

# Black No More



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

Schuyler was born in Providence, Rhode Island, to George Schuyler, a chef, and Eliza Jane Schuyler. Schuyler's father died when he was young, and he spent his early years in Syracuse, New York, where his mother moved their family after she remarried. In 1912, Schuyler enlisted in the U.S. Army and was promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant. He went AWOL after a Greek immigrant, who had been instructed to shine Schuyler's shoes, refused to do so because Schuyler was Black. After turning himself in, Schuyler was convicted by a military court and sentenced to five years in prison; he was then released after nine months as a model prisoner. Schuyler then moved to New York City and worked as a handyman while reading books that sparked his interest in socialism. He lived for a period in the Phyllis Wheatley Hotel, which was run by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). His involvement in the group led him to begin a weekly column for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1924 and subsequently wrote for many prominent national newspapers. By this time, he dissented from Garvey's philosophy and began to believe that socialists cared very little for Black Americans. Schuyler objected to segregation and married Josephine Lewis Cogdell, a liberal white Texan heiress, in 1928, and they had a daughter, Philippa, in 1931. Also in 1931, Schuyler published *Black No More*, and from 1937 to 1944, he became the business manager of the NAACP and subsequently moved sharply to the political right. He expressed opposition to Martin Luther King Jr.'s being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, particularly because Schuyler was anti-Christian. Schuyler also opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, acknowledging that discrimination was morally wrong and unjust, but opposing federal action to coerce changes in public attitudes. Over the between the 1930s and 1950s, Schuyler continued to publish novellas and short stories, often publishing them pseudonymously. In 1964, he ran for the House of Representatives in New York on the Conservative Party ticket and endorsed Republican Barry Goldwater for President. In 1967, Philippa (who had become a journalist) was killed on an assignment in Vietnam, and Josephine committed suicide two years later. Schuyler died in 1977 in New York City.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Schuyler wrote *Black No More* in 1931, and thus his story, which takes place in 1933–1940, speculates changes that might occur in the United States if a treatment were discovered that could turn Black Americans white. However, the story is

grounded in the United States' history of race relations following the Civil War. In the 12 years following the Civil War—a period called Reconstruction—the United States government (spurred particularly by the Congressional Republicans following Abraham Lincoln's assassination in 1865) attempted to provide greater opportunity and political power to Black Americans. This included the abolition of slavery, the ratification of the 14th Amendment, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. However, after Reconstruction, the Democratic party took advantage of white resentment, and Southern states curtailed many Reconstruction laws and began imposing racial segregation through the Jim Crow laws, severely limiting African Americans' political and economic opportunity even as the country was experiencing a major industrial boom in the late 19th and early 20th century. This divide between the progressive Republicans and the conservative Democrats is reflected in the book, as Democrats did not take on economic progressivism until the mid-1930s and did not adopt civil rights platforms until the 1960s. In addition, lynchings of Black Americans became common in the years immediately following the Civil War and then again in the 1910s and 1920s with the rebirth of the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan. This violence and discrimination African Americans faced forced many people to migrate to the Northeast and Midwest in what was known as the Great Migration. This in turn sparked the movement known as the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s—an intellectual and cultural revival of African American literature and art in Harlem, a predominantly Black neighborhood in New York. *Black No More* depicts this cultural richness in Harlem, and aptly, *Black No More* became a major work of Harlem Renaissance literature.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Black No More* is a staple of Harlem Renaissance literature, and there are many other notable works from the same period that deal with topics of being Black, white, and white-passing. One of the most prominent is James Weldon Johnson's [\*Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man\*](#) (1912), which is the story of a biracial man who passes as white to secure safety and advantage while sacrificing racial solidarity and pride. Thematically similar books include Jessie Redmon Fauset's *Plum Bun* (1928), Wallace Thurmon's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), and Nella Larson's [\*Quicksand\*](#) (1928) and [\*Passing\*](#) (1929). Contemporary examples of books about racial passing include Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* and Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*. *Black No More* is also cited as an early example of Afrofuturism, a genre of literature that explores Black history and culture through the lens of science fiction. Ralph Ellison's

*The Invisible Man* (1952), Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899), and W. E. B. Dubois's story "The Comet" (1920), have also been cited as early examples of Afrofuturism. Lastly, Schuyler's other novels include *Slaves Today: A Story of Liberia*, and *Black Empire*.

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Black No More
- **When Written:** 1929–1931
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 1931
- **Literary Period:** Harlem Renaissance
- **Genre:** Satire, Afrofuturism, Speculative Fiction
- **Setting:** New York City, Atlanta, Washington, D.C. from 1933–1940
- **Climax:** Max and his family escape to Mexico; Snobbcraft and Buggerie are lynched in Mississippi.
- **Antagonist:** Racism, Capitalism
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Critical Caricatures.** While the novel is known for its satiric bite and science fiction elements, it also caricatures many prominent Black American figures of the 1920s including W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and James Weldon Johnson.

**Thought-Provoking Products.** In a preface, Schuyler explains that his story drew on many products and treatments marketed to Black Americans at the time of his writing. These included "Kink-No-More," a product for African American hair; a treatment from a Japanese doctor who claimed he could change African American and Asian people into "a race of tall, blue-eyed blonds"; and an electrical engineer who claimed that a surplus of pigment in the skin could be removed to make African American people white.



## PLOT SUMMARY

On New Year's Eve in 1933, Max Disher and his friend Bunny Brown go to the popular Honky Tonk Club in New York City. Max tries to ask a beautiful blonde girl from Atlanta to dance, but she cruelly rebuffs him because he is Black. The next day, Bunny tells him about an old friend of theirs, Dr. Crookman, who has discovered a treatment to turn Black Americans white. The treatment, called "Black-No-More," changes a Black person's skin, hair, and features in three days to make them indistinguishable from white people—though it will not change the features of any **babies** the person might have. Max resolves to be one of the first people to get the treatment, particularly

because he can then go seek out the beautiful blonde woman. After undergoing the treatment, Max is excited by his newfound freedom and assurance as a white man, though he soon realizes that white society is quite dull. But with thousands of people lining up for the treatment, society is changing. Black businesses are starting to worry about losing customers, and people are leaving Harlem in droves now that they no longer face housing discrimination like they did when they were Black. Max tells Bunny that he's going back to Atlanta to find the blonde girl and tells Bunny to meet him there.

Meanwhile, Black and white elites are both trying to shut down Black-No-More: white people are trying to maintain what they consider to be their racial purity and white supremacy. Black activists preach racial solidarity, and they are also worried about losing support for the Back-to-Africa movement or the money white people donate to their organizations when Black people face discrimination or violence. At the same time, Black-No-More has made Crookman and his associates, Charles Foster and Hank Johnson, incredibly wealthy, and they bribe politicians to prevent them from passing any legislation that would close their sanitariums.

Max Disher (who has now changed his name to Matthew Fisher), arrives in Atlanta but can't find the blonde girl. Recognizing white people's growing alarm at African Americans joining their ranks, Matthew realizes he can profit off of this hatred. He gets involved with a white supremacist group called the **Knights of Nordica**, founded by the Reverend Henry Givens, by convincing Givens that he is an anthropologist from New York and by giving impassioned speeches on white people's biological superiority. He quickly earns Givens's trust and becomes his second-in-command, growing their membership and their treasury. Matthew also learns that Givens's daughter, Helen, is the beautiful blonde girl from the Honky Tonk, and Matthew quickly courts and marries her.

A few weeks after the wedding, Bunny arrives in Atlanta and finds Matthew—Bunny has recently become white, too. Matthew immediately hires Bunny as his assistant, and they conspire to stop political progress in either direction. The longer they can draw out a fight between those in favor of and those against Black-No-More, the more members the Knights of Nordica can gain—and the more money Matthew can make.

Soon, white women start having Black babies because either they or their husbands used to be Black, unbeknownst to their partners. As a result, Crookman opens lying-in hospitals (i.e., maternity hospitals) where women can give birth and then turn the infant white immediately after birth. As a result, alarm spreads throughout the country and people pour into Knights of Nordica meetings, aiming to preserve racial purity.

Soon after, Matthew faces a new challenge: now that white workers (many of whom are Knights) do not fear companies

firming them in favor of hiring cheaper Black laborers, they start to organize. Matthew uses this to his advantage, taking bribes from factory managers to stop white workers from organizing. Matthew then starts rumors among the workers that there are Black people among them, leading to infighting that prevents them from unionizing and raising their wages.

A presidential election looms. Because so many of the formerly Black people have better access to voting as white people, the conservative Democrats worry that the Republicans might carry the South and win in a landslide. Matthew comes up with a plan to prevent this, teaming up with the wealthy Anglo-Saxon Association (headed by Arthur Snobbcraft) to raise funds for the campaign while the Knights of Nordica bring in the votes. After some political maneuvering, Matthew convinces the delegates at the Democratic National Convention to nominate Rev. Givens for president and Snobbcraft for vice president; they run on a platform of using genealogical tests to determine who can vote. Meanwhile, the Republicans re-nominate the current president, Harold Goosie.

