to Nathan Irvin Huggins, Black leadership embodied by Martin Luther King, Jr. was previously quite unknown in American history and the reason is that Black leaders often had little connection to great power in the previous decades. King relied on his following white and Black citizens that supported him out of philosophy and tactics, as well as a religious institution that went beyond his specific church. He stood out from other Black leaders because he appeared to be free of restraints of institution and political party and had the freedom to speak out on topics other than racial fairness and race.¹¹ Stated by Professor Harry Reed King's speech from 1963, "I Have a Dream," is likely his so far the most well-known and frequently quoted one. "I Have a Dream" was delivered at the notable demonstration March on Washington which took place in August. While it was barely fifteen minutes long, the speech perfectly described the hope that Blacks and every person who embraced the fight for civil rights felt at the time.¹² As claimed by James Colaiaco, a socialist movement that took place in America from 1955 to 1965 completely altered the country's politics. King led a peaceful Black army that was successful in uncovering white racism's crimes and destroying the South's generations-old justice system of discrimination. In just ten years, more progress was made compared to the prior hundred years, such as the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. King was not the initial person to use nonviolence in an effort to address the race issue in America, nevertheless, he was most influential in organizing large Black groups to engage in peaceful protests in support of the realization of their fundamental human rights.¹³ Martin Luther King, Jr. plays important role in *The White Boy Shuffle*. Cameron Leader-Picone declares that the novel uses King to stand in for both the

¹⁰ "Martin Luther King, Jr.," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 5, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr>.

¹¹ Nathan Irvin Huggins, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (September 1987):476.

¹² Harry A. Reed, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: History and Memory, Reflections on Dreams and Silences," *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 2 (1999): 150.

¹³ James A. Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action," *Phylon (1960-)* 47, no. 1 (1986): 16.

event such as the Civil Rights Movement and inspirational Black leadership.¹⁴ King is mentioned during a speech at a demonstration at Boston University by Gunnar. As a matter of fact, his statue was located where the demonstration took place. Gunnar asked people if they knew what the plaque located at the bottom of the sculpture said and not a single person knew. Therefore, he stated:

You motherfuckers pass by that ugly-ass sculpture every day. You hang your coats on it, open beer bottles on it, meet your hot Friday night dates there, now here you are talking about freedom this and whitey putting-shit-in-the-game that and you don't even know what the plaque says?¹⁵

Gunnar recognizes the oddity of attempting to guide people who did not recognize the sacrifices or efforts that were done by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Black leaders. Throughout his speech, Gunnar draws attention to the fact that Black people nowadays, particularly young Black men and women, tend to rely on the triumphs and sorrows of earlier Black leadership. Stallings explains as Martin Luther King, Jr. did not rely on the exact Black public domain that people at this moment in time can.¹⁶ The claim made in Gunnar's speech is that Black in the post-civil rights era believe they have accomplished racial justice. The plaque at the bottom of the statue states: "If a man hasn't discovered something he will die for, he isn't fit to live. Martin Luther King, Jr." The plaque provided context for Gunnar's speech, and he continued by saying:

So I asked myself, what am I willing to die for? The day when white people treat me with respect and see my life as equally valuable to theirs? No, I ain't willing to die for that, because if they don't know that by now, they ain't never going to know it. Matter of fact, I guess I'm just not fit to live. In other words, I'm just ready to die. I'm just ready to die.¹⁷

In his speech, he points out that he cannot think of anything to die for and this part of the talk is said because the King's plaque sparked the concept for Gunnar regarding the talk.

¹⁴ Cameron Leader-Picone, "Pilgrims in an Unholy Land: Satire and the Challenge of African American Leadership in *The Boondocks* and *The White Boy Shuffle*," in *Post-Soul Satire: Black Identity after Civil Rights*, ed. Derek C. Maus, James J. Donahue (the United States: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 140.

¹⁵ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 235.

¹⁶ L. H. Stallings, "Punked for Life: Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* and Radical Black Masculinities." *African American Review* 43, no. 1 (2009): 102.

¹⁷ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 236.

2. Race and Racism

When talking about the term Black, this thesis contains capitalized “B” in the word Black instead of one in lowercase. The reason is explained by Dean Baquet who is the executive editor of *The New York Times*, and Phil Corbett, associate managing editor for standards, in a memo to staff. They believe the change expresses aspects of mutual identity and past, and represents a commitment to be supportive of every individual and group. The national editor of *The New York Times* Marc Lacey stated: “It seems like such a minor change, black versus Black, [b]ut for many people the capitalization of that one letter is the difference between a color and a culture.”¹⁸

Encyclopedia Britannica declares that racism is the view explaining there are distinct biological groups of people called races in our world. These groups are causally related to one another in terms of personality, morality, intelligence, and other cultural and behavioral characteristics, and some races are inherently superior to others. Inequalities in wealth and income, health care, education, civil rights, and other sectors are maintained based on race. Racism refers to political, economic, or legal organizations and systems that practice or preserve this form of discrimination.¹⁹

Ali Rattansi states that the Nazi aim to make Germany judenrein, or *clean of Jews*, led to the term racism being created in the 1930s. There was no question in the minds of the Nazis that Jews were a separate race and a danger to the Aryan race, to which legitimate Germans were supposed to belong. The difficulties that have followed the spread of the idea of racism can now be seen as having existed from the start in many cases. After all, one could argue that anti-Semitism has a very long history and that the Nazi agenda was just one phase. Since anti-Semitism is one of the oldest forms of racism, some have even called it “the longest hatred.”²⁰

Racism, furthermore, has a long history in the U.S. The history of American arguments and laws indicates ongoing problems in categorizing the Black population, according to Rattansi. Many Southern states implemented the infamous *one drop* rule, which claimed that any Black ancestry, no matter how distant, condemned a person to the wrong side of the white/Black split and restricted one’s options for housing, employment, and even relationships with white partners. However, the significance of a single drop of white blood in determining racial status was diminished. Although the concepts of racism and race are inextricably linked, it should be evident by now that the more one studies the history of each term, the more

¹⁸ Nancy Coleman, “Why We’re Capitalizing Black,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2020.

¹⁹ “Racism,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified January 5, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/racism>.

²⁰ Ali Rattansi, *Racism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), 4-5.

mysterious it becomes. Both biological and cultural components, such as skin tone, religion, and behavior, are included in the concept of race. Depending on the group and the historical era under consideration, the biological and cultural components of a racial group appear to merge in varying amounts. Therefore, it is inevitable that the concept of racism is also influenced by social factors and political disagreement.²¹

As stated by Ali Rattansi, in the decades following the fall of Nazism and the development of genetic science, the concept of race has been on the decline. It is even harder to pinpoint the precise role that racism may play in issues like the fact that one in twenty Americans over the age of eighteen is incarcerated and that Black men in the U.S. are ten times more likely than white men to enter prison. Amnesty International reported in 2004, Black defendants found guilty of killing white people receive death sentences fifteen times more frequently than white defendants found guilty of killing black people. Additionally, Black people in the U.S. are only half as likely to receive the death penalty for killing another Black person as they are for killing a white person.²² *The White Boy Shuffle* deals with discrimination and racism from the police repeatedly. Stalling states: “Beatty establishes that his novel is about the well-intentioned but problematic ways of how African Americans deal with the ever-present of racism in the U.S.”²³ Racism is portrayed when Gunnar’s school Phillis Wheatley High did a monthly assembly called “Young Black and Latino Men: Endangered Species.”²⁴ Stallings explains that the idea that men of color are an endangered species accurately captures the crisis narrative. Visitor speakers from the city’s businesses, former athletes, community leaders, and ex-convicts would deliver inspirational lectures throughout this monthly gathering. The assembly exemplifies just how institutionalized racism, misinformation, and racial oppression, about sexuality and gender affect Black children’s schooling.²⁵ At the beginning of the assembly, principal Newcombe asked different questions. She asked if anybody has ever been handcuffed to which the main character Gunner raised his hand. He explained further that when he was eight years old a police officer visited his school. To illustrate the issue:

[H]e asks for a volunteer to help demonstrate how they work and chooses me, although I didn’t have my hand raised. Anyway, the cop asks me to pretend I’m the bad guy and he handcuffs me, both hands. In the middle of reading me my rights, he asks me if I can get out of the handcuffs. I was so skinny I lowered my arms and the cuffs slid to the floor.

