

Using Satire as a Mode of Understanding the Grotesqueries of Racial Capitalism in  
George Schuyler's *Black No More*

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A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
English: Literature and Textual Interpretation

At  
The University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire

May, 2020

Graduate Studies

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The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2020  
Under the Supervision of Dr. Stephanie Farrar

This thesis examines the intersection of racial capitalism and Saidiya Hartman's recent, racialized theorization of the grotesque in George Schuyler's *Black No More* as a mode to understand Schuyler's satire of the racialized incentives of capitalism. The novel imagines that race can be changed by a biotechnology and sold. I argue that the exaggerated use of satire identifies the critique Schuyler makes on capitalism present at the time of publication, which can also be seen in America today. Through an assessment of the text's parodies on racial indeterminacy, the incentive of racial capitalism, notions of property versus progeny, and racial violence, I demonstrate the inherent connection between the economy and race. This connection can be seen in our society today proving that without race, the economy is thrust into chaos; nevertheless, society will always adapt to create new conceptions of racial hierarchy.

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“[M]any chemists, professional and amateur, have been seeking the means of making  
the downtrodden Aframerican resemble as closely as possible his white fellow  
citizen”  
(Schuyler xxi)

“[T]he effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires  
that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this  
suffering visible and intelligible”  
(Hartman 19)

## I. INTRODUCTION

During the early twentieth century, George Schuyler understood the proliferation of products such as Kink – No – More, a hair straightening treatment for the “most stubborn Negro hair,” and headlines advertising Dr. Yusaburo Noguchi’s ability to change the race of a black man to white, as the commodification of race (Schuyler xxi). Observing the connection between capitalist motives and whiteness revealed by these advertisements inspired Schuyler’s satirical novel, *Black No More*. Black scientist Dr. Crookman develops Black – No – More, a biotechnology to transform black bodies, white. The protagonist, Max Disher, purchases his whiteness, becomes the lead propagandist for white supremacist organization Knights of Nordica, then partakes in the racial capitalist incentive for financial benefit<sup>1</sup>. After the vast majority of African Americans in the novel have undergone the treatment, theoretically “removing the supposed visual signifier upon which anti-black racism relies, that very racism, only slightly altered in its form, still acts as the basis of all of the social policies and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Founded by Confederate army veterans, the Ku Klux Klan dressed in hooded white robes and rode about at night threatening black citizens (Cavendish 9). It is clear that Knights of Nordica as well as another white supremacist organization in the text, Anglo-Saxon Association, are parodies of the Ku Klux Klan.

forces of the country” (Haslam 16). *Black – No – More Inc.* thrusts society into chaos and racial paranoia by making it impossible to distinguish the racially impure “newly whitened” from the racially pure white. This thesis examines the intersection of racial capitalism and Saidiya Hartman’s recent, racialized, theorization of the grotesque in *Black No More* as a mode to understand Schuyler’s satire of the racialized incentives of capitalism.

The theorizations of racial capitalism and the grotesque intersect, giving readers a way to understand the layers of satire in *Black No More*. Racial capitalism is relying upon the commodification of a racial identity to be bought and sold for profit (Harvey 10, 25-26, Leong 2152, Wilhelm 98). How people relate to one another is a function of how commodities are produced, sold, consumed, and profited from. In order to find value in one item, it must be placed in relation to another – white body and black body. If race were to be erased, society falls to disarray until it can find a new pecking order of racial hierarchy. Used alongside this is Hartman’s definition of the grotesque; a mutilation of the human body that shocks readers into a state of empathy by bringing human suffering to the forefront (18). This shock and understanding of various human conditions develops a “common language of humanity” to remedy insensitivity to racial violence (Hartman 18). These theories intersect in the text, demonstrating the bind between the economy and race. Through discussion of the *Black – No - More* machine, Max’s rise to power and wealth by manipulating the racialized market, need to conquer the reproductive capabilities of the female body, and the link between structures of power and racial violence, I will assess Schuyler’s critique of racial capitalism. *Black No More* adopts and adapts the grotesque and genre of satire in order to critique racial capitalism.

Schuyler's work remains relevant not just to assess another literary genius but because his topics of the economy and its connection to racism still exist in America. Critics are discerning a range of new perspectives on Schuyler, showing his significance and engagement within African American literary traditions.

At the time of its publication, *Black No More* was not given critical discussion; but, a contemporary argument calling for his work to be reassessed and placed in the Harlem Renaissance canon has forced critics to shed light on his work. In 1931, legal segregation flourished, making critics from *The New York World* and *The Nation* cast the text aside in racist disregard. *The New York World* denounced *Black No More* for being vulgar, crude, and asserting "subtlety is not in Schuyler's bag of tricks," making it apparent that the employment of satire was overlooked (Peplow 242). Dorothy Van Doren, a popular literature reviewer for *The Nation*, added that Schuyler was "the first Negro to use satire as a weapon with any measure of success" (218). Van Doren goes on to primarily discuss Schuyler's inability to comprehend the "white man's virtue" because, being black, he entered the world with suffering, needing to "ape his former masters" (218). Concluding her racially charged review, she reiterates, three times, that the text is not great literature and a failed attempt to write "white literature" (219). A more critical reception of *Black No More* remains unnoticed until the 1970s near the time of Schuyler's death. Many critics attribute this lapse to Schuyler becoming a "conservative crank," swinging from the extreme left to the extreme right (Kuenz 172, Shivani 86). However, this is being reconsidered by two contemporary critics claiming that his belief that race is a performance and therefore does not exist, remained the same. It was simply

demonstrated in the extreme right because of his platform in the ultra conservative John Birch Society (Kuenz 172, Shivani 87).