The political campaign is long and bitter: on the Democratic side are “pure” white people, while Republican supporters are those who either suspect or know for sure that they are “impure.” Snobbcraft comes up with a plan to help sway people to their side, asking statistician Samuel Buggerie to make a report on people’s ancestry that would be so shocking that people would have to vote for the Democrats to adopt their plank of using genealogical examinations to determine the right to vote. Buggerie aims to release the report just a few days before the election. Meanwhile, Crookman and his men donate money to the Republican cause.

About a month before the election, Matthew reveals to Bunny that Helen is pregnant and due in three weeks, and he doesn’t know what to do because she wants to have the baby at home—but it will almost certainly be Black. Bunny counsels him to get a plane and some money ready and to tell Helen the truth—if she doesn’t take it well, Matthew can flee, and if she does, then all is well.

Soon the Knights of Nordica grow violent, setting fire to one of Crookman’s lying-in hospitals and killing 12 babies. Many of the women who flee the burning hospital are socially prominent, and this fact scandalizes the nation, prompting even more support for the Democrats. Desperate for a plan of attack, the Republicans learn about Buggerie’s ancestry project and plan to steal the research so that he can’t publish it. But two days before the election, Buggerie reveals to Snobbcraft that his research shows many of the most prominent politicians have Black ancestry—including Givens and Snobbcraft themselves. Heading to the vault where they are keeping the research, Snobbcraft and Buggerie soon discover that someone has stolen Buggerie’s research and his summary showing the list of politicians that have Black ancestry.

The day before the election, Helen gives birth to a Black baby.

But before Matthew can explain himself, Givens comes in with a paper, which has published a story about his and Snobbcraft’s ancestry. He tells them that an angry mob chased him home and that they are all in danger. Helen begs Matthew to stick by her, thinking that *her* ancestry is the reason the baby is Black, and Matthew forgives her. He reveals that he was formerly Black and that he is actually the reason for their baby’s skin color. He is relieved to tell the truth, and he, Helen, Bunny, and Givens all resolve to take his plane out of the country.

Meanwhile, Snobbcraft and Buggerie attempt to do the same thing, hiring a man to fly them to Mexico to avoid an angry mob. But the plane doesn’t have enough gas and crashes in Mississippi, and Snobbcraft and Buggerie decide that their best course of action is to use shoe polish to blacken their faces and arms so that people don’t recognize them from the newspapers.

However, the first town they come upon, Happy Hill, Mississippi, is notorious for lynching, and a pastor named Alex McPhule has taken over the town and convinced the townspeople that God is going to send them a sign on Election Day. On that day, when Snobbcraft and Buggerie approach the town, the townspeople (thinking they are Black) attack the two men until they pull off the men’s clothes and see that they are actually white. However, after Snobbcraft and Buggerie clean up, the townspeople recognize them from the papers and because they have Black ancestry, the people brutally mutilate them, shoot them, and burn them alive.

The Republicans are elected in a landslide. Soon after, Crookman publishes a paper explaining that his treatment actually turned African Americans a few shades whiter than “pure” white people. As a result, makeup products spring up to darken people’s complexion to prove that they are white, a trend which now makes most people look Black. In the book’s final scene, Crookman sees a picture of the Givens and Fisher family vacationing in Cannes—all of them looking as dark as Matthew Fisher Jr.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Max Disher / Matthew Fisher** – Protagonist Max Disher is a Black American in 1931 New York. While he appreciates Harlem’s cultural institutions, he also faces painful discrimination, which becomes particularly evident when he meets a blonde girl who turns him down at a club. And so, when Dr. Crookman comes out with his “Black-No-More” treatment, Max is excited to be one of the first people to receive it. He appreciates the freedom and assurance that passing as a white man affords him, but he finds that white society isn’t all it was reported to be. Still, he takes advantage of his newfound status by returning to his hometown in Atlanta to seek out the blonde

girl. Alarmism is gripping the white working class with so many Black people turning white, so he decides that he wants to make money off of their fear. Learning about Rev. Givens and the **Knights of Nordica**, Max adopts a new name (Matthew Fisher) and meets with Givens while pretending to be an anthropologist espousing white supremacy. Rev. Givens immediately hires Max as his second-in-command. Max takes advantage of the white working class by stoking fears about Black people turning white in order to gain more members and donations for the Knights of Nordica. Getting into Givens's good graces also allows him to marry Givens's daughter, Helen, who happens to be the blonde girl from the club. As support for the Knights of Nordica grows, Max accepts bribes from business owners in exchange for suppressing the labor movement within the Knights of Nordica. He also helps Givens run for president. However, Max worries constantly about his identity as a Black man coming out in the open, particularly when Helen becomes pregnant—though the “Black-No-More” changes a person's skin color from Black to white, it doesn't change their baby's skin color. The same day that Helen has their baby, Matthew Jr., Max learns that Helen and Givens both have Black ancestry, which makes Max more comfortable revealing his true identity. Max is an example of both how mutable and unstable identity is, and also how people take advantage of racial divisions to gain wealth and power.

**Dr. Junius Crookman** – Dr. Crookman is the creator of the “Black-No-More” treatment, which makes Black people look white. He initially researches and creates the treatment—with the help of his business associates Foster and Johnson—in order to remove obstacles from his fellow Black Americans and to solve America's racism. He illustrates in his studies that race is simply a matter of skin color and some features, and that any other differences between the races are superficial. As a result of the treatment, however, Crookman also becomes incredibly rich, as he charges \$50 per treatment. In the first two weeks alone, he makes \$70,000, and he hopes to continue making money indefinitely. This is why he creates lying-in hospitals (i.e., maternity hospitals) as well, which are meant for women to give birth to their mixed-race babies and then give their children the Black-No-More treatment immediately—even if the women and/or their husbands have had the treatment, they'll still give birth to mixed-race babies. As opposition grows to his treatment, Crookman also works to ensure that Black-No-More will not be outlawed. Thanks to his fortunes, he employs Foster and Johnson to bribe any government officials (including the Republican Party Chairman, Gorman Gay, and the U.S. Attorney General, Walter Brybe) so that they will not act against his company. Ultimately, Crookman becomes the U.S. Surgeon General. Towards the end of the book, he also reveals that the Black Americans he has turned white are actually several shades whiter than “pure” white people, prompting greater alarm as people then start to use makeup to make themselves look darker and paradoxically prove that they are

really “white.” Crookman seems unphased by this chaos—he hasn't even taken his own treatment—and he simply enjoys his riches, becoming another example of the way in which elites take advantage of racial divisions to bolster their own profits.

**Rev. Henry Givens** – Henry Givens is the leader of the **Knights of Nordica**, Mrs. Givens's husband and Helen's father. He is an ex-evangelist and former member of the Ku Klux Klan, where he siphoned money out of the Klan's treasury until the organization declined. When the Black-No-More treatment comes out, he founds the Knights of Nordica both because he believes in white supremacy and because he wants to regain the wealth he acquired with the KKK. When Max arrives in town claiming to be an anthropologist who also believes in white supremacy, Givens immediately hires him as his second-in-command, and Max marries Helen soon after. Givens is relieved about this arrangement, knowing that the Knights will remain in the family after he retires. As the Republicans gain power in the South, Givens starts giving radio broadcasts to spread his ideas. He gains so much support that he secures the Democratic nomination for the 1936 presidential election. As public alarm grows over Black-No-More and the fact that so many Black Americans are turning white, it appears that the conservative Democrats have the upper hand in the election. However, a report comes out revealing that many top Democrats, including Givens, have Black ancestry, thus prompting mobs of people to come after Givens. As a result, Givens, Givens's wife, Helen, and Matthew all flee the country together. Givens is an example of how the wealthy and powerful take advantage of racial divisions to gain further wealth and power.

**Helen Givens/The Blonde Girl** – Helen Givens is Rev. Givens's daughter, who ultimately becomes Max's wife. Helen is introduced as a nameless beautiful blonde girl at the Honky Tonk Club, where she cruelly rejects Max's advances because he is Black and she's white. Her rejection prompts him to seek her out in Atlanta after he becomes white from Dr. Crookman's “Black-No-More” treatment. There, he reconnects with her after discovering that she's the daughter of the **Knights of Nordica** founder, Henry Givens. Max becomes involved in the Knights of Nordica (claiming to also hold the same white supremacist ideology) and quickly courts and marries Helen—though she only accepts his proposal after he has made a fair amount of money with the Knights. Helen loves Max despite the fact that he interacts with “low-brow” people, and Max loves Helen despite her ignorance. Soon after marrying, Helen becomes pregnant, causing Max to be terrified because he knows the baby will be Black—the “Black-No-More” treatment doesn't carry over to a person's children. Helen has a miscarriage, but when she becomes pregnant again, she learns that *she* has Black ancestry on the day she gives birth, and so she attributes the baby's dark skin to this fact. Then, when Max reveals that he was formerly Black, she accepts him readily



(likely due to her own worry about not being accepted by him) and they flee the country together.