²¹ Rattansi, *Racism*, 7.

²² Rattansi, *Racism*, 7-8.

²³ Stallings, “Punked for Life,” 101.

²⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 134.

²⁵ Stallings, “Punked for Life,” 111.

The whole class is laughing. Then the cop says, “Don’t worry, in a few years they’ll stay on.”²⁶

This dialogue between the police officer and Gunnar portrays the racist prejudices the officer has against not only Gunnar but Black people in general. Racism is present in this situation because the police officer is certain that Gunnar will be arrested or behind bars once he is older. Gunnar dealt with racism on a daily basis when he lived in Santa Monica. He would often play with his white friends. However, whenever they did some mischief and the police would go after them, only he was ever caught for being Black. He portrayed the situation as:

I suffered through countless admonishments from over-zealous officers lucky enough to grab one of us in some act of mischief that was always a precursor to a lifetime of incarceration bunking with society’s undesirables. “Young man, try to imagine a future behind bars.”²⁷

He is happy with his friends, he likes to play with them and does not care if they are white. The only thing he minds is the discrimination and racism toward him by the police. Subsequently, he moved to Hillside, which was a predominantly Black community, he was immediately welcomed by a visit from the police. Gunnar explained their visit such as:

These weren’t some Santa Monica cops sporting Conflict Resolution ribbons, riding powder-blue bicycles, this was the LAPD, dressed to oppress, their hands calmly poised over open holsters like seasoned gunfighters.²⁸

The police knew that Gunnar had some problems with the police in Santa Monica and according to them: “We practice what we like to call ‘preventative police enforcement.’ Whereby, we prefer to deter habitual criminals before they cause irreparable damage to the citizenry and/or its property.”²⁹ Their statement indicated that their initial thought was that Gunnar would sooner or later do something to put himself in prison. They did not assume that everybody is different, and he might not do anything and obey the law. They simply had a prejudice against Black people living in Hillside and it is certain they practice this process all these years. The police wanted to know from the boy for whom he works, what kind of gang he is in. Gunnar was in Hillside at most a few days, and the police were already interested in him. Another occurrence of racism is described when Gunnar and his friend Psycho Loco talk about their experiences with police and how they harass people of their race. To illustrate this issue:

²⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 135.

²⁷ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 31.

²⁸ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 57.

²⁹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 57.

[B]eing frisked in front of our parents, forced to pull out pants down near the day-care center, made to wait face down in the streets with our hands interlocked behind our heads and feet crossed at the ankles, gritty footprints on the nape of our necks.³⁰

Beatty points out the treatment of Black people in America by the police. He shows in this description what police make people do such as pulling their pants down or being face down on the pavement. This inhumane and horrifying situation is experienced by many Black people around America. They are not treated the same and even in some situations, when they had not done anything wrong, they are treated in this cruel and barbaric way in this book. Sadly, this happens in most cases when law enforcement is dealing with Black people and Beatty wanted to capture how discriminating police officers can be in this novel. Gunnar realized how racist police officers can be at an early age when he often used to visit his father, who was an LAPD sketch artist, at the precinct. Gunnar and his family could take a joke and joke with friends. However, when he was at the precinct his father's colleagues were always telling racist jokes such as: "[H]ow-many-niggers-does-it-take jokes, pounding each other on the back and looking over their broad shoulders to see if me and Daddy were laughing. Dad always was."³¹ Gunnar further explained that if he did not laugh his father would slap him. This particular situation indicates how racism was present in the father's everyday life. His colleagues found these racist jokes funny and did not think about how Gunnar's father would feel and how it would affect him. He laughed at these jokes to presumably fit in and not stand out amongst other officers. Not only he had to cope with the jokes at his work but when sketching he "used his face as a reference point"³² when drawing the victim's faces. This by no means happened when white people would sketch the faces of victims and they would not use themselves as the reference. The specific situation highlights how Black men are stereotypically suspects. Racism is present in the life of Black people almost every day as implied in the novel. Gunnar once stated: "After growing accustomed to police officers pulling students out of class for impromptu interrogations, bomb scares, and locker searches."³³ The circumstance shows how Black people got used to the racism they received from police officers on daily basis. It displays how the police officers automatically went to interrogate Black students for the inconvenience that happened. These occurrences portray the prejudice the police have against Black people and in all probability would not happen to a white student. Another situation involving law

³⁰ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 149.

³¹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 13.

³² Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 13.

³³ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 77.

enforcement occurred when Gunnar went out one night and immediately heard a police helicopter and saw the white and blue light aiming at him. Intuitively, he did the routine he was used to doing when dealing with the police such as: “Instinctively, my hands shot above my head as I waited for the standard drill – ‘Face down on the ground, hands behind your head, ankles crossed. Move!’”³⁴ This situation portrays the standard routine Black people are used to in this specific novel. White person’s first instinct would not be to lie down, put their hands behind their head, and cross their ankles. It indicates racism towards Black people. Another occurrence where police were portrayed happened when Gunnar, his friend Psycho Loco and Pookie Hamilton, who was a neighborhood celebrity, were in a car driving through the streets. Pookie was telling them a story about his cameo in docudrama *Peace Officer* where:

[W]hite cop is driving down a dark street, quickly glancing from the road to the camera and explaining what it’s like to patrol the streets of West Los Angeles. [...] The cop looks into the camera as if he’s talking to his partner and says, “See that. That nig ... uh, turd ... uh, guy is probably intoxicated.”³⁵

This fictitious situation portrays how the police are talking about Black people. For instance, they are using racial slurs and derogatory terms to humiliate a Black person. If the situation were different and they would see a white man, they would refer to him in many more respectable words. What is even more absurd is that this did not occur in a real life but was in a docudrama. It really shows how police officers are racist toward Black people in this book. A different situation involving the police occurred on Gunnar’s first day in the new school El Campesino Real High in San Fernando Valley. While he was having a conversation with his teacher, he realized that: “It had been a long time since I’d communicated with white people who weren’t athletes or police officers.”³⁶ From this encounter, it is evident that apart from him living in Santa Monica the only white people he had interactions with were basketball players and police. The encounters he had with law enforcement were not pleasant and most of the time he had done nothing wrong, but they still found him suspicious in a particular situation because of his race. Another occurrence with law enforcement happened while he was at Boston University. At the time Gunnar was known for his poetry and when he attended a class, white people started to cheer and could not believe the famous Black poet was in the poetry workshop. Gunnar panicked and wanted to prove to them he had nothing in common with them and to do so while walking to his apartment. During the walk he started to undress. Just as he reached the

³⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 254-255.

³⁵ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 129.

³⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 182.

apartment building, he was stopped by the police. However, his professor told them: “It’s okay, he’s a poet. Matter of fact, the best black ... the best poet writing today.”³⁷ The police immediately let him go. They would not do that if the professor had not said something to stop them. On normal occasions in all probability, he would be handcuffed and taken to a police station. Racism is captured in this quick encounter with the law enforcement who were quick to get to him because of his race and likely expected him to do something more dangerous than only go into his apartment naked. Perhaps they did not even take into consideration he could be a resident there. Their view of the situation would be different if white people were involved.

According to Rattansi in any case, there are unique issues with the category of white people. Whiteness has never been a straightforward issue of the apparent difference in the U.S. Through political strife and strategic alliances, groups like the Irish, Italians, and Jews could set themselves apart from Blacks and communities of Chinese descent and eventually gain acceptability as whites. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the *one drop* rule, which plainly does not apply to whites, has dramatically distorted the concept of Blackness. Otherwise, all Black people would have to be categorized as white.³⁸

In terms of racism, it is talked about institutional racism. Rattansi states that the term institutional racism was first popularized in the United States in the late 1960s by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in their *Black Power*. Stokely and Carmichael wanted to emphasize how all whites benefited from social structures and organizational patterns that constantly disadvantaged Black people while allowing whites to maintain a significant advantage in living standards, including health, housing, life span, neighborhood amenities, safety, and educational facilities. Regardless of whether ordinary white people’s attitudes, motivations, and behavior were racist or not. Institutional racism was used to draw attention to the unequal playing field on which Blacks and whites competed for respectable standards of living. Black people were routinely disadvantaged in both opportunity and results.³⁹

Racism is still being experienced for the time being and is still a debating point of conversation. Beverly Daniel Tatum is a clinical psychologist with a research focus on the racial character development of Black children and according to her, there is always someone who will say that racism is a topic of the past. There is always going to be somebody who has not seen the housing discrimination in their neighborhood, who has not noticed the stereotypical depictions of people of color in the media, who has not read the newspaper articles about the

³⁷ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 212.