Much of the criticism that emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on Schuyler's intense and exaggerated use of satire. Published in 1974, critic Michael Peplow acknowledges, "over-statement, crudities, even vulgarities are to be expected in satire" (242). Emerging in 1999, Dara Cook claims the reason for oversight of *Black No More* ought to be attributed to direct satire. Cook argues satire should be executed indirectly, stating the book is a "brilliant treatise on race disguised as an irrelevant, amusing novel" (53). Jason Haslam expands on a similar claim in 2002 believing Schuyler's satire functions to "highlight what he sees to be the ways in which race and economics function together to create America's oppressive cultural system" (16). Critic Anis Shivani uses Alvin Kernan's definition of satire to assess *Black No More* in 2013. Kernan defines elements of satire to include "crowded, disorderly, [and] grotesque" (Shivani qtd Kernan 81). This addition demonstrates Schuyler's exaggerated and direct use of satire in conversation with Hartman's rendition of the grotesque. Shocking readers with such powerful satire reveals the radical critique of racial capitalism. Discussing the necessary disclaimer that the audience and satirist must previously "agree as to how normal people can be expected to behave" during stable times, Schuyler breaks this understanding by generating a society that mirrors reality and having it fall to disarray (Shivani 83). Shivani, like Cook, argues the direct use of satire made critics overlook the astonishing societal critique happening in *Black No More* (84). These claims foreshadow more contemporary critical assessments of *Black No More* such as Sterling Bland Jr's "Pedagogy and its Anxieties in the Post-Race Era: Teaching George Schuyler's *Black No*

*More*,” published in 2017. Bland advocates using the text to provide multicultural students with the knowledge, awareness, and tools to question “assumptions at a cultural moment when identity is so variously conceived” (74). Other critics such as John Reilly categorize this work by its trope of “anti-utopia” (107). Anti-utopian texts bare the utmost truth to the predictable behavior of human beings (Reilly 107). Identifying, via satire, the grotesque intersection between race and the economy, the fictional society grapples with chaos attempting to locate a new racial hierarchy. According to Reilly, Schuyler demonstrates human behavior will consistently be determined by this intersection. Sonnet Retman’s “Black No More: George Schuyler and Racial Capitalism” published in 2008 assesses how race is “manufactured and regulated through several kinds of reproduction,” including the assembly-line, theatrical staging, and biological procreation (1449). She uses theorizations of racial capitalism to emphasize the intricate bind between race and the economy due to mass production. My argument is in conversation with previous critical assessments of this text as I engage with the contentious use of satire as well as branching off of Retman’s addition of racial capitalist theory to make the claim that the extreme satire of *Black No More* is a mode to understand Schuyler’s critique of the grotesqueries of racial capitalism.

Even though Schuyler was writing during the Harlem Renaissance, he actively denied alignment with the movement<sup>2</sup>. As a political, social, and artistic movement of the early 1900s, the Harlem Renaissance sought to signify the importance of black intellect and contributions in America. Schuyler was critical of the movement because it

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<sup>2</sup> The Harlem Renaissance was a national movement from 1920-1932 that black thinkers such as Fenton Johnson, W.E.B. DuBois and Alain Locke are credited with establishing. Ultimately, it was Locke who asserted that this movement be strictly associated with Harlem, NY as it was the political, social, and artistic “Mecca” for Blacks living in America (Mitchell II 645).

“romanticized the movements aesthetic” through white patronage (Shivani 85). Schuyler, alongside white eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard, was one of the movements most notable critics. Ideologically juxtaposed to W.E.B. DuBois, a prominent figure in the movement and leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Schuyler argued against the belief that blacks in America had retained a connection to Africa that distinguished them from the white population, whom they were in daily contact with (Mitchell II 645-646). Within *Black No More*, Schuyler parodies DuBois with his character, Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard leader of the National Social Equality League. In this parody, DuBois is depicted as hypocritical for his harbored racial biases and capitalist desires. Parallel to this is the character Arthur Snobbcraft, leader of a white supremacist organization running for presidency. Schuyler’s caricatures show leaders of social organizations, regardless of race, to be “inept and pompous” and motivated by high profits (Goode 26). Positing that both races were fundamentally the same, *Black No More* demonstrates that if race could be determined by a biotechnology, black bodies would choose to be white given the financial and social benefits and the market would naturally adapt with new racially charged commodities. The satire on racial capitalism is how I assert Schuyler forces readers to face the grotesque reality of capitalism. It is this type of resistance that wrongly led critics of his time to set aside critical commentary on his work. Critics argue now that this resistance ought to be reassessed to consider what his satire is commenting on and solidify his placement in the Harlem Renaissance canon. Sonnet Retman asserts this form of resistance is located in Schuyler’s use of race as a commodity that can be determined by technology. “An alternative genealogy of [the Harlem Renaissance] emerges, one that centers writing explicitly engaged with racial

capitalism and the vagaries of race as commodity in the marketplace” (Retman 1450).