**Samuel Buggerie** – Samuel Buggerie is a nervous, bald statistician who comes from one of the First Families of Virginia. He believes that the best way to tell “pure” white people from others is to study family trees. Arthur Snobbcraft hires him to study how many Americans have Black ancestry, hoping to release the results just before the election in order to rile people up and ensure support for the conservative Democratic Party. However, Buggerie’s findings illustrate that almost 50 million people have some Black ancestry—including Rev. Givens and Snobbcraft. The published findings are shocking and spark angry mobs, prompting Snobbcraft and Buggerie to flee the country via. Because the men’s pictures have been printed in the papers, when they are forced to crash land in Mississippi, Buggerie comes up with the idea to darken their faces with shoe polish so that they won’t be recognized. The residents in Happy Hill, Mississippi attempt to lynch them—thinking the men are Black—before stopping because they realize the men are white. However, soon after, they recognize Snobbcraft and brutally lynch him and Buggerie anyway because of Snobbcraft’s Black ancestry (and because they assume Buggerie has the same Black ancestry).

**Arthur Snobbcraft** – Arthur Snobbcraft is the President of the Anglo-Saxon Association. A strong believer in white supremacy and racial purity, Snobbcraft teams up with Max and the **Knights of Nordica** despite the fact that he looks down on the white masses in general. Ultimately Snobbcraft runs for Vice President under Rev. Givens on the Democratic ticket; he campaigns on creating a law that uses genealogical tests to determine whether someone should receive the right to vote. However, at the end of the book, Buggerie reveals that many of the top Democrats—including Snobbcraft—have Black ancestry. This prompts Snobbcraft to flee with Buggerie in order to escape angry mobs coming after them. Because their pictures have been printed in the papers, when they are forced to crash land in Mississippi, they decide to darken their faces with shoe polish so that they won’t be recognized. The residents in Happy Hill, Mississippi, however, attempt to lynch them (thinking the men are Black), before stopping because they realize the men are white. However, they eventually recognize Snobbcraft and brutally lynch him and Buggerie anyway because of his Black ancestry.

**Bunny Brown** – Bunny Brown is Max’s best friend. After Max turns white from the “Black-No-More” treatment, Max sponsors Bunny’s own treatment, allowing Bunny to become white and follow Max to Atlanta. There, Bunny becomes Max’s assistant in all his business dealings in the **Knights of Nordica**, making sure to keep various groups fighting so that they can receive more and more members and money. By this point, Max has taken the alias Matthew Fisher, so Bunny also helps cover up Max’s identity. Bunny even arranges to set Max’s house on

fire so that Helen can’t give birth there when she becomes pregnant—the idea being that she would then have to go to one of Dr. Crookman’s lying-in hospitals (maternity hospitals where mixed-race babies receive the “Black-No-More” treatment immediately after birth) because they know the baby will be Black. Ultimately, Bunny escapes the country with Max’s family when research reveals that the Givenses have Black ancestry and an angry mob sets after them.

**Santop Licorice** – Santop Licorice is the founder and leader of the Back-to-Africa Society. The book critiques him as a hypocrite, because he both praises racial solidarity but he also dislikes other Black leaders like Beard. Licorice also works to tear down “Black-No-More” despite the fact that it aims to remove obstacles for other Black Americans. He does this because he profits off of Black Americans who want to immigrate back to Africa, as their first step is always to pay for membership in his society. Ultimately, Max pays Licorice to fight Beard and the other Black leaders, hoping to create an impasse between them so that Max can continue to gain members in the **Knights of Nordica** and more money as a result. Licorice is a parody of famous Black activist Marcus Garvey.

**Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard/Karl von Beerde** – Beard is the founder of the National Social Equality League. Though he preaches racial solidarity, the book implies that he secretly admires white people and pities and despises other Black Americans. Beard tries to appeal to the U.S. Attorney General, Walter Brybe, to shut down “Black-No-More,” convening a conference of other Black American leaders. But ultimately, Beard becomes white himself (taking the name Karl von Beerde) and works for the Democrats. Beard is a parody of famous civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois.

**Mrs. Sisseretta Blandish/Sari Blandine** – Mrs. Blandish is a businesswoman and Max’s landlady at the beginning of the novel. She owns a hair salon in Harlem, New York, which helps Black people straighten and relax their hair to make it appear more like white people’s hair. She is dismayed at the “Black-No-More” treatment, because it causes her to lose her business. By the end of the novel, Blandish has turned white and changed her name to Sari Blandine. When Americans realize that white people are a few shades darker than Black Americans who have turned white, she becomes successful selling skin stains that make people appear tanner and. Blandish is a parody of Madam C. J. Walker.

**Hank Johnson** – Hank Johnson is one of Dr. Crookman’s business partners. Ten years prior to the beginning of the novel, he was in a chain gang and then worked his way up to become one of Harlem’s leading businessmen. Once Crookman’s business takes off, he bribes and blackmails many politicians to ensure that the business can continue. He is riskier than Dr. Crookman’s other business partner, Chuck Foster.

**Alex McPhule** – Alex McPhule is a reverend who founds a new kind of Christianity and spreads it in Happy Hill, Mississippi. He claims that God has visited him and is going to send him a Sign on Election Day. Then, when Snobbcraft and Buggerie arrive on Election Day, McPhule leads the townspeople to lynch the two men after learning that Snobbcraft and Buggerie have Black ancestry.

**Walter Williams** – Walter Williams is one of the leaders whom Dr. Beard gathers to condemn the “Black-No-More” treatment. Williams is a heavy-set white man (though Williams claims he is proud to be part of Black society because his grandfather was a mixed-race man). Later, Williams supports the Republicans and joins Gorman Gay’s staff.

**Matthew Fisher Jr.** – Matthew Fisher Jr. is Max and Helen’s son. His birth prompts Max to reveal to Helen that he is actually Black, as Matthew Jr. has darker skin. After Helen learns of her own Black ancestry, the three of them escape the United States together in the wake of mobs targeting Rev. Givens.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Joseph Bonds** – Joseph Bonds is the leader of the Negro Data League. He convinces others of the necessity to conduct studies on socioeconomic conditions so that they will donate to the League, but his data has little practical effect. Eventually Bonds receives the “Black-No-More” treatment and works for Gorman Gay.

**Charles “Chuck” Foster** – Chuck Foster is one of Dr. Crookman’s business partners. He is a Black American real estate agent in New York who helps fund Crookman’s work and also helps him find new buildings to turn into sanitariums. Foster is more cautious than Dr. Crookman’s other business partner, Hank Johnson.

**Walter Brybe** – Brybe is the U.S. Attorney General at the beginning of the novel. Gorman Gay has heavy influence over him, and so when Brybe receives a letter asking him to investigate and stop the “Black-No-More” treatment, Gay convinces Brybe to ignore the letter.

**Frazier** – Frazier is a pilot whom Snobbcraft and Buggerie hire to take them out of the country when mobs set after them. However, the plane runs out of gas and Frazier is unable to land safely. The plane crashes into a ditch in Mississippi, and Frazier is killed.

**Blickdoff** – Blickdoff and Hortzenboff are the owners of a factory in Paradise, South Carolina, where many **Knights of Nordica** work. Matthew extorts them in exchange for quelling the unionization efforts there.

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the unionization efforts there.

**Rufus Kretin** – Rufus Kretin is the Democratic Senator from Georgia. Buggerie’s research reveals that he has Black ancestry, and as a result, a mob lynches him on Election Day.

**Harold Goosie** – Harold Goosie is the president of the United States at the beginning of the novel. He is a Republican who ends up winning reelection after Givens and Snobbcraft flee the country.

**Gorman Gay** – Gorman Gay is the National Chairman of the Republican National Committee. Hank Johnson bribes Gay to keep the Republicans sympathetic to “Black-No-More.”

**Sybil Smith** – Sybil Smith is a reporter from *The Scimitar* to whom Max sells his story after receiving the “Black-No-More” treatment.

**Gump** – Gump is the Vice President at the beginning of the novel who wins reelection along with President Harold Goosie.

**Mrs. Givens** – Mrs. Givens is Rev. Henry Givens’s wife and Helen’s mother.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### RACISM AND OPPRESSION

*Black No More* begins in 1933 when Dr. Junius Crookman, a Black scientist, discovers a treatment to turn Black Americans white by changing their skin color, hair, and other features. Among the thousands and then millions of Black Americans who get the treatment, there is no discernible difference between them and people who were born white. Crookman thus illustrates that any distinction in physical appearance is superficial—a radical idea at the time, as white people had long believed that they were biologically superior and discriminated against others based on this difference. But by the end of the book, even though differences between Black and white have been eradicated, people are still obsessed with race and determining who is “Black” and “white.” The book thus illustrates two key points: first, that race is no more than a malleable difference in skin color; and second, that even though race is just a construct, American’s fixation on it is so inescapable that it doesn’t even end when virtually everyone is the same race.