³⁸ Rattansi, *Racism*, 11.

³⁹ Rattansi, *Racism*, 132-133.

documented racial prejudice in practices between acclaimed banks, who have not observed the reports of rising cases of racially motivated racist violence in America meaning it is somebody who has not been considering racial issues. Racism, however, is not difficult to notice if one pays attention, and it affects society as a whole.⁴⁰ Black people did not experience racism only from law enforcement but often times from their surroundings and people of different races than them. After Gunnar encouraged people to send him their death poems, he received many of them showing situations of racism towards these people. Thirty-one-year-old Carlton Malthus drank himself to death after being refused the bar's invention of a drink called a Crater Lake Blue. The bar's reasoning why they at first did not allow him to order the drink was that Carlton was: "too black to appreciate 'the Blue.'" ⁴¹ It might seem ironic considering Black people were linked in the past with Blues and now he was refused because suddenly him being too Black was apparently an issue. The next letter was from Carol Yancy who stabbed herself in a supermarket and the reason for that was that the supermarket: "refused to place the change in her hand."⁴² The next victim of racism was Merva Kilgore who was a writer and when she was reading her poems in an elementary school the white principal asked her if she could sing: "one of those old Negro spirituals."⁴³ The content of the three letters displays how Black people endure racism daily. They have to deal with it in a working environment, when going out to a bar or a restaurant, or even when going shopping. It makes life difficult for them and coping with it on daily basis makes it exhausting for people to carry on with their existence. It does not matter the age people are to experience racism in the novel. This can be seen when Gunnar was still a teenager and was away in Oregon at a basketball camp. He wrote his mother a letter in which he expressed discrimination towards him at the camp because of his skin color. To clarify the issue:

I am the last in line to do everything. Last to eat. Last to use the shower. Last to get issued the camp sweats and practice uniforms with 100 emblazoned on the back. In the "college prep" class, I have to sit way in the back. Not that I'm missing anything. College prep amounts to an etiquette lesson on how to behave once we get there.⁴⁴

Gunnar's experience evidently shows how he was discriminated against at the high school camp and treated by others. He was last in everything because he is Black and not because of his

⁴⁰ Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race* (Basic Books, 2017), 15, <https://www.basicbooks.com/titles/beverly-daniel-tatum/why-are-all-the-black-kids-sitting-together-in-the-cafeteria/9780465060689/>.

⁴¹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 250.

⁴² Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 250.

⁴³ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 251.

⁴⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 169-170.

abilities. It should not matter in which position he was in line to eat, use a shower, get sweats, or even which number he had embroidered on the back of his uniform. Yet he was still the last and faced discrimination the whole time he was at the camp.

According to Tatum racial discrimination has an early effect. People are exposed to false information about individuals who differ from themselves starting in their preschool years. Many people grew up in communities with few opportunities to socialize with individuals outside of their own families.⁴⁵ This can be seen in the novel *The White Boy Shuffle* where Gunnar first lived in a white community in Santa Monica and then moved to Hillside which is a community of many races but mainly Black people. He is aware that he is Black but during his stay in Santa Monica, he was mainly exposed only to the white population. He adopted the way whites talk, behave, and dress. One time his mother asked him and his sister if he would feel better going to a black camp which he immediately dismissed. His answer was: “Because they’re different from us.”⁴⁶ Gunnar lived for so long in the primarily white community that it was hard for him to live anywhere else especially among the same race of people because according to him they were different from him. His mother immediately planned their move to Hillside due to the disappointing revelation from her son. Stallings explains that Gunnar’s relationship to blackness is not Southern, Northern, or urban. He will not access real blackness in the South, by moving to the Africa and South, or by moving North. Stallings states: “His migratory identity is post-civil rights: he has to migrate from the suburbs to the hood.” Gunnar is guided toward his career as a race leader by his mother.⁴⁷ Immediately upon his move to the Black community he asked for directions and the Black young guy made fun of the way he talked and dressed. It is evident and unmistakable that even when Gunnar tried fit in to the white community and did not succeed, he started to have the same issue in the community of Hillside. It is clearly a struggle for Gunnar to fit in. He has this problem in Santa Monica as well as in Hillside. He was trying to fit in and adapt to each community but failed to do so and as he stated:

I was the funny, cool black guy. In Santa Monica, like most predominantly white sanctuaries from urban blight, “cool black guy” is a versatile identifier used to distinguish the harmless black male from the Caucasian juvenile while maintaining politically correct semiotics.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, 15.

⁴⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 45.

⁴⁷ Stallings, “Punked for Life,” 106-107

⁴⁸ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 34.

Beatty explains that, in Santa Monica, Gunnar is perceived as the funny black guy and realizes that when anyone is a darker shade, white kids will believe anything the person says. Consequently, he would make up lies for instance that he was part gypsy and could predict the future. Him not belonging to Santa Monica is seen when he had a sleepover at a friend's house, he observed that his friend David would put toothpaste on a toothbrush first and then put it under water. He would further explain: "I, like most folks, wet my brush, then put on the toothpaste, but I copied him because he was white and I figured maybe I was doing it wrong."⁴⁹ It does not matter if one wets their brush first and then puts on toothpaste and vice versa, but it mattered to Gunnar. He was under the assumption he was doing it wrong, however, there is no right or wrong way. Gunnar was only trying to fit in and be like the other white kids, but that was impossible considering they were raised differently and were different as people. Beatty shows how Gunnar is not Black enough to fit in Hillside and is not white enough to belong in white Santa Monica. During a time when Gunnar and his class discussed color, he had to describe what some colors mean to him. While thinking of white he described this particular color as: "White Gunnar was a broken stringed kite leaning into the sea breeze, expertly maneuvering in the gusty gales."⁵⁰ This is what he thought of himself when he imagined the color white. When describing the color black, he portrayed it as:

Black was an unwanted dog abandoned in the forest who finds its way home by fording flooded rivers and hitchhiking in the beds of pickup truck and arrives at its destination only to be taken for a car ride to the desert. Black was being a nigger who didn't know any other niggers.⁵¹

In these examples of the color black and white, it is clear that Gunnar thought of himself differently if he were white or Black. It portrays how he had to change in order to fit in different environments. When Gunnar left Santa Monica and moved to Hillside he wrote letters to his friends. It is evident how he changed his style of writing in each letter. He had different styles of writing and appeared to have different ways of intellectuality to please the particular friend and it displays how he in all probability acted around them, therefore, every individual friend knew a different side of him. Looking at the way Gunnar had a hard time adjusting to life in Santa Monica and Hillside and how he as a matter of fact never fitted anywhere, it is safe to assume he was confused about it. He found out after his move to Hillside that this community is much different from the one in Santa Monica. He stated:

⁴⁹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 48-49.

⁵⁰ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 43.

⁵¹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 43-44.

I learned the hard way that social norms in Santa Monica were unforgivable breaches of proper Hillside etiquette. I'd been taught to look someone in the eye when speaking to them. On the streets of Hillside, even the briefest eye contact wasn't a simple faux pass but an interpersonal trespass that merited retaliation. [...] The people of Hillside treat society the way society treats them. Strangers and friends are suspect and guilty until proven innocent.⁵²

He was not used to this lifestyle. There is an evident contrast between these two communities, and it is safe to assume it would be hard for the main character to fit in the new community at Hillside considering he was not used to the manners local people have even though he is a Black person and they are as well. The difference between being Black and white was felt by Gunnar during his basketball practice. When his basketball coach Shimimoto wanted to divide his students into two teams he would repeatedly put on one team people with black shoes and on the other team people who had white shoes or people who had not been to the dentist and people who had been. However, when he asked the students to split into two groups based on who had red and dark lips Gunnar was perplexed. This particular situation captures how Gunnar never really knew where he belonged. He explained it as: "My upper lip is dark and the bottom is cranberry red, so I was a bit confused."⁵³ He did not know where he stood not only literally but also figuratively. He did not know how to be himself as a Black person. This was explained to him by his best friend Nicholas Scoby when he said to him: " 'Stay black, nigger.' 'And what exactly does 'stay black' mean, Nick?' 'It means be yourself, what else could it possibly mean?' " ⁵⁴ At this moment Gunnar tried to be himself as a Black person and did not try anymore to be like white people by copying their manners, and how they dressed or spoke. It shows how far he has become and how he finally started to understand what it means to be Black. For him, it meant being himself and not to try being like other people regarding their race.