Regardless of Schuyler’s defiance to identify with the movement, he is nevertheless engaging with and responding to society and critical thought of the time.

## II. A PARODY OF RACIAL INDETERMINACY: USING A BIOTECHNOLOGY TO SELL RACE AND WHITE PRIVILEGE

The African American literary tradition of passing and racial indeterminacy sheds light on the connection between racial capitalism and the grotesque, demonstrating the privileges of race that incentivize racial passing. Sonnet Retman defines passing as a subversion of “basic epistemological assumptions about race and identity” in order to reveal the economic and social limitations or privileges of race (1452). Making race into a commodity, Schuyler subverts racial indeterminacy to demonstrate the privileges of whiteness and that when faced with the choice to buy whiteness, black bodies will choose to be white.

Established literary traditions of African American literature gave Schuyler a platform to write about racial passing. Before 1865, slave narratives were the best-selling genre (K. Mitchell 27); however, the issue of racial indeterminacy gave a new platform for African American artists to assert “black humanity and equality” (K. Mitchell qtd Allyson Hobbs)<sup>3</sup>. After the Civil War, the rise of tragic mulatta fiction appeared. This genre exposed the reality of racial passing in the new American society without slavery (Wong 687)<sup>4</sup>. In attempt to find identity in this era between antebellum slavery and postbellum freedom, tragic mulatta fiction narrates the alienation and estrangement of the

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<sup>3</sup> Passing narratives are typically associated with the Reconstruction Era. As the number of biracial bodies increased during and after slavery, the passing identity arose. Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, published in 1892, represents this literary tradition and asserts racial passing as a source of agency.

<sup>4</sup> A common novel associated with the tragic mulatta genre is William Wells Brown’s *Colet*.

biracial body. This primed audiences for the popular reception of passing narratives during the Harlem Renaissance. Schuyler could trust readers to be invested in such a genre; yet by exploring and reconceptualizing race as an item for sale at the store, he intensifies and makes a satire of racial indeterminacy. He unsettles his readers, like that of slave narratives, but pulls away from the trope of tragedy commonly associated with genres of racial indeterminacy, to reveal white privilege. A biotechnology conquering race and marketed as a service to black bodies who can afford it is a satire of passing and as a result, a location of the grotesque. Characters weigh the literal costs and benefits of racial passing, citing the gross disparities between races. Passing narratives have often been used to “reveal the constructed and fragile nature of racial categories and to critique the hypocritical and discriminatory system” (Joo 171). Giving a black body the power to choose their race reinforces the privileged essence of whiteness. The benefits of whiteness extend beyond freedom and agency over their own body; the ability to participate in society as a citizen who can climb the ladder of American exceptionalism is what becomes available, thus revealing the unbalanced system right before readers eyes. The technology and descriptions of the Black – No – More machine evokes Saidiya Hartman’s formulation of the grotesque. Exaggerating each concept in the actualization of purchasing race, Schuyler parodies passing; furthermore, the fact that race is commodified by a biotechnology that executed blackness makes this grotesque.

Max is immediately jarred from his pleasant thoughts of being able to access society when he sees the Black – No – More machine and realizes that his black body will be executed. The formidable machine, “resembled a cross between a dentist’s chair and an electric chair. Wires and straps, bars and levers protruded from it and a great

nickel headpiece, like the helmet of a knight hung over it” (Schuyler 14-15). Explicitly noting the machine is akin to a dentist chair, recalls its curious history. The electric chair was invented in 1888 by a dentist fascinated by an accidental death via electrocution (Pusey “August 6, 1890: First Execution by Electric Chair”)<sup>5</sup>. During the era of its conception, this was seen as less humane than lynching. Many of its victims required more than one round of electrocution. Horrifying testimonies discuss the smell of burnt, flaking skin on the victims’ shaved heads from the frying probes. Many had heaving chests, scorched eyes, blood filled and foaming mouths, and burnt finger nails after the first shock. They were still alive. A second shock was required in order for this method of capital punishment to be fatal<sup>6</sup>. These terrors are what Max endures to become white.

Surviving the execution of his black body and creation of his white body, Max revels in his newly purchased freedom. Feeling, “terribly weak, emptied and nauseated; his skin twitched and was dry and feverish, his insides felt very hot and sore” (Schuyler 17). The physical pain of electrocution lasts but a moment until he catches his reflection; Max has purchased his whiteness and freedom, becoming the ultimate racialized commodity. The layers of grotesque highlight the commodification of black and white bodies. The satire of passing as an optional commodity is intersected with the grotesque execution of the black body to attain whiteness. Satire reveals that race is so intricately bound to capitalism that the black body would seek the benefit of whiteness to the extent that they would execute their black body.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information regarding Thomas Edison’s involvement, the history, and technology of the electric chair, see Allen Pusey’s “August 6, 1890: First Execution by Electric Chair.”

<sup>6</sup> During my research I found an overwhelming number of primary sources between 1900-1930 from African American newspapers discussing the travesties of the electric chair. Schuyler intentionally wrote this passage with the electric chair aware that his readers would be privy to these atrocities thus enumerating the grotesque.