Dr. Crookman’s research on race, and the fact that Black Americans can become fully integrated by taking his treatment, establishes that race is superficially constructed. When discussing his treatment with reporters, Dr. Crookman states

that “Black-No-More” can help “solve the American race problem” because it makes Black people indistinguishable from white people, suggesting that skin color and a few other superficial physical features are the only things that distinguish races. When a journalist questions Johnson about whether the treatment changes people’s voices, he emphasizes that a Black man “speaks the same dialect as his white neighbors.” He also points out that many people—both Black and white—have mixed ancestry, and so there aren’t actually that many biological differences between Black and white people. The book’s protagonist, Max, experiences this firsthand after undergoing the treatment. He easily blends into white society, and he thinks, “As a boy he had been taught to look up to white folks as just a little less than gods; now he found them little different” from Black Americans. In this way, the book emphasizes that any differences between the races have only come out of power imbalances, not any inherent differences.

Yet even when Black Americans become fully integrated into white society (often unbeknownst to white people), white people still try to seek out differences between the races, demonstrating how fixated society is on race. One difference that alarms white people is the fact that Dr. Crookman’s treatment does not affect people’s genes, and therefore **babies** are still born Black or mixed-race. Dr. Crookman is easily able to use the treatment on babies as well, but white people become very alarmed at the prospect of giving birth to Black babies. This illustrates how even when given solutions to the racial divide, white people still take any opportunity to point out racial differences. As more and more Black people turn white, the “pure” white people—particularly Arthur Snobbcraft of the Anglo-Saxon Association—try to distinguish themselves from people who were formerly white. He comes up with the idea of creating genealogical tests to determine whether someone is truly white or not. However, this plan backfires, as research indicates that nearly 50 percent of the country has Black ancestry—even Snobbcraft. This discovery underscores again that race is superficial (because so many people have mixed-race ancestries), and it also shows how Americans unflinchingly obsess over racial differences even when there’s little to no evidence of these differences.

The book satirizes this obsession with race even further at the end of the book, when people darken their skin color to prove they are “white,” showing not only how race is malleable, but also how people (particularly white people) unceasingly obsess over trying to maintain their idea of a superior race. At the end of the book, Dr. Crookman comes out with a report that the Black Americans who took his treatment are actually two to three shades whiter than the “pure” white people. This very fact illustrates how race is malleable and a mere construct. Even though there are differences between people, the underlying definitions of what it means to be “white” versus “Black” have become completely eradicated—so much so that “white” people

no longer have the whitest skin. As a result of this discovery, people start to use makeup to darken their skin in order to paradoxically prove they are white. Even when people become ostensibly the same, Americans fixate on race in a new way as a way to differentiate people even though it is an entirely fabricated construct.

The book also explores *why* Americans have such a deep fixation on race. Race is an easy tool to invent hierarchy, and society craves a way of establishing and wielding power against others, even if it’s over something arbitrary. Particularly because white people are the majority and hold the power in society, they seek a way to maintain that power and thus look for differences between themselves and Black people in whatever way they can. The book thus suggests that even when given a solution to the “race problem,” people will simply find a different way to obsess over race.



### RACE, CLASS, AND POWER

*Black No More* illustrates that much of the United States’ political and financial hierarchies are based in stoking racial division. For example, white politicians in the book fundraise and run on the promise of keeping white society racially pure; Dr. Crookman makes thousands of dollars on a treatment that makes Black people more like white people; and Max Disher, a Black character who turns white, use the white working class’s hatred of Black workers to make himself rich by joining a hate group called the **Knights of Nordica**. Meanwhile, poor Black and white workers can’t recognize their inferior social position is a result of class because these elites are dividing them based on race. By demonstrating how Black and white elites both use racism to gain power and money, the book suggests that racism is a tool for shifting money and power toward elites while keeping the working classes from uniting to take the money and power they deserve.

Throughout the book, wealthy white supremacists use racism to bolster their own wealth and power. Before the beginning of the novel, Rev. Givens works for the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan and takes advantage of its members by siphoning off some of the treasury for himself so that he can retire. Then, when Dr. Crookman creates the Black-No-More treatment that can turn Black Americans white, Givens starts the Knights of Nordica. While he believes in the mission to “fight for white race integrity,” his real aim in founding the organization is to have a “full treasury to dip into.” Thus, he preys upon this fear among white people that Black people are infiltrating their race in order to bolster his own wealth. In a way, Max—who is the first person to receive Dr. Crookman’s treatment—does the same thing. After he turns white, he joins the Knights of Nordica, though he has “no belief in the racial integrity nonsense,” and only planned to use the white working classes as “a stepladder to the real money.” Thus, the book

demonstrates how even Black people who have turned white, like Max, use racism to profit themselves even at the expense of Black or formerly Black people like himself.

White leaders are not the only ones taking advantage of the working class, as the book also demonstrates how Black elites also use racism to gain wealth. Although Dr. Crookman claims that he just wants to remove obstacles from his fellow Black Americans in creating Black-No-More, he also makes an enormous amount of money while creating chaos and division in the Black community. At the end of the book, he comes out with a study showing that his treatment made people several shades whiter than “pure” white people, lighting the fire anew on racial discrimination. Thus, even though he theoretically wants to prevent discrimination, his treatment doesn’t actually eradicate it, and he upends Black society while earning his fortune. Even Dr. Crookman’s very name suggests that his motivations may not be as pure as he states, as it hints that he’s a “crook,” or a morally crooked person. The book also critiques many other Black leaders who use racism to take advantage of the Black masses, like those who are a part of the National Social Equality League. The book states, “While the large staff of officials was eager to end all oppression and persecution of the Negro, they were never so happy and excited as when a Negro was barred from a theater or fried to a crisp” because this would increase support for their organization and lead to more funds and bigger salaries for them. In this way, the book takes an extremely cynical view of these leaders, who see the advantage to be had in using racism as a way to make money.

Not only do Black and white elites use racism to take money from the working classes, but they also use racial hatred to *divide* the working classes and thwart them from gaining political and economic power. Even before the beginning of the book, businessmen use racism to prevent labor organization. White workers often blame Black workers for taking their jobs because they do the same work for less money. The businessmen and newspapers “fan[] the color prejudice of the white people” so that the white working class gives “little thought to labor organization,” even though organizing with Black Americans would ultimately help them. In this way, playing up racial divisions prevents workers from unionizing and building collective power that could earn them all better wages and working conditions. Then, after Black people begin undergoing Dr. Crookman’s treatment, Max realizes that he has to ensure that this prejudice continues, even at the expense of the workers, many of whom are part of the Knights of Nordica. First, he extorts two factory managers to guarantee them that he can prevent the Knights there from unionizing. He accomplishes this by spreading rumors that the leader of the factory’s labor movement used to be Black. As a result, they refuse to work with him, and the labor movement dissolves. The book explains, “The erstwhile class conscious workers became terror-stricken by the specter of black blood.” This

episode illustrates both of the key dynamics at play between race and class in the book. First, that elites (like Max) take advantage of the working classes to bolster their own wealth and power; and second, that forcing the working classes to focus on race rather than class consciousness prevents them from attaining the benefits they deserve.



## IGNORANCE

*Black No More* is author George Schuyler’s deeply critical and satirical assessment of ignorant people—whom he identifies as those who blindly accept any ideology. He particularly focuses on the “white masses”—largely working class, Southern, rural, and Evangelical—as having little moral integrity but a deep desire to feel superior to others. (Though he also makes a few references to the same critiques of the Black working class.) He illustrates how people who accept ideologies blindly are then taken advantage of—by the Rev. Givens, by Matthew, or by Alex McPhule in the book’s final chapters. In showing how ignorant masses will follow any ideology to the extreme, the book suggests that ignorance is dangerous because it makes people easy to manipulate and often devolves into violence.

The white working class’s unthinking support for the **Knights of Nordica** ideology gives Matthew and Rev. Givens incredible power, and the book highlights how dangerous this collective ignorance can become. When Matthew first attends a Knights of Nordica town hall, posing as a white anthropologist, he is amazed at the attendees’ willingness to “believe anything that was shouted at them loudly and convincingly enough.” And so, he does just that, using their ignorance and their desire to feel superior to rile their anger up about Black people turning white. As a result, many of the attendees join up in the Knights of Nordica (giving the organization five dollars as a membership fee), and Rev. Givens gives Matthew a leadership position in the organization. All of this illustrates how ignorance makes people easy to take advantage of, and it also often enables leaders to gain power and influence as a result. Soon after, Rev. Givens starts giving radio addresses about a variety of topics in order to gain political support—usually invoking Christianity, denouncing Black-No-More, and disseminating white supremacist ideology. The book notes that in these addresses, Givens avoided “saying anything that was true.” Yet despite his lies the addresses enable Givens to gain political support as he runs for President because people are ignorant and susceptible to falsehoods. The latter half of the book illustrates how ignorance can rapidly devolve into violence. For example, people burn down one of Dr. Crookman’s birthing centers, resulting in a dozen **infants’** deaths. Later, when newspapers print a story that Givens and other top Democrats have Black ancestry, a mob violently chases after these Democrats and even lynches several of them—despite the high likelihood that many of the mob members have Black ancestry as well. In this



way, the book illustrates how ignorant people are dangerous because they can be easily moved to uncontrollable and violent extremism.