When talking about racism, prejudice should be mentioned. Tatum asserts that prejudice emerges as a result of stereotypes, deceptions, and omissions. A preconceived judgment or view, typically based on incomplete knowledge, is called prejudice. Tatum believes that everyone has prejudices, not because people intentionally do so but rather because they are constantly exposed to false information about other people. Although Tatum frequently hears students or workshop attendees say that someone is not prejudiced, she usually advises them to take another look. One of the unavoidable outcomes of living in a racist community is prejudice. Cultural racism, or the cultural images and messages that support the presumption that white

⁵² Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 64.

⁵³ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 144.

⁵⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 183.

people are superior and people of color are inferior, is according to her like smog in the atmosphere. The smog people breathe in every day, whether it is visible because it is so thick, or whether it is less noticeable. No individual would identify as a smog breather and the majority of people do not want to be labeled as prejudiced. Society will form the negative classifications of groups that serve as the foundation of prejudice if people live in a society where they are frequently subjected to ethnic jokes from family and friends. In a society where people are constantly exposed to stereotypical media images and are hardly informed of the achievements of suppressed groups. These classifications are created by both white people and people of color. Even a representative of the stereotypical group may internalize some of the stereotypes about their own group. As a matter of fact, *internalized oppression* is a term used to describe this process since it occurs so frequently.⁵⁵ The process is seen in *The White Boy Shuffle* during a conversation about girls. Gunnar's friend Psycho Loco finds out Gunnar never really had a girlfriend. Gunnar argues he had one in Santa Monica, a white girl named Eileen, but Psycho Loco said it did not count and that in two years as soon as Gunnar is eighteen, he is going to find him a wife. When Gunnar thinks about it, he realizes he would really not find someone on his own and that perhaps arranged marriage would not be appalling. Gunnar claims that he adhered to Judeo-Christian virtues he gathered from British romantics like Coleridge and Wordsworth or American sitcoms such as *Ozzie and Harriet*. To this, Psycho Loco stated: "You crazy? How could anyone do that shit? Don't even think about it. It's like slavery or something."⁵⁶ Psycho Loco's answer shows how some Black people at that time are not comfortable marrying a white person. He goes as far as calling it slavery and is clearly shocked by the idea of Gunnar ever marrying a girl that would be white. As stated by Tatum, there are those who intentionally embrace and spread terrible impressions of those who are different from themselves, and there are those who are undoubtedly more biased than others. Perhaps what society means when it says it is prejudice-free is that individuals are not hateful people. However, no one in society is free from blame. Prejudice is ingrained in people from a young age and is not their fault. People are not at fault for the prejudices and omissions that influenced their way of thinking as they grew up. However, just because society claims it was not its fault does not free people of accountability. Even though people may not have contributed to air pollution, they must participate in the cleanup efforts and should all evaluate their actions. Without performing deliberate actions of reflection and reeducation, society as a

⁵⁵ Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, 16-17

⁵⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 149.

whole is likely to have children go through the same thing. Society shares what they have learned. The children inherit the parents' unquestioned views. Despite the fact that it is not people's fault, they must stop this circle.⁵⁷

Related to racism and prejudices is colorblindness. Edward Fergus declares that colorblindness evolved following the civil rights movement, while society had previously accepted this theory in the early 1900s as a means of integrating immigrants. People adopted colorblindness after the civil rights movement in the hope that eliminating the concept of race or ethnicity as a dividing line between people might stop racism. Additionally, colorblindness enables its practitioners to excuse racial injustice. True believers of colorblindness might claim that specific circumstances only occur as a result of environmental factors or the cultural practices of subgroups. For instance, a colorblindness assumption blames social inequality in residential communities on people's capacity to purchase a house and is unaware of the faint actions. These actions are taken by banks to charge loans with higher interest rates to people with relatively lower wage and members of racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities or real estate agents to restrict potential buyers' access to homes or apartments.⁵⁸ Colorblindness is expressed in *The White Boy Shuffle* when Gunnar's teacher in Santa Monica lectured them about colorblind society. She was asking the kids about examples such as:

Anyone else think of anything that's colorblind? Gunnar?

Dogs.

I [teacher] believe that dogs are truly colorblind, but they're born that way. Class, it's important that we judge people for what?

Their minds!

And not their what?

Color!⁵⁹

Gunnar's teacher clearly expressed what it means to be colorblind. People should not judge others based on their skin color and the teacher is trying to teach this term to her class. Even though children and even adults know what colorblind society means some of them are still racist. Children are evidently educated and could apply this level of thinking to the outside world however they see how adults are discriminating towards people of different skin color subsequently it can be confusing to them. As a result, there is a possibility that some of them will judge others regarding their skin color even in spite of the fact they were taught differently. When Gunnar goes to a doctor the same day, he asks what is the purpose of the test, and the

⁵⁷ Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, 16-17.

⁵⁸ Edward Fergus, "Confronting Colorblindness," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 98, no. 5 (February 2017): 32.

⁵⁹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 38.

doctor explains to him it is for colorblindness. To which Gunnar replies: “ ‘Our teacher says we’re supposed to be colorblind. That’s hard to do if you can see color, isn’t it?’ ‘Yeah, I’d say so, but I think your teacher means don’t make any assumptions based on color.’ ”⁶⁰ It is shown that Gunnar is confused about the concept of colorblindness. After all, he is not supposed to be colorblind when he is being tested by the doctor because his sight is perfect. On the other hand, his teacher teaches them to be colorblind and not judge people based on their color but based on their minds. In this example, it is explained that there should not be any barriers between races, people should not be looked down on because of their skin color. This explanation of colorblindness contains aspects of satire which will be discussed later on.

⁶⁰ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 39.

3. Black's Stereotypes

It is widely acknowledged that Walter Lippmann was the first person to establish the notion of a stereotype in his book *Public Opinion*. Lippmann asserts that people's opinions encompass more than what they can really see, including a wider time span and a larger number of things. Hence, they must be tight together using information from other sources and our imagination.⁶¹ Lippmann states that for most of the time, people characterize before they see anything rather than seeing first and then characterizing. Society chooses what culture has already established for any individual, and people often view what they choose in the way that their culture has stereotyped it.⁶² He further explains that society must evaluate not just the information available to people, but also the mindsets through which they have processed it.⁶³ According to Lippmann, people cannot fully comprehend another person's actions unless they know what they think they are aware of. As a result, it is practically impossible to perceive everything clearly and in detail while conducting active issues, as opposed to types and generalizations. The factors that produce and preserve the stereotype are the most covert and persistent of all effects. Before society sees the world, it is first informed about it. Almost all things people experience just before they envision them. And until learning has made individuals highly aware, these prejudices profoundly influence the entire perceptual process. Prejudices distinguish between odd or familiar objects by magnifying the differences, making the somewhat strange appear foreign and the mildly familiar seem very familiar. However, some stereotypes are accurate and it would be wasteful to give up all stereotypes in favor of an entirely innocent way of looking at the world. What counts are the characteristics of the stereotypes and how credulously people use them. These characteristics ultimately rely on the universal patterns that make up a way of life. If, in that mindset, people take it for granted that there is a pattern that governs the world, they are likely to use that pattern to describe the world in their observations of what is happening. The philosophy of society holds that each person only makes up a small portion of the world and intelligence only captures stages and elements of existence through a rough net of notions. When people use stereotypes, they tend to recognize that they are merely that – stereotypes. People also have a tendency to understand the origins of their ideas meaning where they came from, why they adopted them, and how the ideas reached us.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 79.