Max decides to undergo the transformation in order to access political rights and economic privileges allotted exclusively to whites in a racist society. Looking at his white reflection, Max sees freedom as his thoughts attest to the connection between whiteness and agency: “There would be no more expenditures for skin whiteners; no more discrimination; no more obstacles in his path. He was free! The world was his oyster and he had the open sesame of a pork – colored skin!” (Schuyler 17). Even though Max sees whiteness, he recognizes the freedom that accompanies whiteness making it a desirable commodity. Cheryl Harris notes that the desire to pass as white is logical because, “becoming white meant gaining access to a whole set of public and private privileges that materially and permanently guaranteed basic subsistence needs and, therefore, survival” (1713). It may appear obvious but the discussion of white privilege necessitates the exclusion of the black body from privileges. Forcing black bodies to be traded as property during slavery, the identity that holds freedom is whiteness. As Hartman’s analysis of the grotesque points out, “the laws of slavery subjected the enslaved to the absolute control and authority of any and every member of the dominant race” (24). Black bodies were not seen as citizens with agency, but rather as “anti-citizens” because they threatened the democracy (Joo 173). A hierarchy of race relations creates and defines the nation. Schuyler captures the essence of what whiteness provides in the market and ultimately political body (Kuenz 170). After the abolition of slavery, niche market appeared for the black consumer to mimic white standards of beauty in hopes of passing as white. Max refers to the combs, brushes, and hair relaxers he used as tools of “tyranny,” replacing a white master with hair and skin products to govern, regulate, and modify the black body (Schuyler 17). Schuyler emphasizes the inaccessibility of freedom

in the most mundane tools and micromanaged existence of the black body is divulged through this satire. Kuenz refers to this as “the violent interpolation of subjects into a brutal and faceless economic system” (186). Max was no longer bound to these commodities in an oppressive manner – he fit the hegemonic norms set up by society. Schuyler attests to racialized commodities through the character Madame Sisseretta Blandish. As a black beauty shop owner, her narrative depicts her financial struggle as the black community abandons her and her services to be white.

Max immediately assumes white supremacist ideology after his transformation and therefore the corrupt nature embodied in white privilege. He quickly, and quite joyfully, assimilates to hierarchical mentality before he even leaves Black – No – More Inc.; “he glanced in a superior manner at the long line of the black and brown folk...none of them recognized majority. Ah, it was good not to be a Negro any longer!” (Schuyler 18). Race and racial passing have been monetized in a manner consistent with African American literary tradition as a minstrel performance. Hartman discusses minstrelsy as an element of the grotesque stating, “the fungibility of the commodity, specifically its abstractness and immateriality, enabled the [white body or whiteface] mask to serve as the vehicle of [black] self-exploration” (26). Being able to assume another identity provides the opportunity to attest to another idea of the self in a different context. Max explores whiteness through sensations of privilege and is able to perform those privileges as a minstrel. The economy is continuously adapting to the changes that race imposes on the market, the hair relaxers and Black – No – More Inc., are representations of those adaptations. Modifying the human body impacts societal norms and the foundation of society forcing new commodities to enter the market.

III. JOINING THE RACIAL CAPITALIST INCENTIVE TO MANIPULATE  
ORGANIZED LABOR

Sonnet Retman demonstrates that market-driven forms of identity make capitalist theory the pinnacle of assessment for *Black No More*. Max, passing as white coupled with his ability to perform white ideology, highlight the gross reality of racial capitalism and racial disparities. Taking traditional conceptions of the grotesque and rethinking how this theory can be applied to transgressions against marginalized bodies, Hartman has redefined and refigured the grotesque to grapple with the “changes wrought in the social fabric after the abolition of slavery and the refiguration of subjection” (116). It is Hartman’s “refiguration of subjection,” that I am identifying as racial capitalism. Without slavery to subject black bodies to, racial capitalism becomes its replacement and Schuyler satirically narrates this “unabashed displayed of the market’s brutality,” making it overtly grotesque (Hartman 32). Schuyler connects these two concepts and I contend that this provides opportunity to consider the white human condition and the “violated condition” of blacks (Hartman 34).

As a newly whitened citizen, Max has access to benefits of society that he was previously barred from, including white supremacy. Joo, in conversation with Kuenz, states ““wanting to be white [in the novel] means wanting to be a free and democratic citizen of the nation. To be included in the conceptual realm of ‘America,’ access to which in the novel’s present is...limited to whites alone”” (Joo qtd Kuenz 172). The basic notion of freedom becomes available to Max as he assumes whiteness. Becoming white is more than the socioeconomic climb, it is the mere opportunity to make the climb.

Max's infiltration of Knights of Nordica is startling because it is a space and ideology strictly for whites. Newly whitened skin and features gives Max access to the profitability of white supremacy. Max reads a call for membership into the Knights of Nordica asking for 10,000 men and women to unite against "the activities of a scientific black Beelzebub in New York" (Schuyler 43). Despite his white skin, Max still "possessed the fear of the Klan and kindred organizations possessed by most Negroes" (Schuyler 44). Max has already physically denied his blackness and now denies his black identity to enter into a strictly white space accessing power and freedom previously unavailable to him. Working for white supremacy, places emphasis on the satire of passing<sup>7</sup>.