The residents of Happy Hill, Mississippi, ignorantly believe any ideology that makes them feel superior. And as a result, they become tools of a power-hungry man named Alex McPhule to violent ends. The book establishes the residents of Happy Hill as “blue-blooded Caucasians” who also might have boasted about the town’s “inordinately high illiteracy rate and its lynching record.” In this way, the book emphasizes again the connection between ignorance (reflected here in the illiteracy rate) and mob violence (the town’s lynching record). The story then illustrates how both of these things make people easily influenced. Rev. Alex McPhule arrives in the town claiming to be the founder of a new true faith that would save them from an “Evil One,” having been touched by an angel. Believing that they are being uniquely chosen for this religion, the townspeople take to the sect with complete fervor and McPhule becomes the de facto leader of the town. As a result, he receives anything he wants from the townspeople—even taking sexual advantage of the married women and young girls in the town. This again illustrates how those who are ignorant can be easily manipulated. McPhule then convinces the townspeople that there will be a “Sign” to convince them that his religion is the true, good faith. This fervor culminates when two powerful white men, Snobbcraft and Buggerie, flee their homes because they have been revealed to have Black ancestry. To disguise themselves, they use shoe polish to darken their skin. But when they have to stop in Happy Hill, the local townspeople take this as the Sign from God, believing that the two men are Black. McPhule works them up into a frenzy and convinces the town to lynch the two men—even when the men’s true identities are revealed. Thus, the book illustrates how ignorance not only gives McPhule incredible power over the town, but also leads people to act violently and dangerously.

The book occasionally criticizes the Black masses as well—but because their motivations stem not from ignorance but from wanting advantage or avoiding discrimination, Schuyler doesn’t criticize them as harshly. Matthew notes, for example, that the Knights of Nordica meeting resembles the “religious orgies of the more ignorant Negroes,” suggesting that religion can be just as much of a tool to manipulate and take advantage of ignorant Black Americans as white Americans. The book also begins with Black Americans taking the Black-No-More treatment en masse despite not being fully aware of the ramifications of this action on their lives and on Black society as a whole. And yet, the book makes a distinction between this and the white masses’ actions, because they are motivated by a desire to avoid discrimination and gain better advantage in society. Throughout his life, Schuyler was particularly critical of Christianity and other ideologies that people accept blindly. In

*Black No More*, he clearly illustrates the dangers in this blind acceptance, showing how uncritical ignorance can be easily manipulated to the point that people become uncontrollably violent.



## IDENTITY AND DECEPTION

Many of the characters in *Black No More* lie about or misrepresent their identities. For example, many Black characters take the Black-No-More treatment and turn white, taking on new personas. Other characters throughout the book misrepresent their racial makeup—whether to exaggerate their white heritage or their Black heritage. Some are simply unaware of the truth about their identity, like the many white characters with Black ancestry who do not realize this fact until the end of the novel, despite their security in being “pure.” Given these deceptions, Schuyler suggests that no one can be fully secure in their identity or define themselves purely by a skin color or bloodline.

Black Americans who take the Black-No-More treatment deceive others as they often fabricate new names and identities, showing how difficult it is to fully express or understand the truth about their identities now that skin color has become so malleable. Max, the book’s protagonist, takes on a new identity after turning white, calling himself Matthew Fisher rather than Max Disher. He notes that he no longer feels like he belongs in Black American society. And yet, as he confides to his friend Bunny, he knows he’s Black and he’s “always on the alert” as a result. In this way, Max is deceiving others but doesn’t feel fully settled in any given identity because his bloodline and his skin are at odds with one another. Later, when Max marries a white woman, Helen, and is expecting a **child** with her, he feels guilty about keeping his identity from his wife. “An angel of frankness beckoned him to be done with this life of pretense,” and he does eventually reveal the truth to her just after their mixed-race son, Matthew Jr., is born. Even then, Max continues to go by Matthew, and he and Helen leave the United States with Matthew Jr. This demonstrates that Max knows he was deceiving his wife, but even after giving up the “pretense,” he still struggles to fully understand his identity. Moreover, he may not ever be able to understand himself in the context of the United States’ difficult race relations.

Yet as much as the Black characters actively deceive others about their race, the book also suggests that the white characters are deceiving others as well, because many of them have Black ancestry. In other words, no one knows the full truth about their identity, nor can it solely be defined by race or bloodline. Characters like Reverend Givens and Arthur Snobbcraft pride themselves on having “pure” white ancestry, and they start social organizations and become a part of political movements based in white supremacy. But at the end

of the novel, a statistician's research reveals that Givens, Snobbcraft, and several other prominent white supremacist figures have Black ancestry. The men are shocked to learn this: Givens even uses a racial slur and says that they're all Black people now. Givens's identity hasn't changed—his use of this slur illustrates that he's still racist despite his heritage—but it shows how arbitrary and ultimately deceptive skin color and bloodline can be. Givens's daughter, Helen, realizes this as well. When she learns of this heritage and Max's deception—just moments after she gives birth to her and Max's baby—she is relieved rather than angry about Max's deception. "Compared to what she possessed," thinks Helen, "all talk of race and color [is] damned foolishness." She recognizes that no one can be truly secure in their identity, and therefore, fixating on it is useless.

Several Black civil rights leaders, even before the emergence of Black-No-More, manipulate their identities to benefit their public images, illustrating another way in which skin color or bloodline can change people's *perception* of a person's identity but have no bearing on their actual identity. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, the founder of the National Social Equality League, is a graduate of Harvard and Yale and often speaks at white banquets about "we of the black race." However, he also states that he is part French, part Russian, part Native American, and part Black. The book notes that he discusses the plights of average Black workers "with whose lives he was totally and thankfully unfamiliar." In this way, the book critiques him for aligning himself with an experience he doesn't have, and the book suggests again that factors like skin color or bloodline don't fully capture identity. The book gives another example in Walter Williams, a white man who is a part of the National Social Equality League because his great-grandfather was a mixed-race man. He says that he is "proud" to be Black, but later, after the N.S.E.L. disbands, he goes "back to the white race." Again, the book suggests that white and Black racial identities are not fixed; they can be manipulated and unstable, and as such, these definitions of bloodline and skin color become meaningless.

Dr. Crookman (the creator of Black-No-More) and Samuel Biggerie's research both put a scientific point on this argument. Crookman's research illustrates that more than 80 percent of Black Americans have white ancestry, while Biggerie's research shows that more than 50 million Americans have Black ancestry. In 1931, when *Black No More* was published, the U.S. population was about 122 million with 108 million white Americans and 11 million Black Americans, suggesting that more than one third of white Americans at the time had Black ancestry.) This data illustrates that, in reality, focusing on blood or skin color to determine identity is confusing and pointless, as very few people are as "pure" as they think they are, and almost no one has a full picture of their identity.



## LEADERSHIP AND HYPOCRISY

One of the most striking things about *Black No More* is not only that it satirizes white society's reaction to Black Americans becoming white, but also that it contains caricatures of many of the real-life Black leaders at the time. At the National Social Equality League meeting in the book (which stands in for the real-life NAACP), a group of Black leaders attempts to figure out how to get Black people to maintain pride in their race rather than turning white. However, author George Schuyler implies that they are doing so not because they actually have that same pride, but because it profits them to espouse these beliefs. And because so many of them are direct proxies for figures like W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Madam C. J. Walker, Schuyler suggests that in reality, many Black leaders are just as hypocritical as the figures in the book—they preach racial solidarity while having little racial pride themselves.

The book's character Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard parodies W. E. B. Du Bois, and Schuyler's criticism of Beard—that he has very little in common with most Black Americans and wants very little to do with them—highlights Du Bois's own hypocrisy. Beard's description draws immediate comparison to Du Bois. Beard is the founder of the N.S.E.L.; writes a journal for the organization called *The Dilemma*; is a graduate of Harvard, Yale, and Copenhagen; and is described as having a "full spade beard." Likewise, Du Bois founded the NAACP (an organization advocating for racial equality and justice); wrote a journal for the organization called *The Crisis*; was a graduate of Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin; and wore the same kind of beard. In this description, Schuyler thinly veils Du Bois in Beard, while also immediately setting up his critique. Just the pretentious name—Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard—implies that Schuyler believed Du Bois was haughty and elitist. Further descriptions add to the book's critique, as it notes that Beard "denounc[ed] the Caucasians whom he secretly admired and laud[ed] the greatness of the Negroes whom he alternately pitied and despised" in his journal editorials. It goes on, explaining that Beard was completely unfamiliar with the "down-trodden black workers" and that even though he "deified" Black women, he employed "aught save octoroons." In this way, Schuyler depicts Du Bois as someone who claimed to be proud of his race, but in reality, was hypocritically disdainful of the majority of Black Americans.