⁶² Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 81.

⁶³ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 85.

⁶⁴ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 88-91.

Not only there is the existence of stereotypes but there is another term called metastereotypes. Sigelman and Tuch explained that to the best of our knowledge, no one has ever raised the issue of “metastereotypes – blacks’ impressions of whites’ stereotypes of blacks” in the academic community. This is problematic because metastereotypes, just like stereotypes themselves, have a significant impact on how each individual, who is involved, behaves. For instance, whereas negative stereotypes held by whites about Blacks may make it more difficult for Blacks to move into formerly all-white neighborhoods, the desire of Blacks to do so appears to be more likely to be affected by their perceptions of white stereotypes rather than by white stereotypes as such. Tuch and Sigelman compiled information on Black Americans’ metastereotypes from a nationwide Time/CNN survey. The polling company Yankelovich Clancy Shulman conducted phone interviews with five hundred and four Black individuals who made up a sample that was nationally representative between April 24 and April 29, 1991. Interviewees were questioned about racial concerns after responding to a number of generic political questions. One of the initial questions asked whether:

“most white Americans hold the following perceptions of black Americans or not” – the assumptions in order: “Blacks are lazy”; “are religious”; “are more likely to commit violent crimes”; “would rather live off welfare than work”; “are less intelligent than whites”; “are better athletes than whites”; “have no self-discipline”; “are patriotic”; “have low moral standards”; “are good parents”; “are always whining about racism”; and “are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol”

Partially two-thirds of Black people believed that most white people view them as being violent, stupid, morally wrong, unmotivated, and undisciplined complainers who would rather use substances such as alcohol and drugs and rely on welfare than employment. This means that a significant majority of Black people believed that most white people view them negatively. The majority of Black people also believed that most white people saw them as devout and athletic. It was divided evenly that most white people view Black people as loyal and excellent parents. The racial stereotypes that Black individuals believed to be most prevalent among white Americans were all negative, if the stereotype of athleticism is taken aside. When compared to the opposing preconceptions of Blacks as patriotic, devout, and great parents, Blacks believed that each of these pessimistic stereotypes was more common among whites.⁶⁵ Stereotypes are repeatedly presented in *The White Boy Shuffle*. For instance, during Gunnar’s visit to a doctor, they had a conversation regarding colorblindness and a colorblind society. The conversation resulted in the doctor explaining to Gunnar who was previously lectured about this topic at

⁶⁵ Sigelman, Tuch, “Metastereotypes,” 88-90.

school that their teacher does not want them to see color. As a result, they are supposed to be colorblind. The doctor further clarifies to him that the teacher meant they should not make assumptions based on color. The children should not say things like: “Black people are lecherous, violent, natural-born criminals.”⁶⁶ In this one sentence, it is expressed what white people think of Black people based on stereotypes. Dr. Gowher Ahmad Naik and Sanjay Kumar explain this situation:

Beatty uses the stereotypical images of blacks in hilarious form; on the one hand, it is said that there is no racism. But on the other hand, whites have some fixed images of blacks as lustful, violent, and natural-born criminals.⁶⁷

Children learn these stereotypes from their parents and the people that surround them and apply them to their everyday life. This does not mean that every individual is thinking like that according to this example but as a matter of fact, people grew up in an environment where everybody believed a particular stereotype, which they apply in their life. Another occurrence of stereotype is displayed when Gunnar enrolled into a new school in Hillside, the receptionist looked into his file where it said:

Despite his race, subject possesses remarkable intelligence and excellent reasoning and analytic skills. His superb yet raw athletic ability exceeds even the heightened expectations normally accorded those of his ethnicity.⁶⁸

The results of the CNN survey are clearly seen in this monologue. There is an emphasis on the phrase “despite his race” because white people think of Blacks as less intelligent, lazy and that they do not like to focus on education. Gunnar is a smart Black boy and so are others of his race yet white people think otherwise based on stereotypes that were created decades ago. Another example of what white people think of Blacks is shown in the scene where Gunnar enters a drama competition with his drama club from Hillside. The competition is only made up of white boys and girls and with the children from predominantly Black community Hillside. Gunnar is supposed to play Iago from *Othello* and when he eventually walks up on stage, he says to the judges what he knows when they think of him. To display the stereotype:

What dost thou know me for? A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking whoreson one trunk-inheriting slave beggar, Nigger..... I will beat you into clamorous whining if thou deny’st the least syllable of thy addition.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 39.

⁶⁷ Gowher Ahmad Naik, Sanjay Kumar, “Racial Discrimination And Stereotyping In Paul Beatty’s *The White Boy Shuffle*: A Critical Study,” *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 8 (2022): 2720.

⁶⁸ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 74.

⁶⁹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 86.

The monologue shows the typical image of whites about Blacks. Gunnar expresses what the judges think of him. Not only him but about other Black children they see. They think of Black people as dishonest, descendants of slaves, beggars, shallow and filthy. In a view of the fact that at the time almost every single white person thought this about Black people.

Louis Harrison, Keith Harrison, and Leonard Moore state that racial identity views may be closely correlated with sports and physical activity views. Perceiving a sport or physical activity as identity-acceptable can have a big impact on people's willingness to play, practice, and stick with their chosen activity or sport.⁷⁰ According to David Wiggins involvement in other activities is considered unsuitable, Black youth may view football, track and field, and basketball as acceptable. These attitudes may lead to the development of talents, competences and likes in a select group of activities at the expense of the many of others.⁷¹ Paul Beatty sets the example of racial stereotypes in sports in *The White Boy Shuffle*. Gunnar and his classmate Eileen were the fastest kids in their school. They ran marathons every Friday around the schoolyard and people would place bets on them. Instead of paying attention and running Gunnar focused on how beautiful Eileen was and as a result, she ran out first. He had a chance to catch her at the end but decided against it. The boys were disappointed in him and commented:

Dude, why did you let her win? I lost four grape Pixie Stix. What the fuck is wrong with you, man? You're supposed to be fast. When's the last time a white sprinter won a race? Would you bowl with a white bowling ball? No, you wouldn't.⁷²

Beatty clearly presented one of the most known stereotypes about Black people which is that they are great athletes whether it is in basketball or running. This example discusses how other children grew up knowing this particular stereotype. Everybody expected Gunnar to win because of his skin color. However, people could expect him to win not only because he is Black but also because he is a boy. People frequently assume that boys are faster than girls. Mainly society always thinks and assumes that Black people are great at running so that is the reason the boys expected Gunnar to win. Wiggins believes that in discussions about the relationship between race and athletic ability and worries about Black people's difficulty in

⁷⁰ Louis Harrison, Jr., C. Keith Harrison, Leonard M. Moore, "African American Racial Identity and Sport," *Sport, Education and Society* 7, no. 2 (2002): 125.

⁷¹ David K. Wiggins, *More Than a Game: A History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Landam: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2018), 180, <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442248960/More-Than-a-Game-A-History-of-the-African-American-Experience-in-Sport>.

⁷² Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 41.

landing jobs in administration, coaching and sports journalism, Black people continue to place a high value on sporting careers, engage in numerous sports, and struggle with issues related to racialized mindset and white privilege. A small handful of Blacks managed to become international icons despite their daily battle to gain entry into other sports. Unsurprisingly, several Black basketball heroes would attain this position, mainly because of the game's extreme popularity both domestically and overseas. The victories of Black athletes were extremely essential because they promoted racial pride, helped dispel white notions about Black weakness, and could therefore advance the race. This was especially true when they competed against white athletes. Some Blacks disagreed with this view and warned against overemphasizing athletics for concern that it would reinforce the myth that Black people are mentally deficient and physically talented. While being successful in sports might be financially rewarding and mentally fulfilling for some Black sportsmen, for other Black people, it will never be enough to solve the issues associated with race. Regardless as Black people in America have a greater obsession with sports than other racial groups, the data shows that they continue to be underrepresented in many sports and overrepresented in a small number of sports. Despite significant efforts by individuals and groups to ensure that minorities are given opportunities to participate in sports traditionally restricted to any of them, the disparity in these rates of participation has stayed relatively steady over the previous few years with next to no noticeable movement. Approximately sixty-one percent of college basketball teams and seventy-four percent of NBA players are Black.⁷³ In *The White Boy Shuffle* Gunnar excels at basketball and he has a natural talent that can be seen throughout the novel. When they are playing a match, his teammates rely on him to shoot the winning ball which he does and as a result, they win. His Coach Shimimoto tells him: "What a competitor. What self-control. That hold on your emotions will take you far wait and see, Gunnar."⁷⁴ Beatty wrote another example of a stereotype in sports which is that Black people excel in basketball. Even if Gunnar does not care about the sport later on it still helps him to fit in and be good at something. Wiggins argues that Black people continue to overrepresent in a few sports and one of them is basketball. Several theories have been put forth in an attempt to clarify why Black people are so passionate about basketball. Some have stated that basketball is especially appealing to poor young Black

⁷³ David K. Wiggins, *More Than a Game: A History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Landam: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2018), 180-181, 183, 186-187.