Meeting with Imperial Grand Wizard, Rev. Henry Givens, Max performs a monologue of white ideology and his whiteness becomes unquestionable to this astute white supremacist, earning him the title of Grand Exalted Giraw of the Knights of Nordica. Odd titles such as this are yet another parody of the Ku Klux Klan. According to Cavendish, "the Klan loved weird titles...former Confederate cavalry general, Nathan Bedford Forrest, is said to have been for a time the Klan's leader as Grand Imperial Wizard" (9). Max's monologue to Rev. Givens, recites the recent themes and headlines of white supremacy; "We all know what has been the fate of those that of inferior breeds." (He has read some argument like that in a Sunday supplement not long before, which was the extent of his knowledge of anthropology.) 'This latest menace of Black – No – More

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<sup>7</sup> Cheryl Harris uses her Grandmother's narrative of passing to support her claim that whiteness is property, as part of her introduction. The narrative demonstrates her Grandmother's self-denial as she enters the white female workforce. She must keep her private life a secret, all the while in an environment where her true identity goes undisclosed because she can pass as white. What Harris proves is the benefit of whiteness as this opportunity would not be granted to her Grandmother had she not been able to pass.

is the most formidable the white people of America have had to face since the founding of the Republic” (Schuyler 46). Merely saying what Rev. Givens wants to hear, Max presents himself as an educated white supremacist. He is able to position himself for this job all because he can pass. His monologue of whiteness reiterates Schuyler’s conception that race is a performance and that newly whitened characters are simply a minstrel. Sonnet Retman sees this as a spectacle of race stating, “Max eloquently enumerates his observations (really his observations of white people’s ‘observations’), he is simultaneously observed by the imperial grand wizard” (1455). The monologue is a performance of whiteness as a perspective of theater; Max has memorized his lines and performed them. White supremacist ideology is his script and a white supremacist is his audience – the performance was set up for success! This moment scrutinizes what race is other than a class of bodies to subjugate in the economy. If Max can repeat certain phrases with a slight amount of gumption, he will get hired as a professional white supremacist. Max can be likened to a contemporary greasy car salesman; eager to sell his product of white ideology to the right ignorant buyer, a white supremacist, to make a high profit. Taking this moment out of Jim Crow and making it a relatable profession, reveals the sly grotesqueries of Max’s behavior. The notion of race, human behaviors, and beliefs are proven to be a hierarchical ideological construct that has been woven into the economy to propagate the subjugation of black bodies. Whiteface, or as Retman notes, “burlesque,” seduces his audience and satirizes what it means to be white as he receives a position of status within Knights of Nordica by the end of the night (1544)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Retman also connects the similarity of Max entering Knights of Nordica to that of Walter White, “the civil rights activist and NAACP leader who used his ability to pass as white to investigate and report on race riots and lynchings in the 1920s” (1455-1456). It is essential to note though, Max did this for

Holding the position of Grand Exalted Giraw, Max earns a living by reproducing white supremacist ideology in the labor force. In the 1930s, Fordist capitalism thrived and the fear of communist Russia was rampant. This economy is defined by mass production via the assembly line followed by mass consumption (Joo 171,174). As a result, factories began popping up all over the country, employing white and black bodies for cheap labor. White laborers quickly became upset that they were being paid the same as black laborers and strikes began.

Max is able to exploit his position in the Knights of Nordica for profit from white laborers. White laborers were in the midst of a strike, demanding higher wages. These labor forces, previously divided into racial hierarchies, became paranoid they were working amongst the racially impure newly whitened laborers who are undeservedly earning the same wage. Max capitalizes on this fear by printing false communist propaganda claiming Black – No – More Inc. was in business with the communist Russian Bolsheviks and distributed it amongst mills and factories to break the strike. Worried newly whitened laborers, who are still seen as racially impure, would be making the same wage as them, unified white laborers. The fear and hatred used to undermine union organization by Max immediately brought in contributions and increased membership showing “racism is wed to [Fordist] capitalism of the early twentieth century” (Joo 174). Newly whitened laborers joined as well in order to conceal their real identity and appear authentically white. The ability to mass produce propaganda generated a mass consumption of information leading to the increased revenue for Max

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personal profit (financial and social), unlike White. Nevertheless, Schuyler would have been aware of this as White’s passing reveals the privilege of whiteness that is not accessible to those to cannot pass.

and increased financial contributions to Knights of Nordica. The economy of mass production and consumption thrives on the consumption of black bodies. Joo interprets and analyzes this literally, stating, “the other is ‘eaten’ and the white self is satiated through consumption of aspects of the other...or even the other’s body” (169). The machine consumed the black bodies by making them white. Max then consumes their newly whitened bodies by ending the strike, thereby forcing them to prove their racial purity to other whites by donating money to Knight of Nordica.

