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THE WHITE AESTHETIC STANDARDS RUIN THE LIVES OF BLACK IN THE NOVEL,
THE BLUEST EYE BY TONI MORRISON: A BLACK AWARENESS AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper treats the recuperation of beauty as a productive critical strategy in discussions of black American identity and thought in the novel, the *Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. The novel highlights the devastating effects of white American aesthetic standards of beauty on black people. Toni Morrison brings awareness in Afro Americans to claim the physical identity of beauty regarding their (blacks) physical appearances because this kind of affirmation is essential to their identity and self esteem. By observing American history one can understand that many people have struggled with the accepting physical features common to Blacks as beautiful.

This paper considers the recuperation of "Beauty" as a productive critical strategy in discussions of Black American Identity and thought in the novel, "*The Bluest Eye*", by Toni Morrison. The novel provides the devastating effects of white American aesthetic standards of beauty on Black People. Toni Morrison wants the Afro-Americans to reclaim the physical identity of beauty regarding their (blacks) physical appearance because this kind of affirmation is essential to their identity and self-esteem.

By observing American history, one can understand that many people have struggled with accepting physical features common to blacks as beautiful. For example, having brown eyes, brown skin and coarse hair are not the traditional benchmarks of attractiveness in American society. This paper traces Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, which depicts the long term implication and damaging effects of self-hatred that some blacks encounter in the American Society.

The novel setting is the fall of 1941, in Lorain, Ohio. The novel portrays how the effects of self-hatred continue today in the black community. The central character in the novel is a young girl called Pecola Breedlove. The self hatred is portrayed through the character of Pecola Breedlove. Pecola's character that shapes all of the other characters in the novel "*The Bluest Eye*". This paper probes why many black people today feel alienated, oppressed, and depressed in American Society and how the notion of beauty is tied to this alienation.

It is observed that the three-hundred-year-old history of blacks brought to the United States during the era of slavery has produced psychological oppression within the black culture. Through this kind of subjugation and oppression, black people experience because of their physical appearance promotes an adoration of everything associated with white, Eurocentric standards while encouraging disgust toward everything connected with black identity and thought. This paper highlights an awareness of how television, movies, and lack of

communal support can effect the lives of black people.

Morrison's plea towards her black people is to recoup beauty in their identity and psyche. Morrison in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, builds a narrative around the concept of self-loathing and how it effect the young mind of Pecola, who lives in Lorain, Ohio, in 1941. The novel deals with the individual psychology of the protagonist, Pecola Breedlove. Pecola's hatred of self and feelings of inferiority are so intense that Pecola feels solace by acquiring an imaginary blue eyes. Because of her shallow mindedness, this young girl believes that a miracle of getting these blue eyes will make her beautiful and accepted by the people around her. If she gets Blue Eyes means that she is equal to all white people. The tragedy in the novel is aimed at one main problem; whiteness as a standard of beauty. The white hegemony sets the standards for beauty is a major factor to the racial self-hatred, that occurs up to the end of the novel for Pecola and many of the other characters. Racism plays a major role in this novel, and a prevailing foundation behind, *The Bluest Eye*.

The novel *The Bluest Eye*, is about the life of the Breedlove family who live in Lorain, Ohio, in early 1940's. The family consists of the father Cholly, the mother Pauline, the Son Sammy, and the daughter Pecola. Pecola Breedlove, every day she encounters racism, not just from white people, but mostly from her own race. Other characters think Pecola is too much dark. Her darkness suggests that she is inferior, and according to everyone else, her skin makes her even uglier. Pecola comes to one understanding that she can conquer the battle of self-hatred by obtaining blue eyes. She wants blue eyes that anyone has ever seen because she believes the eyes make her beautiful.

According to Morrison, a Social situation is distorted by the myth of whiteness that it produces in Pecola an unorthodox obsession of the blue-eyed beauty named Shirley Temple. Pecola is abused by almost everyone in the novel and eventually suffers two traumatic rapes. Except for Claudia and Frieda, Pecola has no friends. She is abused and ridiculed by most of the other children and is insulted and tormented by black school boys because of her dark

skin and coarse features. She is raped by her drunken father and self-deceived in to believing that God has miraculously given her the blue eyes that she prayed for. She is impregnated by her father and loses her baby. She finally loses her sanity.

There are so many incidents in the novel that highlight that whiteness is superior and seen everywhere in the novel and that effects on the susceptible black community.

Pauline, the mother of Pecola, learns to hate the blackness of their own bodies (her daughter Pecola). She hates her own daughter, because Pecola is ugly.

Toni Morrison, in her attempt to demonstrate the need for blacks to recuperate beauty in *The Bluest Eye*. She shows the negative effects of blacks not accepting and believing in their own physical attractiveness. Morrison gets success by getting the attention of black people, by focusing the story of Pecola. Pecola is sensitive and delicate, and passively suffers the abuse of her mother, father, and classmates. At the end of the novel, she mistakenly believes that her wish has been granted, but only at the cost of her sanity.

Morrison recognizes that blacks will suffer from a crisis identity if they will not accept self as beautiful.

Pecola is a symbol of the black communities, self-hatred and belief in its own ugliness. There are so many characters in the novel, including her mother, father, and Geraldine, act out their own self-hatred by expressing hatred toward her. At the end of the novel, one can find that Pecola has been a scapegoat for the entire community. Pecola's ugliness has made them feel beautiful, her suffering like the suffering of Jesus, has made the black people feel comparatively lucky, and her silence has given them an opportunity for speaking. Pecola becomes a reminder of human cruelty and an emblem of human suffering because people in the black community - the ones that were supposed to embrace her and validate her beauty when she did not, did not believe in their own self-worth of beauty; hence another reason why recuperating beauty is so vital. The novel's focus is on victimization in America.

When Pecola is finally granted her wish for blue eyes, she receives it in a vicious and mysterious ironic form. She is able to obtain blue eyes only by losing her mind. Rather than granting Pecola insight into the world around her and providing a redeeming connection with other people, these eyes are a form of blindness. Pecola can no longer truly recognize the outside world, and she has become even more invisible to others. Pecola's suffering makes the community feel relatively happy and her inability to speak for herself permits them to feel lucid. It brings awareness in the minds of black people.

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