⁷⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 139.

people who see it as a “way out of the ghetto,” partly because it requires little equipment, or other resources to develop the abilities needed to succeed.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Wiggins, *More Than a Game*, 187.

4. Satire and Irony

Raj Kishor Singh states that satire is a literary genre, as well as occasionally graphic and performance arts, in which temptations, foolishness, injustices, and incompetencies are exposed for what they are, with the hope that people and society as a whole may be shamed to change. While satire is typically intended to be humorous, its main objective is frequently beneficial social critique. It does this by utilizing humor as a tactic to reach a wider audience for both specific and more general societal problems. Satire is a literary technique that uses, irony, exaggeration, humor, or mockery to reveal and critique the stupidity and immorality of a person or a society. By exposing humankind's mistakes and flaws, it seeks to make it better. In satire, an article uses a fictitious persona to represent actual people to reveal and expose their wrongdoing. Satire can be directed at an individual, a nation, or even the wider world. It is typically a humorous work of fiction that ridicules someone or something in order to highlight their ignorance and flaws. Singh urges that those the author critiques strengthen their personality by conquering their flaws. Irony and satire go hand in hand. Irony is when anything that is stated or performed differs from what is genuinely intended. As a result, satire is commonly used by authors to highlight the disingenuousness and foolishness of people and society and to critique them by making fun of them.⁷⁶

Darryl Dickson-Carr explains that satire succeeds in captivating, enraging, and delighting society to the point where it defies standards of appropriateness, etiquette, and taste.⁷⁷ He further explains that the main goal of satire is to critique through parody, caricature, comedy, and irony. Early African American satire, either spoken or in writing, was intended to ridicule racism and the logic or illogic of slave ownership. Meaning that anyone either person or organization that maintained people in servitude in North America, from the U.S. government to someone who assisted in the continuation of slavery to the slave owner was under suspicion. The satirist's intention was to highlight the ludicrousness of slavery, and in achieving this, he contributed to some of the best satire in American literature, if it took the shape of sarcastic lines inside slave tales or antislavery writings.⁷⁸ Dickson-Carr believes that the twentieth century represented the initial era in that certain African American writers proceeded above irony to create works that were unmistakable. In the African American literary culture, novels

⁷⁶ Raj Kishor Singh, "Humor, Irony and Satire in Literature," *International Journal of English and Literature* 3, no.4 (October 2012): 68-69.

⁷⁷ Darryl Dickson-Carr, *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel* (the United States: University of Missouri, 2001), 1.

⁷⁸ Dickson-Carr, *African American Satire*, 3-4.

also evolved to become their own throughout this era as a few book publishers either actively sought out Black authors or gradually made themselves available to them. This most recent evolution took place at the same time as America was modernizing, and African American culture was part of that modernization. Younger generations became increasingly desperate for independence due to the generation that had firsthand experience with enslavement died off. Recontextualizing the fight against injustice in the American context meant relying less on the spirit of slave ownership and instead on the recognition of the genuine, if long-drawn-out achievements of Black Americans in the democratic and social spheres that they have achieved on their behalf. These changes, coupled with many of the remarkable past events of the period, gave rise to a new, multilingual aspect of African American writing that varied the genre and laid the foundation for satire.⁷⁹

The usage of satire is mentioned in *The New York Times* which praises Beatty in their article stating: “This first novel by the poet Paul Beatty is a blast of satirical heat from the talented heart of black American life, a kind of literary-parodic counterpart to hip-hop and stand-up comedy.”⁸⁰ Satire is in *The White Boy Shuffle* evident when Gunnar goes to visit a doctor to check for colorblindness. Before his eye exam, his teacher explains to the class what racial colorblindness means and that they should not judge people based on their race. When the doctor explains to Gunnar what the test is for, he is confused because before he is told he should be colorblind, and now the doctor tells him that the eye exam is to test whether he is colorblind or not. He explains that people should not say things such as: “Black people are lecherous, violent, natural-born criminals.”⁸¹ The doctor’s explanation contains satire because there is a conflict between the actual words said and their intended meaning. The doctor’s advice is that people should not really speak about the discriminating declaration conflicts with the declaration’s implied meaning. To be colorblind means not to see color and not judge others based on their race but it also means an excuse for society not to see inequality and violence. The comment from the doctor serves as an example of demonstrating the prejudiced attitude that Gunnar has to put up on daily bases. Another example is portrayed when reporters of *Good Morning America* from different countries are interviewing Gunnar, the new Black leader, about death poems being sent to him. The question from the French reporter states:

Bonjour, France. Monsieur Kaufman, but what about your endorsement of freedom through suicide?

⁷⁹ Dickson-Carr, *African American Satire*, 9-10.

⁸⁰ Richard Bernstein, “BOOKS OF THE TIMES; Black Poet’s First Novel Aims the Jokes Both Ways,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 1996, 25.

⁸¹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 39.

My [Gunnar's] suicide, no one else's.

Yes, but people are following your example. There are reports of black people killing themselves indiscriminately across the United States. Don't you have anything to say?

Yes, send me [Gunnar] your death poems.⁸²

The irony is that even though Black people want to live life without any discrimination the only answer for them is suicide. Black people have to deal with racism, discrimination, and stereotypes all their lives and it is sad that the only solution for them to live in a world without all these problems is through suicide in this particular novel. A better solution would be to change the world and its view on racism rather than lose the lives of innocent people.

Satire is tightly linked with irony. According to Singh, irony is a conflict or inconsistency either between what is anticipated and what really happens or what is stated and what is really comprehended. It may be applied purposefully or accidentally, and the public is of vital importance. Writers might use irony to highlight a key concept or to let their readers pause for thought and consider what is currently being uttered. Irony can only be used effectively when the reader recognizes the contrast between what is stated and what is expected. In fiction, it can be applied in a variety of manners. In actuality, based on the kind of narrative being delivered, there are numerous types that may be observed in fiction. For example, a man who seeks the woman he perceives as flawless later discovers she is not quite as desirable as he initially believed. They observe and are aware of things that the protagonists themselves are not. As a result, it makes readers feel distanced from the narrative. However, it enables them to analyze the concepts and themes that are being presented in a manner that can be difficult to achieve in narratives without the use of irony. Furthermore, irony helps readers comprehend heroes and villains in a manner that the characters are unaware of.⁸³ Irony is portrayed when Gunnar's mother suggests for her kids to go to an all-black camp and the kids immediately reject this idea justifying it: "Because they're different from us."⁸⁴ The children's answer has ironical features because this is exactly how they were viewed by white people in Santa Monica. Gunnar and his sister are of the same race as the children attending the camp. It is clear that even though Gunnar has ties to the Black community as well as the white community he is not comfortable attending a camp with only Black kids. The situation seems ironic that he is now more comfortable being in an all-white community rather than spending time with people of his own race. One of the reasons for his decision can be that he is used to the manners and white

⁸² Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 238.

⁸³ Singh, "Humor, Irony and Satire," 67-68.