#### IV. PROPERTY OR PROGENY: CONQUERING THE FEMALE BODY TO CONTROL BIOLOGICAL PRODUCTION

Whiteness grants accessibility to white women and thus the ability to create progeny to carry on wealth and status. Marrying Helen Givens, the daughter of Rev. Givens, Max is enamored with her tall, white body and blonde hair. Max met Helen prior to his transformation where she snubbed him at a night club; her rejection solidified his choice to buy whiteness. This rejection demonstrates the masculine desire to conquer white female bodies sexually as productive forces in the market. Max’s urgent longing to possess a white female body paired with his anxiety about the color of his progeny reveals the female body to be a productive force for its ability to create laborers and consumers.

Capable of producing, increasing, and therefore investing in progeny, white women and female reproduction play an essential role in the economy. While at the Honky Tonk Club with his friend Bunny, the two black men spot a tall, blonde, white woman who was the “prettiest creature” they had ever seen (Schuyler 4). Max fantasizes about being with her; however these images of dancing and dining with her have as much

to do with obtaining his “legal rights of access to public spaces as it has to do with sexual conquest” (Joo 181). Feeling uncomfortable in a public space due to the presence of white bodies renders the black body unable to fully occupy a public space as they will always be regulated by the white body. Upon asking for a dance he is harshly rejected by her, “‘No,’ she said icily, ‘I never dance with niggers!’” (Schuyler 6). Because he is black he cannot occupy a public or private space with a white woman. This “ravishing creature” with “exotic perfume” and green eyes conveniently ends up being Max’s wife Helen, daughter of Rev. Givens (Schuyler 5). Stemming from this is the notion that racial subordination imposes racially charged social boundaries. One form of social boundary appeared in the form of a “taboo on sexual contact between black men and white women” (J. Harris 390). When crossing from black to white, he gained access to white women. Hartman’s theorizations of masculinity can demonstrate that “masculine mastery entailed the possession of women as a sign of that mastery” (Retman qtd Hartman 1545). Having Helen implies that Max is fully white. He is able to acquire her and, theoretically, have white progeny to continue the cycle of production and consumption in Fordist capitalism.

Taking Helen as his wife completes Max’s passing granting him the ability to have an heir. The boundaries of racial hierarchies made the white female body extremely desirable. Female reproduction was commodified during slavery to determine the child’s future as property or progeny. Black women produced property, regardless of the fathers status, and white women produced progeny, regardless of the fathers’ status. Max, terrified that his true identity will be revealed in a dark baby paralleled with the taboo of a white woman having a dark child, forces Helen to have a miscarriage by distressing her. Helen has the power to validate his white masculinity but also reveal his blackness. His

first scheme for miscarriage is paying Bunny to burn down the meeting hall of the Knights of Nordica. As the building burns, it is too much for Helen and the next day she has a miscarriage. His reaction demonstrates his happiness in response to the news,

‘What’s that?’ yelled Matthew into the mouthpiece. ‘The hell you say! All right, I’ll be right up.’ He hung up the receiver, jumped up excited and grabbed his hat. ‘What’s the matter?’ shouted Bunny. ‘Somebody dead?’ ‘No,’ answered the agitated [Max], ‘Helen’s had a miscarriage,’ and he dashed out of the room. ‘Somebody dead right on,’ murmured Bunny (Schuyler 111).

Schuyler enumerates the grotesque, making an unborn child the victim of an act of racial violence, gladly committed by the father. The reproduction of dark children from white female bodies is a social boundary associated with rape and violation of the Romanticized pure white woman. White men raped black women to produce property. Infanticide was often committed on behalf of the slave mother to spare her children of a life of oppression; this was done out of compassion. Max however, forces an abortion as a way to ensure his identity is kept safe. Assuming power over Helen’s productive capabilities, Max grotesquely continues racial capitalist ideals, manipulating her to his financial benefit and her subordination. The violation in slavery is the act of rape as sexual satisfaction and to invest in their property to reproduce it. With a mass production of slave property, there was more money to be made. Max however violates Helen’s body after conception with emotional turmoil, resulting in a spontaneous abortion. This logic is validated by the raping of slave women to produce human property to best impact their attackers’ financial stakes. In Max’s instance, the fear of black men raping white women would result in capital punishment. Hartman identifies sex, and specifically rape, as a way female bodies are regulated (84). She discusses this tangentially with a court case

however this theorization can be used to outline the atrocity Max committed against Helen's body.

Max's second attempt to give Helen a miscarriage is failed; however it is still essential to note the amounting grotesqueries of this moment, as this is his *second* time. Thinking the stress of travel will cause a miscarriage, Max sends Helen to Palm Beach. Talking with Bunny, Max announces his plan did not work, then "to make matter worse, she miscalculated. At first she thought she would be confined in December; now she tells me she's only got about three weeks to go" (Schuyler 139). Now Max, in the midst of the Presidential election, must figure out how to conceal her and their dark baby. The essence of whiteness is privilege and the essence of blackness is shame with a desire to change it. Discussion of abortion and sin are had between he and Bunny, only to conclude that paying her off once the baby is born is the best way to keep his reputation and most of his money. Ultimately this idea does not go as planned. However, this is yet another attempt to assert a form of masculine control over Helen, this time with money. To maintain his current status, wealth, and reputation, he is willing to sacrifice some money to keep her quiet about his true identity. Schuyler demonstrates the sexual taboos of the era in a capitalist manner. Max seizes control of Helen's reproductive capabilities and renders them ineffective through abortion; and when that does not work, he believes money will solve his problem.