Schuyler also critiques Marcus Garvey through the character of Santop Licorice, who uses the "Back to Africa" movement to promote racial solidarity even though he doesn't fully believe in it or take part in that same solidarity. The book introduces Licorice as the head of the Back-To-Africa Society, which advocates for Black Americans to immigrate to Africa. This bears comparison with Garvey, who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a Black nationalist organization that advocated for solidarity between members of

the African diaspora and helped arrange for immigration for Black Americans who wanted to return to Africa. Yet just as Garvey never visited Africa himself, Schuyler writes that Licorice had never gone to Africa and had no intention of going there (merely profiting off of those who wanted to), pointing out his hypocrisy. Later in the book, one of the heads of the white supremacist group the **Knights of Nordica** considers asking some of the Black leaders to speak to his members because they have a common enemy in Black-No-More (a treatment that turns Black people white). This mirrors how Garvey had strong ties to members of the Ku Klux Klan because they both argued for racial separatism—again illustrating his hypocrisy in advocating for racial solidarity while working with the very people who oppress and murder his fellow Black Americans.

The book also criticizes businesspeople like Madam C. J. Walker, who is lauded as a self-made Black businesswoman even though she makes her fortune off products to make Black people appear more like white people. Madam C. J. Walker (born Sarah Breedlove) is often credited as the first female self-made millionaire. But she made her fortune mostly off of hot combs and other products that made Black people's hair look more like white people's hair. This echoes the character of Sisseretta Blandish, who owns a hair salon in Harlem. She condemns people who take the Black-No-More treatment as not having any "race pride." But the book points out that she found success in "making Negroes appear as much like white folks as possible," and as a result she was recently "elected for the fourth time a Vice-President of the American Race Pride League," just as Walker joined the Executive Committee of the NAACP. In this way, the book highlights Blandish's (and thus, Walker's) hypocrisy in stating that she shows race pride while making money off of products that portray white hair or features as the ideal.

Throughout his life, Schuyler's critiques of Black leaders made him a controversial figure. But his caricatures illustrate that no one is above criticism, because he suggests that many Black leaders do not practice what they preach. While people like Du Bois, Garvey, and Walker are lauded for their success and leadership, Schuyler suggests that they, too, show their hypocrisy in gaining that success from products or ideas that they either do not believe in or that undermine racial solidarity.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE KNIGHTS OF NORDICA

The Knights of Nordica represent the perils of ignorance—particularly that of the white working-

class Americans in the book. While Rev. Givens starts the Knights of Nordica to "fight for white race integrity," he also does so in order to take advantage of the white working classes and profit off of them. By stoking fears about white society being infiltrated by Black Americans who have turned white (from the "Black-No-More" treatment), Givens is then able to gain power and wealth simply because the "ignorant" white working classes are willing to accept his ideology and believe in their own superiority. But as a result, he—and people like Max, who are exactly the kind of people the Knights of Nordica are trying to avoid—are able to then take advantage of the white working class. Thus, the members are giving money and power to an organization whose leaders aren't actually working in their interests.

The Knights' ignorance becomes even clearer when some of the members try to organize a labor movement. But because Max is able to shift their focus to think about race, the members don't see how white businessmen are taking advantage of their divisions with Black people. Thus, the members' ignorance in being part of the Knights of Nordica and focusing more on race only works to their detriment, because it prevents them from gaining power over the elite businessmen who are actually oppressing them, not the poor Black workers with whom they could unite.



## BABIES

In the book, babies symbolize how racism in America corrupts innocence. While children are traditionally associated with innocence, in this novel they become a political tool. Because the "Black-No-More" treatment doesn't translate to genetics, Black people who have become white still give birth to Black or mixed-race babies. This alarms white society, so much so that they actively target the birth centers that Dr. Crookman has set up to immediately treat these babies after birth. White hate groups set one of the hospitals on fire, killing 12 newborn babies. This incident illustrates how racism corrupts and ultimately kills pure, innocent children for no reason whatsoever.

This becomes evident when Helen is pregnant as well, and Max's fear of what she will say when the baby is born with dark skin makes him consider murdering his own child. Racism not only corrupts those who hold racist beliefs, but also corrupts those who fear what might happen if their own deception is found out—all to the detriment of innocent children.

Ironically, at the end of the book, when people start to want to have darker skin to prove they are more "white," it is paradoxically Matthew Fisher Jr. who is the least out of place in society because he is mixed-race. It shows once again how racism is a corrupting force that contrasts with the idea that children should be allowed to be themselves—that innocence should be preserved. However, because Matthew and his

family have to leave the country in order to find this ease, it suggests cynically that racism's corruptive force is unavoidable in the United States.





## QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Black No More* published in 2018.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

●● As the cab whirled up Seventh Avenue, he settled back and thought of the girl from Atlanta. He couldn't get her out of his mind and didn't want to. At his rooming house, he paid the driver, unlocked the door, ascended to his room and undressed, mechanically. His mind was a kaleidoscope: Atlanta, sea-green eyes, slender figure, titian hair, frigid manner. "I never dance with niggers." Then he fell asleep about five o'clock and promptly dreamed of her. Dreamed of dancing with her, dining with her, motoring with her, sitting beside her on a golden throne while millions of manacled white slaves prostrated themselves before him. Then there was a nightmare of grim, gray men with shotguns, baying hounds, a heap of gasoline-soaked faggots and a screeching, fanatical mob.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Samuel Buggerie, Arthur Snobbcraft, Helen Givens/The Blonde Girl

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 7

#### Explanation and Analysis

After the blonde girl (who's white) rejects Max (who's Black) on New Year's Eve, Max returns home and promptly has two vivid dreams about her that foreshadow the events of the rest of the book. At first, they seem to depict two completely opposing visions, or perhaps two alternate endings for Max's story. In the first, he defies the blonde girl's racial slurs and bigotry and takes his place alongside her, overcoming racism to dance and dine with her. He also becomes a kind of overlord of the white masses, who become "slaves" that "prostrate[] themselves before him."

This imagery foreshadows the fact that Max will soon earn this place above the white working class when he undergoes the titular Black-No-More treatment, making himself appear white, and joins the Knights of Nordica (a white supremacist hate group). In this position, he uses the members' ignorance, fear, and bigotry to make himself



wealthy. This vision of himself sitting on a golden throne with white people "manacled" suggests that he'll achieve a great degree of wealth while other white people are doomed to serve him, just as they eventually become bound up in his white supremacist ideology.

At the same time, his second vision depicts a more realistic fear: being mobbed, shot, and burned on a pile of "gasoline-soaked faggots" (meaning sticks in this context). This image of Max being lynched is a present threat, particularly in the South, as the residents in Happy Hill enact just this kind of lynching at the end of the book. Yet what is ironic is that the people who are lynched at the end of the book in exactly this way are not Black people, but instead are Arthur Snobbcraft and Samuel Buggerie—two white supremacists who discover they have Black ancestry.

This illustrates that by the end of the book, people have not left race behind in spite of the Black-No-More treatment—the purpose of which was to eliminate racial categories and, by extension, racism. But instead, people continue to focus on race in a new, different way. It continues to be a tool for people to oppress and violate others, just as Max feared in his dream here.

●● On the other hand, many so-called Caucasians, particularly the Latins, Jews and South Irish, and frequently the most Nordic of peoples like the Swedes, show almost Negroid lips and noses. Black up some white folks and they could deceive a resident of Benin. Then when you consider that less than twenty per cent of our Negroes are without Caucasian ancestry and that close to thirty per cent have American Indian ancestry, it is readily seen that there cannot be the wide difference in Caucasian and Afro-American facial characteristics that most people imagine.

**Related Characters:** Dr. Junius Crookman (speaker), Samuel Buggerie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 13

#### Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Crookman announces his Black-No-More treatment, he explains to reporters that it doesn't matter that his treatment doesn't change people's dialects or certain features. Here, Crookman's argument illustrates that race is superficial and purely a construct that people fixate on. At the time the novel is set (the 1930s and 40s), most people (particularly white people) believed that there



were biological differences between the races, and that Black people were inherently inferior. These beliefs were a way to justify white people's discrimination against Black people.



But this passage debunks some of the myths surrounding biology, as Crookman suggests that there aren't many differences between people's genetics—after all, many white people have the same kinds of features that Black people do. And if skin color is the only real difference between people's genetics, then this means that race is superficial and essentially fake. This idea is evidenced by Dr. Crookman's treatment, as it allows people to change their skin color and eradicate all racial differences.

This passage also touches on the fact that most people don't have a full handle on their identity, as Black people often share genes with white people. This echoes Samuel Buggerie's discovery toward the end of the novel, that many white people share ancestry with Black people. This suggests that no one can be fully secure in their identity because people often don't have a clear picture of their ancestry. Therefore, trying to define identities or social hierarchies based on these qualities is pointless, because they don't fully capture who people are.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

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

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Dr. Junius Crookman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

After Max undergoes the Black-No-More treatment and sells his story to *The Scimitar*, he gets frustrated when he sees his picture being printed all over the paper. His irritation at being made conspicuous because he was once Black foreshadows some of the conflict throughout the rest of the novel. First, it suggests that despite the fact that people like Max are becoming white in order to avoid being ostracized for their race, they will still be distinguished and


separated. Even when race has virtually no meaning because everyone looks alike, the book suggests that people will still find a way to fixate on race and the ways in which people have been different in the past.