⁸⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 45.

culture that he grew up with in Santa Monica. When Gunnar attends school in Santa Monica, he still faces discrimination and bullying from his classmates. The same discrimination was felt by his sister when she attended the YMCA camp trip because she heard the children shout: “Yeah, white camp! Yeah, white camp!”⁸⁵ However, this was not what the children were shouting. Gunnar further explained to her that they were shouting: “Yeah, Y camp! Yeah, Y camp!”⁸⁶ His sister Christina however felt not welcomed and it resulted in her feeling she did not belong in the camp because of her race. The occurrence feels ironic how children face prejudices toward Black people in academic establishments. The reason is that the prejudices seem to be embedded in the roots of humankind and that is why they are present in academic establishments. On the first day of a new school in Hillside, Gunnar walks up to the receptionist and he immediately recognizes that Gunnar was not from Hillside. The receptionist says to him: “Boy, you know if you find yourself having trouble getting to and from class, the school provides an escort service and you can be placed in protective custody.”⁸⁷ The irony in this example shows how different people see Gunnar in different settings. On one hand, the police think that he could be a potential threat and that is why they visited him as soon as he moved to Hillside with his mother and sister. They wanted to know with which gang he associated himself so they could keep an eye on him. On the other hand, the school thinks he does not belong there and could be a potentially easy target for local kids. It shows how Gunnar never really fits anywhere. On the same day, he sat in a class full of Black people and he said to himself:

I’d never been in a room full of black people unrelated to me before, and as the classroom filled, the growing din was unlike anything I’d ever heard. I sat like a tiny bubble in a boiling cauldron of teenage blackness, wondering where all the heat came from. Kids popped up out of their chairs to shout, whispered, tugged at each other. Homeroom was a raucous orchestral concerto conducted by some unseen maestro. In the middle of this unadulterated realness I realized I was a cultural alloy, tin-hearted whiteness wrapped in blackened copper plating.⁸⁸

What Gunnar thought of other Black kids portrayed irony because he is actually Black and part of the Black community and despite that, he still did not feel comfortable in the classroom. It feels like he would rather still be in Santa Monica and be surrounded by white people rather than to sit in the classroom any longer. The situation gives the impression of being ironic because Gunnar was being discriminated by white people however, he still would feel more

⁸⁵ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 45.

⁸⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 45.

⁸⁷ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 73.

⁸⁸ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 76.

comfortable being back in the predominantly white school than be surrounded by Black kids. This behavior nonetheless changed once he made new friends in Hillside. The summer before Gunnar would attend his first year of high school Black people did not sit next to each other anymore when they would go to a movie theatre. Gunnar this action explained as: “We jaywalked, spit on the sidewalk, broke curfew, but strictly abided by the unwritten law prohibiting black boys over the fifteen from sitting next to each other in the park.”⁸⁹ It is ironic how differently Black people were treated as opposed to whites. The irony is pictured as inequality between Black and white people. The only difference between them is their race and as a result, Black people were treated in a much more harsh and unfair way. An example of irony is displayed when Gunnar’s newly found friends bully him because of his choice of a book. When one of the guys found the book Gunnar was reading, he said: “*The Odyssey*? Ain’t that some club over on Slauson and Normandie?”⁹⁰ The young men are making fun of the book and they do not understand how someone could read this type of novel. The occurrence seems ironic because they bully and make fun of Gunnar regarding the book when it is easily understood that Gunnar is much smarter than them. Not only irony is present when talking about his friends but also when talking about his classmates. At Boston University Gunnar’s classmate Peyote Chandler was so obsessed with her favorite poet Sylvia Plath that she tried to recreate her way of dying:

When I was twelve, my boyfriend, Skip Pettibone Helmsford, broke up with me, so I tried to kill myself by sticking my head in the oven like Sylvia Plath did. Only I forgot to blow out the pilot light and I stuck my head into a preheated four-hundred-and-fifty-degree inferno.⁹¹

The situation appears to be ironic how a smart and beautiful woman lowers to something as drastic and horrifying as suicide because a young man decided to end their relationship. Irony is shown in this situation as Peyote tried to end her life and instead of blowing out the pilot light, she just preheated the oven and then put her head in it which resulted in not killing herself but having burns all over her face. It is ironic regarding her admiration for her favorite writer to the point of recreating the way she decided to end her life. This particular literary genre is portrayed when Gunnar was asked to speak at a demonstration at Boston University. He stated:

Things looked different from the dais, behind a microphone, squinting into the spring sun. I was struck by how unaccustomed I was to looking down at people. Growing up in

⁸⁹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 114.

⁹⁰ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 70.

⁹¹ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 209.

southwest Los Angeles, coming off a season of playing in places known as the Pit and the Hell Hole, I was always at the bottom, the spectacle, the fighting cock looking up.⁹²

This situation shows how ironic it is for Gunnar to look down on people literally and figuratively. He was always on the bottom and looked down on mainly by white people. White people in Santa Monica treated him as if he did not deserve their respect and not only people in Santa Monica but society looks down on people of color. For him, the feeling of looking down on people even from the podium is ironic because he never experienced a situation like this one before. Another occurrence of irony is described when Gunnar's best friend Nicholas Scoby is asking him questions such as: "To kill yourself you don't need a permit or anything like that, do you?"⁹³ or when staring at the Hancock Building Nicholas questioned: "Tallest building in Boston, right?"⁹⁴ Gunnar imagined that his best friend is only being curious so he was trying to be helpful and answered him that this, in fact, is the tallest building and that person does not need permission to end their life. The irony is pictured here in how Gunnar unknowingly gave Nicholas his permission to end his life. He did not realize Scoby was determined to jump from the roof the moment his questions were answered. Scoby still then asked Gunnar a few questions such as:

They don't have no nighttime dinner thing?

Nope. Closed up.

What's the second tallest building?

The Prudential Building, but I [Gunnar] think BU's law school is the third.

Can you get in there at night?

Yeah, during finals week the law library is open all night.⁹⁵

That night Nicholas jumped off the roof of the law school. The whole interaction seems ironic in a view of the fact that he was genuinely wanting to answer Nicholas' questions and did not even think he was giving him permission and helping him end his life. Irony is also demonstrated when Gunnar went to a club and did not really know how to dance. Two girls from Hillside, Betty and Veronica, went over to him to dance, and when they detected that he does not know how to do it, they explained he should mirror their style of dancing. Gunnar tried but did not succeed and instead he performed a different dance. To illustrate the situation: "After a few moments I'd relax and settle into a barely acceptable, simple side-to-side step, dubbed by

⁹² Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 231.

⁹³ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 240.

⁹⁴ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 240.

⁹⁵ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 240-241.

the locals the white boy shuffle.”⁹⁶ The situation feels ironic how Gunnar tried so hard to fit in the white community of Santa Monica and Hillside only to end up not fitting anywhere. He is surrounded by two girls from Hillside yet the dance he performs is called the white boy shuffle.

⁹⁶ Beatty, *The White Boy Shuffle*, 147.

5. Conclusion

This thesis deals with the social and racial issues of Black people in the novel *The White Boy Shuffle*. These issues are portrayed through the main character Gunnar who is a Black boy living in Los Angeles. Paul Beatty describes Gunnar's life from young age to his life after Boston University and his journey from a young child living in a white community in Santa Monica to moving to mainly Black Hillside and becoming a successful basketball player to a leader of Black people.

The historical context focuses on the infamous event that happened in 1992 the Los Angeles riots. This particular event is portrayed in the novel through Gunnar's experience. The process of Black people rioting awoke a sense of pride in Gunnar and although he was not a violent person, he wanted to show his disagreement regarding the verdict. His personal riot is portrayed when he and his friends steal a safe. American history is further analyzed through the main character's speech at Boston University where Martin Luther King, Jr. is mentioned. Gunnar's speech reflects King's perception, meaning if people do not know what they would die for they do not deserve to live. This concept resulted in mass suicide among Black people.

Regarding racism, the thesis analyzes racist situations in the life of the main character. Gunnar experienced racism from a very young age like all the Black children in the novel. To a great degree, he experienced discrimination from law enforcement and the first occurrence is commented on when he was eight years old. It supports the argument that Black people are most likely to be arrested and treated in an inhumane way than white people in the novel. Racism occurred repeatedly in predominantly white Santa Monica. In regard to race, there is a visible difference between Gunnar's experience in the white community as opposed to Hillside. It resulted in him not fitting anywhere since he was too white for the black community and too Black for Santa Monica.