When the dark baby is born, Helen believes it is because of the recently discovered black ancestry in her family; yet, Max tells her it is also a result of his originally black body. Helen's reaction is a satire and shows her changed perception of race with her newfound ancestry: "There was no feeling of revulsion at the thought that

her husband was a Negro. There once would have been but that was seemingly centuries ago when she had been unaware of her remoter Negro ancestry. She felt proud of her [Max]. She loved him more than ever. They had money and a beautiful, brown baby” (Schuyler 155). Aware she has black ancestry and that her husband is black, she is content with her dark baby. Schuyler continues to prove that racial roles are constructed by authoritative classes to maintain their authority. Once the subjugation is flipped, the grotesque is witnessed as an ironic change of heart towards race and the systemic structures defining the status of races.

#### V. RACIAL VIOLENCE: ROOTS IN THE HYPOCRISY OF RELIGION

*Black No More* culminates in a racially charged lynching of white supremacists, Arthur Snobbcraft and statistician Dr. Samuel Buggerie<sup>9</sup>. Part of Hartman’s retheorization of the grotesque is that in order to thwart the sentiment of indifference to black suffering, “it requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body” (19). Schuyler executes this way of understanding the grotesque by placing the supposedly “white” bodies into a moment of racial violence.

The citizens of Happy Hill, Mississippi amplify Schuyler’s use of satire, demonstrating the hypocrisy of religion and corruption of social organizations that ultimately seek an economic benefit. Attempting to flee an angry mob of white supremacists, Snobbcraft and Dr. Buggerie crash land in Happy Hill. The small, rural town exhibits the link between illiteracy and ignorance leading them to commit acts of racial violence in the name of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Manning Marable’s *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* discusses the history of lynching. Classified as an extralegal hanging, Virginian politician Charles Lynch established this in southern America during the American Revolution as a means to protect property. Lynching is most commonly associated with the execution of slaves.

Placing inconsistencies within the same breath, Schuyler is able to inflate the hypocritical morality of white Christianity. Satire, according to John Snyder contains a political, religious, or moral critique. Snyder believes satire “reduces the already reduced” by attacking the religious, political, or moral belief at stake, revealing the already suspicious nature of it (97). The system of religion is destabilized by Schuyler’s use of satire through Fundamentalist priest, Rev. McPhule, showing that it was never a stable locus of morality. For critic Stephen Goode, this is where Schuyler’s satire “shocks his readers out of complacency” (26). Schuyler takes a trusted moral norm, makes a satire of it, and leaves his readers aghast at the disarray he made of a moral code the majority of America identifies with.

The connection between the church and its community becomes a reflection of each other. The values of the community are reflected in the church and the values of the church are reflected in the community; the two collectives become fused by the representative of both parties, the clergymen, and the community. The citizens of Happy Hill wanted a faith with “more punch to it;” allowing them to fiercely consume liquor and boast about their lynching and illiteracy rate, all the while praising God (Schuyler 166). This is the religion that Rev. McPhule brought. With orgiastic sermons, regularly “embracing” the women of the town, and waiting for a sign from God to validate him, Rev. McPhule and Happy Hill embodied the fused collectives. Donald Matthews highlights the result of this connection in the American south being a “nullified Christian compassion for black victims” (Matthews qtd Raper 31). Rev. McPhule capitalized on the Happy Hill illiteracy rate, ability to “rid itself of what few Negroes had resided in its vicinity,” and desire for a religion that satisfied their bestial behavior by founding the

True Faith Christ Lovers' Church (Schuyler 165). The sermons bring about a network of trust from similar norms that lead to mutual benefit, known as social capital (Conroe et al 366). Religious organizations facilitate social capital, which is essential for the formation of a business, or the True Christ Lovers' Church. Unifying like-minded people further progresses and validates their ideals, particularly when a religious figure of power is reinforcing them. Sonnet Retman states that, "Christianity has long served as the handmaiden of white supremacist exploitation and violent" (1457).

In attempt to win the presidential race, leader of the Anglo-Saxon Association, yet another parody of the Ku Klux Klan, Arthur Snobbcraft, and Rev. Givens, want eugenic research to determine the racial lineage of the nation. Done by statistician Dr. Samuel Buggerie, the research implicates all that are involved, forcing Snobbcraft and Buggerie to flee. Ending up in Happy Hill, the two men paint their bodies in black shoe polish to conceal their identities. As the town is waiting for their divine sign from God, the two fugitives become just that. They are immediately noticed for their black façade as they stumble into town. Both men attempt to escape nevertheless they are restrained. Their polish is washed away and their white skin, that proves their genuine black heritage, is revealed. The men are stripped naked, castrated, had their ears stitched to their backs, shot, and finally burned alive (Schuyler 173-175). This torture coincides with the rituals of racial violence in America. Lynching demonstrates a "fixed social solidarity" and "a pervasive repeatable ritualization of power relations practiced on black bodies to assert, confirm, and celebrate" against a social discord (Matthews 33 qtd Wood). Witnessing ritualized lynching is part of a religious practice for the members of Happy Hill as they

believe they are answering a divine sign from God thus asserting their beliefs, both social and religious as the two are now entangled.