Secondly, the book foreshadows Max's eventual decision to adopt a new name and identity because he wants to blend in and leave his old life behind. Identity is soon to become a destabilized force in the United States as a result of Black-No-More, because color is no longer a way to define it, and Max foreshadows that he'll soon begin to deceive people by changing his name. Even though he's still the same person, he feels that he has to adopt a new identity to avoid his past. However, the book again implies that even trying to change that identity may not necessarily save him from being distinguished, because Americans are so obsessed with racial difference.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ There are times when the welfare of our race must take precedence over law. Opposed as we always have been to mob violence as the worst enemy of democratic government, we cannot help but feel that the intelligent white men and women of New York City who are interested in the purity and preservation of their race should not permit the challenge of Crookmanism to go unanswered, even though these black scoundrels may be within the law. There are too many criminals in this country already hiding behind the skirts of the law.

**Related Characters:** Dr. Junius Crookman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 30



### Explanation and Analysis

As Dr. Crookman continues his work and more and more people receive the Black-No-More treatment, opposition to the treatment grows. In this newspaper editorial that Crookman reads, the author suggests that people may need to respond with violence to combat "Crookmanism." This underscores the danger of ignorance, as it causes people to blindly believe that the white race needs to maintain "purity" and to buy into racist stereotypes of Crookman as a "black scoundrel" and a "criminal." As the book suggests, the lines between Black and white are already blurry—and by the end of the novel, they are nearly nonexistent. Thus, this emphasis on white racial purity is just a product of ignorance, borne out of white people's desire to feel superior and sit at the top of the racial hierarchy.

The book then ties this ignorance to violence. Even though the newspaper says that “mob violence” has always been the enemy of democratic government, the newspaper still suggests that people should act outside of the law and form these angry mobs. This idea also has historical basis, as vigilantes often lynched Black people—particularly in the American South—with no legal backing or any consequences for this injustice. In this way, the book sets up a connection between these ignorant beliefs and the violent danger that they can cause, particularly because people working with this kind of mob mentality can be easily worked up and manipulated by these kinds of editorials.

☛ Madame Sisseretta Blandish sat disconsolately in an armchair near the front door of her ornate hair-straightening shop, looking blankly at the pedestrians and traffic passing to and fro. These two weeks had been hard ones for her. Everything was going out and nothing coming in. She had been doing very well at her vocation for years and was acclaimed in the community as one of its business leaders. Because of her prominence as the proprietor of a successful enterprise engaged in making Negroes appear as much like white folks as possible, she had recently been elected for the fourth time a Vice-President of the American Race Pride League.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Mrs. Sisseretta Blandish/Sari Blandine

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 38

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mrs. Sisseretta Blandish—who owns a hair-straightening shop—considers what to do now that Black-No-More is essentially putting her out of business. The quote ties Blandish to the real-life figure of Madam C. J. Walker, who was born as Sarah Breedlove and is often credited as the first female self-made millionaire. However, Walker made her fortune mostly off hot combs and other products that made Black people’s hair look more like white people’s hair, as the book notes is true of Sisseretta Blandish. In an earlier chapter, Blandish condemned Max for not having any “race pride,” but here the book points out the implicit hypocrisy in that statement.



Blandish finds success in “making Negroes appear as much like white folks as possible,” and as a result, she has recently been “elected for the fourth time a Vice-President of the American Race Pride League,” (another tie to Walker, who

joined the NAACP’s Executive Committee). In this way, the book highlights Blandish’s (and in some ways, Walker’s) hypocrisy in stating that she pride in her race while making money off of products that portray white hair or features as the ideal. This also echoes a recurring motif throughout the book, as several other characters make money off of racism. Even though Blandish is working-class herself, she still takes advantage of people who are trying to assimilate or conform to white beauty standards.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ The unreasoning and illogical color prejudice of most of the people with whom he was forced to associate infuriated him. He often laughed cynically when some coarse, ignorant white man voiced his opinion concerning the inferior mentality and morality of the Negroes. He was moving in white society now and he could compare it with the society he had known as a Negro in Atlanta and Harlem. What a let-down it was from the good breeding, sophistication, refinement and gentle cynicism to which he had become accustomed as a popular young man about town in New York’s Black Belt. He was not able to articulate this feeling but he was conscious of the reaction nevertheless.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 42

### Explanation and Analysis

During Matthew’s first three months in Georgia after becoming white, he starts to move among white society. His reflections on what he finds illustrate two key ideas: first, that there is no fundamental difference between Black and white society. Though it was accepted at the time the novel is set (the 1930s and 40s) that white people were biologically superior to Black people—thus justifying discrimination against them—the book levels a massive critique at that belief. Matthew is easily able to slip into white society, and he is able to compare his former life to his current one, challenging the idea that there are inherent biological differences between the races. He even suggests that Black society in New York is overall more sophisticated and refined than white society in Atlanta.

On top of this attitude, the book also indicts people like Matthew, implicitly calling him out on his ignorance. Again, there is an irony in his observation about white people’s “unreasoning and illogical color prejudice,” because *he* is

clearly prejudiced as well. He is making assumptions about people with whom he's likely had little contact and discriminates against them because of those assumptions—and yet he accuses others of this very same thing. This illustrates how ignorant people are more than willing to accept any ideology that convinces them of their own superiority, which leaves them open to manipulation. And, ironically, Matthew ends up being one of those people who uses other people's ignorance to his advantage.

☛ The attitude of these people puzzled him. Was not Black-No-More getting rid of the Negroes upon whom all of the blame was placed for the backwardness of the South? Then he recalled what a Negro street speaker had said one night on the corner of 138th Street and Seventh Avenue in New York: that unorganized labor meant cheap labor; that the guarantee of cheap labor was an effective means of luring new industries into the South; that so long as the ignorant white masses could be kept thinking of the menace of the Negro to Caucasian race purity and political control, they would give little thought to labor organization. It suddenly dawned upon Matthew Fisher that this Black-No-More treatment was more of a menace to white business than to white labor. And not long afterward he became aware of the money-making possibilities involved in the present situation.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Dr. Junius Crookman

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 43

### Explanation and Analysis

As Matthew begins the new phase of his life as a white person, he observes how the newspapers seem to be fanning the flames of racial prejudice as Black-No-More becomes a more prominent treatment. Matthew's consideration of this idea illuminates some of the societal factors that are prompting the response to Dr. Crookman's work. First, it shows how, even when given an opportunity to overcome the "race problem," as Dr. Crookman put it, or to "get rid" of the people who are often blamed for the country's problems, Americans still choose to fixate on race. This is because, as the book implies here, race is an easy way to create a hierarchy among people. The South wants to maintain a cheap labor source to "lure new industries" there, and eliminating racism would prevent this kind of exploitation.

This also ties into the book's constant references to the "ignorant white masses," and how they can be easily manipulated to believe in their own superiority. By using Black-No-More as a way of threatening that superiority, white elites can direct the ignorant masses to racial resentment rather than class consciousness. But white businesses aren't the only people who recognize the potential profits in those ideas, as Matthew also understands—and soon takes advantage of—the potential for profiting off of white people's racism.

☛ Unlike Givens, he had no belief in the racial integrity nonsense nor any confidence in the white masses whom he thought were destined to flock to the Knights of Nordica. On the contrary he despised and hated them. He had the average Negro's justifiable fear of the poor whites and only planned to use them as a stepladder to the real money.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Rev. Henry Givens

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 47-48

### Explanation and Analysis

In Georgia, Matthew discovers the newly founded Knights of Nordica, a group fighting for white racial integrity and supremacy, and he plots to use the group to his own advantage. Matthew's thoughts on the group illustrate the complicated nature of his identity and race. Because Matthew was formerly Black, as he notes here, he doesn't believe in the group's actual mission. He only views the white masses as a "stepladder to the real money"—as does Givens, even though Givens does believe in the group's mission.



Both Givens and Matthew use race consciousness as a way to bolster their own wealth and power. This calls back to the dream that Matthew had earlier in the novel about white slaves bowing down to him. This implies that racist, working-class white people are easily manipulated by their ignorance and their desire to believe in their own supremacy, even though these things actually shackle them to poor working conditions by preventing them from uniting with the Black working class.


Yet at the same time, Matthew's motivations and plans are

complicated by hypocrisy. Even though Matthew is making money off of the poor white people who despised him and discriminated against him for so long, he is doing so at the expense of Black and formerly Black people like him by stoking those racial divisions.

Matthew, who sat on the platform alongside old man Givens viewed the spectacle with amusement mingled with amazement. He was amused because of the similarity of this meeting to the religious orgies of the more ignorant Negroes and amazed that earlier in the evening he should have felt any qualms about lecturing to these folks on anthropology, a subject with which neither he nor his hearers were acquainted. He quickly saw that these people would believe anything that was shouted at them loudly and convincingly enough. He knew what would fetch their applause and bring in their memberships and he intended to repeat it over and over.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Rev. Henry Givens

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 53

### Explanation and Analysis

When Matthew attends a Knights of Nordica meeting for the first time, posing as an anthropologist from New York working for white racial integrity, he is astounded at the attendees' ignorance. This passage is an indictment of ignorance on multiple fronts: first, it takes the white working class to task by arguing that they are susceptible to believe anything "shouted at them loudly and convincingly enough." As such, Matthew knows that he can gain power and influence by taking advantage of their ignorance.