The thesis studies the classical stereotypes regarding Black people. It comments on a number of situations concerning white people's perception of Blacks through stereotypical images. Widely known is the stereotype of Black people as excellent athletes. The main character is portrayed by Beatty as immaculate at basketball. He did not fit in Hillside because of the manners he carried from Santa Monica however once he fitted the stereotypical image of a basketball player his popularity and acceptance arose.

The final analysis focuses on the use of satire and irony in the novel. Satire is portrayed when dealing with colorblindness and it is seen as the prejudiced attitude of white people when commenting on Black people's lives as an excuse. The thesis offers numerous occasions when

irony occurred in Gunnar's life regarding his view on Black people. As a Black person Gunnar throughout the novel was showing his disagreeable stance toward people of his own race because of the habits he learned in Santa Monica.

Resumé

Román *The White Boy Shuffle* je dílo napsané americkým autorem Paulem Beattym. Tato kniha se zaměřuje na život černošského chlapce, který nejprve vyrůstá v bělošské komunitě a následně po rozhodnutí jeho matky se přestěhuje s rodinou do převážně černošské komunity v Hillside. Cílem této práce je se zaměřit na rasové a sociální problémy, které jsou v knize uvedeny a odehrávají se ve městě Los Angeles. Město Los Angeles je nastíněno z různých úhlu pohledu na specifické situace ohledně historie, která se zaměřuje na druhou polovinu dvacátého století, stereotypy, rasismus, rasy, a následně práce pojednává o satíře a ironii.

Z hlediska historického kontextu Spojených států amerických se *The White Boy Shuffle* soustředí na událost známou jako nepokoje v Los Angeles 1992. Tyto nepokoje začaly, když čtyři bělošští policisté z Los Angeles, kteří byli obviněni z napadení černošského řidiče Rodneyho Kinga, byli 29. dubna 1992 v Simi Valley v Kalifornii porotou shledáni nevinnými. Tato událost je zmíněna v románu, když si hlavní hrdina Gunnar si všimne začátek nepokojů v jeho městě. Gunnar není člověk, který by se ihned odkazoval na násilí, avšak podle něj nespravedlivý rozsudek Kinga by měl být pomstěn. Práce popisuje jeho nesouhlas a touhu pro násilí což končí tím, že on a jeho kamarádi ukradnou trezor jako důkaz protestu. Kromě nepokojů v Los Angeles se práce zabývá reprezentací Martina Luthera Kinga, Jr. Daná osobnost je zmíněna, když Gunnar dělá svůj projev o tom, jak populace černochů není respektována jinou rasou, zejména bělochy. Martin Luther King, Jr. slouží jako inspirace pro hlavní postavu a její řeč, která skončí tím, že si lidé Gunnara zvolí za svého černošského vůdce.

Druhá kapitola této práce se soustředí hlavně na rasismus. Ze začátku je vysvětleno, že v celé této práci bude použito kapitalizované „B“ ve slově „Black“, což znamená v překladu černoch. Důvod pro tuto změnu znamená rozdíl mezi kulturou, kde je použito kapitalizované písmeno a barvou. Dále je vysvětlen pojem rasismus což zahrnuje jeho definici a historii, kdy byl poprvé použit, a to zejména ve třicátých letech v nacistickém Německu. Většina analýzy se soustředí na rasistické situace, které hlavní postava zažívala už od mladého věku. Tyto konkrétní okolnosti měla na svědomí policie, se kterou se Gunnar potýkal a zmínka o prvním styku s policií se odehrála, když mu bylo pouhých osm let. Problémy s policií nastaly už když Gunnar žil v Santa Monice v bělošské čtvrti, kde měl jenom bělošské kamarády a pokud nějaká situaci zahrnovala policii, potom jako jediný, kdo byl chycen a vyslýchán byl právě Gunnar. Následující termín, který je probírán je rasa a konkrétně začleňování do bělošské a černošské komunity. Hlavní postava nejdříve žila v Santa Monice, což je tedy hlavně komunita, kde sídlí běloši. Do této komunity Gunnar nezapadal z důvodu své rasy. Po rozhodnutí jeho matky se

přestěhoval se svojí rodinou do hlavně černošské komunity v Hillside. Zde opět Gunnar nezapadal, a to z důvodu jeho chování, stylu oblékání, a i jeho mluvy, kterou se snažil přizpůsobit v Santa Monice. Naopak v Hillside se takto nikdo nechoval, a i když byl stejné rasy jako obyvatelé této komunity, tak je evidentní, že byl odlišný od svých vrstevníků. Ohledně rasy a rasismu práce také pojednává o barvosleposti. Tento termín se týká rasismu, protože dává možnost bělochům se skrývat za tento výraz a používat rasistické narážky. Také ale původně sloužil, aby lidé neviděli barvu a aby nebyli odsuzováni na základě své rasy.

Třetí kapitola obsahuje vysvětlení, co jsou to stereotypy. Tato explanace je poskytnuta Walterem Lippmannem, který je známý jako jeden z prvních lidí, kteří vysvětlili tento pojem. Jako další výraz související se stereotypy jsou metastereotypy. Tyto metastereotypy jsou myšlenky, které mají členové určité skupiny o způsobu, jakým jsou nahlíženi z úhlu jiné skupiny. V práci je také zahrnut výzkum na tyto metastereotypy, který zahrnoval účastníky černošské rasy. Tito lidé poskytli i své pojetí, co si o nich myslí běloši a výsledky ukázaly klasické stereotypy, které společnost má o černoších. Nejčastější odpovědi uvedly, že černoši jsou líní, častěji páchají trestné činy či by raději nechodili do práce. Tato kapitola se také zaměřuje na analýzu stereotypů, které pocítil Gunnar či jeho okolí. Nejvíce známý stereotyp o Gunnarově rase je, že černoši jsou excelentní sportovci a v této knize je hlavní postava důkazem tohoto stereotypu. Jakmile se hlavní postava ocitne v Hillside, tak zjistí, že exceluje právě v tomto sportu a lidé ho začnou obdivovat, což je pro Gunnara kontrast v porovnání s jeho začátky v této komunitě, kdy mezi své vrstevníky nezapadal. Kromě basketbalu je zmíněn i běh jako jeden ze stereotypů, který je analyzován při závodu, kdy hlavní postava a dívka z jeho třídy soutěží a Gunnar prohraje. Chlapci jsou zklamáni z důvodu toho, že žádný černošský běžec není pomalý.

Žánrově je tento román zařazený do satiry a ironie. Tato kapitola zahrnuje vysvětlení těchto pojmů a součástí je i jejich zobrazení v této knize. Kromě obecného vysvětlení je také obsahem i definice a historie africko-americké satiry. Zahrnuta je i kritika, která byla zmíněna v deníku *The New York Times*, která líčí o užití satiry. Znovu je tu zanalyzovaná pasáž, kdy se Gunnar baví o barvosleposti z pohledu literárního i doslovného. Tato situace již byla rozebrána v kapitole o rasismu, kde byla vysvětlena barvoslepost. Nahlížení na tuto situaci z pohledu satiry nastíní kompletně jiné mínění. Satira popisuje tuto situaci ohledně toho, že sice barvoslepost se snaží omezit rasismus, ale také dává příležitost lidem jiné rasy ignorovat násilí a nerovnost. Následně je analyzována ironie, která je nastíněna v mnoha situacích týkající se hlavní postavy. Návrh matky Gunnara ohledně nástupu do tábora čistě černošských dětí je ihned zamítnut, a to z důvodu, že tyto děti jsou od nich odlišní. Kvůli tomuto zjištění je okamžitě

matka přestěhuje do černošské čtvrti Hillside. Ironie je nastíněna kvůli tomu, že Gunnar a jeho sourozenci se necítí být černochoy, i když to je jejich rasa. Změna prostředí dodá hlavní postavě pochopení o jeho rase a rozdíly mezi černošskou a bělošskou komunitou což je jedna z hlavních témat této práce. Název této knihy vyplývá z ironické situace, která se stala, když se Gunnar snažil zapadnout na taneční parket, kde tancoval s dvěma černošskými dívkami. Bohužel jedině, co dokázal předvést byl takzvaný „the white boy shuffle“ v překladu tanec bílého chlapce. Ironie je ilustrována, jak hlavní postava nikdy nezapadla mezi bělochy či černochoy.

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