The lack of societal development due to the entanglement of race and the economy continues to move readers from complacency. Readers align this moment with the uncensored executions of black bodies throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>10</sup>. Headlines such as “There are Crimes Even Worse Than Rape” from the may 1916 edition of *The Crisis*, discussing the annual statistics of lynching and torture committed against the African American population. Surrounded by those headlines and realities, Schuyler witnessed these reports and chose to acknowledge this cultural crisis of the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century in a satirical moment. The use of satire, layering the instability of race and many layers of race within the white supremacists, Schuyler is able to peel back the curtain of black suffering to show white enjoyment of racial violence. As pointed out by Hartman, to destabilize the normative idea of black suffering, a white body must be positioned in the same place (19). During the lynching, Schuyler depicts “two or three whitened Negroes” in the assemblage who remember “what their race had suffered in the past, would fain have gone to the assistance of the two men but fear for their own lives restrained them” (176). Attracting negative glances from pure white bodies who question their authenticity, the newly whites pick up sticks to poke the burning bodies and throw stones to participate in the spectacle. Their participation in the event is a minstrel. Trapped in permanent whiteface, they pretend to believe white supremacist ideals and partake in white behaviors. This performance is fueled by fear. Even though they appear

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<sup>10</sup> From 1882-1968, over 4,000 lynchings occurred in the United States and nearly 75% of the victims were African American (“History of Lynching”).

white, like Snobbcraft and Buggerie, Happy Hill citizens have shown they will lynch white bodies that conceal blackness.

*Black No More* concludes with a description of how the market and society adapted to the new “dusky” color line, reinforcing the fungibility of the market to changes in social behaviors (Schuyler 181). Newly whitened bodies are noticeably whiter than naturally white bodies, proving that naturally white bodies are not purely white. This shifts the desires of appearance, forcing bodies to attempt to appear “dusky” (Schuyler 181). At the beginning of the text, multiple products exist to lighten dark skin and straighten kinky hair. Mme Blandish’s hair straightening store slowly losing its customers is the first glimpse of the capitalist market adapting to the racial change started by Black – No – More Inc. The newly whitened Mme Blandish becomes a success selling skin stains, “that would impart a long-wearing light-brown tinge to the pigment. It worked so successfully on her younger daughter; so successfully, in fact, that the damsel received a proposal of marriage from a young millionaire” (Schuyler 180). Other products that emulate this adaptation are *Poudre Negre*, *Poudre le Egyptienne*, and *L’Afrique* (Schuyler 179). The consumption of an “other” is continued simply in a new disguise. Joo notes that in the contemporary beauty industry we still see the consumption of the “other” even in the naming of shades of foundation make up; the darker the color of foundation, the more edible of a title the shade has (169). For example, light foundation shades are titled “porcelain,” “ivory,” or “nude.” Dark shades of foundation are all items one can find on a coffee shop menu, “cappuccino,” “caramel,” “café,” or cocoa.” The Romanticized pure white female and exotic dark female continue to be thriving tropes in

the beauty industry. Race is woven into the foundation of the economy that will adjust based on changes in racial ideologies.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The satire of *Black No More* spans time from 1931 to present day making it a novel that must continue to be assessed. Emerging during a time of Jim Crow and segregation, the same tropes of racial capitalism exist in the, theoretically, post-racist America. Unlike Dorothy Van Doren's belief, this "fable" is not a "simple one"(218). Society is beginning to turn to texts such as *Black No More* that grapple with racially charged issues due to Donald Trump's presidency. His inaugural speech reveals startling similarities to the fictional dystopia that Schuyler created in *Black No More*, verifying that racial capitalism and the hypocrisy of leaders still exists.

On January 20, 2017, Donald Trump delivered his inaugural address, boasting that his presidency would bring power back to the people to satisfy the fear that the government was not adequately serving its people. Trump's speech begins with a thank you to Barack and Michelle Obama for their "gracious aid throughout this transition" (Trump "The Inaugural Address of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States"). This gratitude comes after Trump's campaign continuously and falsely questioned Barack Obama's birthplace and citizenship. The inaccurate logic that to be authentically American necessitates being white is still present in American society, just as Schuyler critiqued. Upon Barack Obama's presidency, for a moment America was moved from complacency, yet has pulled even further back into complacency by placing Trump in the Oval Office.

Trump pits himself against the elite even though he is part of the elite, similar to Rev. Givens, Max, Dr. Beard, and Snobbcraft. Each leader has claimed to be invested in the interest of their supporters, yet their pockets are filled and corrupt plans take place in ways supporters do not recognize. Trump's message of giving power back to the people and Snobbcraft's message of racial purity speaks to supporters, as they see their desires aligning with a political candidate. In reality, supporters merely elected a celebrity real estate agent, Donald Trump, and a white supremacist, Arthur Snobbcraft. Both performed what they believe people want and only seek the status that comes with authority.

Schuyler's work is still being assessed for its critical work. My thesis has demonstrated how the satire of *Black No More* exposes Schuyler's extremely intricate critique of racial capitalism as a site of the grotesque in hopes to displace readers from their bystanding complacency to the system that continues to subjugate black bodies. This work upsettingly transcends time and will continue to remind readers of the lack of progress society has made.

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