In addition, this is one of the rare moments when the book also critiques the Black masses, as Matthew notes that the meeting reminds him of Black "religious orgies." This furthers the book's critique of Christianity (one that will recur during the Happy Hill lynching at the end), as it acknowledges that Christianity plays on that same ignorance. It makes practitioners feel morally superior, when in reality, Matthew suggests that religion is simply a tool used to manipulate people.


Lastly, the passage demonstrates that Matthew is using the white working class's racial resentment to further his own

wealth and political power. He has no qualms about impersonating someone or spewing falsehoods about race—despite the fact that he knows nothing about anthropology—in order to bolster his own standing, even when it has a huge potential to harm Black and formerly Black people like himself.

For an hour Matthew told them at the top of his voice what they believed: i.e., that a white skin was a sure indication of the possession of superior intellectual and moral qualities; that all Negroes were inferior to them; that God had intended for the United States to be a white man's country and that with His help they could keep it so; that their sons and brothers might inadvertently marry Negresses or, worse, their sisters and daughters might marry Negroes, if Black-No-More, Incorporated, was permitted to continue its dangerous activities.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 53-54

### Explanation and Analysis

When Matthew speaks at his first Knights of Nordica meeting, he spews falsehoods about race. The passage plays on many aspects of the book's satire. First, Matthew's speech reflects much of the commonly held wisdom at the time (the 1930s and 40s) about race, suggesting that Black Americans are biologically inferior to white people and that this justifies their discrimination. However, because Matthew is the one saying this—as a Black person who has since become white—the book turns this critique on his head. The person who is held up as the authority and who is leading the meeting is Black, and because the book makes it clear that he doesn't actually believe what he is saying, it provides a framework that shows how blatantly false Matthew's statements are.

Instead, the fact that Matthew is able to gain such success following this meeting illustrates instead the ignorance of the crowd, as they are willing to believe anything that reinforces their idea of their own superiority. It again indicts Christianity, showing that it is used to further justify and manipulate people's ignorance.



The passage also implies that people are so fixated on race because it is an easy way to establish hierarchy and



motivate people using fear and hatred. For example, Matthew suggests that people need to join the Knights of Nordica in order to ensure that white people do not intermarry or have children with Black people. Yet this fear and hatred has no true purpose other than the fact that stoking it can give people like Matthew enormous financial and political power, which is exactly why he gives the speech and joins the Knights in the first place. In this way, the book suggests that racial divisions are only beneficial to a select set of elites who take advantage of people's ignorance and willingness to buy into those ideas.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☛ While this organization had to depend to a large extent upon the charity of white folk for its existence, since the blacks had always been more or less skeptical about the program for liberty and freedom, the efforts of the society were not entirely unprofitable. Vistas of immaculate offices spread in every direction from the elevator and footfalls were muffled in thick imitation-Persian rugs. While the large staff of officials was eager to end all oppression and persecution of the Negro, they were never so happy and excited as when a Negro was barred from a theater or fried to a crisp. Then they would leap for telephones, grab telegraph pads and yell for stenographers; smiling through their simulated indignation at the spectacle of another reason for their continued existence and appeals for funds.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 64

### Explanation and Analysis



This chapter shifts perspective to the National Social Equality League, an organization that aims to achieve racial equality and justice (it is a stand-in for the real-life NAACP). Yet the book's description of the organization reveals an intense critique of its hypocrisy and suggests that the Black leaders running the League are simply using racism to their own advantage in gaining money. First, the book suggests that the organization doesn't actually cater to Black people, since the people who donate most to the organization are white people. Therefore, the League focuses more on what will rake in donations than actually trying to achieve equality or social justice. This is why Black people are "skeptical" of the organization—not because they don't want liberty and freedom, as the book sarcastically implies, but because the organization seems to have little effect on their

lives to actually achieve that freedom.

This belief that the organization isn't actually interested in social equality is also what prompts the cynical statement that the staff was "never so happy and excited as when a Negro was barred from a theater or fried to a crisp." This jarringly calculated attitude reveals that the staff cares more about performing their "simulated indignation" to gain donations than actually working to end racial inequality. The book also demonstrates why these leaders are so intent upon continuing the organization—because it earns them a lot of money, which then provides for the vistas in their offices or "their thick imitation-Persian rugs." The fact that the society is described as "not entirely unprofitable" suggests that profit, and not justice, is the true goal of the organization. In this way, the book suggests that the staff is just using racial divisions for their own profit.

☛ In a very private inner office of the N. S. E. L. suite, Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, founder of the League and a graduate of Harvard, Yale and Copenhagen (whose haughty bearing never failed to impress both Caucasians and Negroes), sat before a glass-topped desk, rubbing now his curly gray head, and now his full spade beard. For a mere six thousand dollars a year, the learned doctor wrote scholarly and biting editorials in *The Dilemma* denouncing the Caucasians whom he secretly admired and lauding the greatness of the Negroes whom he alternately pitied and despised. In limpid prose he told of the sufferings and privations of the down-trodden black workers with whose lives he was totally and thankfully unfamiliar. Like most Negro leaders, he deified the black woman but abstained from employing aught save octoroons. He talked at white banquets about "we of the black race" and admitted in books that he was part-French, part-Russian, part-Indian and part-Negro. He bitterly denounced the Nordics for debauching Negro women while taking care to hire comely yellow stenographers with weak resistance. In a real way he loved his people.

**Related Characters:** Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard/Karl von Beerde

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 65

### Explanation and Analysis

When the book shifts to the National Social Equity League meeting, Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, the organization's founder, is introduced. Just as the N.S.E.L.

bears striking resemblance to the real-life NAACP, so too does Beard's description mirror real-life NAACP founder and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois. The first part of this introduction establishes clear connections between Beard and Du Bois. First, Du Bois was a graduate of Harvard, Fisk, and the University of Berlin (providing some parallels to Beard's education). Du Bois also wrote a journal called *The Crisis* for the NAACP, a similar journal as the one described here. Du Bois also had the same kind of beard that Beard does—and the mere fact that the character is named Beard suggests that this is a key aspect of his character that clearly points to the connection to Du Bois.

Intermingled with these descriptions is the book's critique of Beard's (and thus, Du Bois's) hypocrisy. It suggests that even as he purports to advocate for working-class Black people, in reality he is completely removed from them and actually has very little good will toward them. The book establishes him as haughty and elitist, being "thankfully and totally unfamiliar" with most people's lives. He claims to be a part of the "black race" while also in many ways trying to distance himself from it and thinking himself above it.

In addition, the book suggests that many of the very things Beard critiques white people for—like "debauching Negro women"—he does himself. He hires very few dark-skinned women (showing his own racial prejudice), and the book's statement that he hires stenographers with "weak resistance" suggests that he takes sexual advantage of them. Lastly, he makes "a mere six thousand dollars a year," which was much more than the average salary at the time, suggesting that he is profiting greatly from keeping these attitudes. All in all, the description skewers Beard, and the real-life figures that inspired him, by depicting his many layers of hypocrisy and elitism.

Mr. Licorice for some fifteen years had been very profitably advocating the emigration of all the American Negroes to Africa. He had not, of course, gone there himself and had not the slightest intention of going so far from the fleshpots, but he told the other Negroes to go. Naturally the first step in their going was to join his society by paying five dollars a year for membership, ten dollars for a gold, green and purple robe and silver-colored helmet that together cost two dollars and a half, contributing five dollars to the Santop Licorice Defense Fund [...], and buying shares at five dollars each in the Royal Black Steamship Company, for obviously one could not get to Africa without a ship and Negroes ought to travel on Negro-owned and operated ships. The ships were Santop's especial pride. True, they had never been to Africa, had never had but one cargo and that, being gin, was half consumed by the unpaid and thirsty crew before the vessel was saved by the Coast Guard, but they had cost more than anything else the Back-To-Africa Society had purchased even though they were worthless except as scrap iron.

**Related Characters:** Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard/Karl von Beerde, Santop Licorice

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 74-75

### Explanation and Analysis

After introducing the N.S.E.L. and figures like Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, the book transitions to Santop Licorice's office, who is head of the Back-to-Africa Society. This connection to the real-life Back-to-Africa movement, which advocated for Black Americans to immigrate back to Africa, connects Licorice to Marcus Garvey, a famous Black nationalist who advocated for solidarity between members of the African diaspora. Yet just as the book did with Beard, this passage shows how Licorice (and thus Garvey, the book implies) is motivated by less-than-pure ideals. First, the book acknowledges that despite advocating for a return to Africa, Licorice had never been there and had no intention of going there (just as Garvey never went to Africa).



Instead, Licorice seems to advocate for the movement purely for selfish financial reasons. It allows him to take advantage of other Black people who see merit in his idea, forcing them to pay to be a part of the society despite the fact that it will actually help them very little in getting back to Africa (particularly as Licorice's own ships have never made it there). In this way, the book points out Licorice's hypocrisy and the fact that he is simply using racial divisions to make money for himself and to ensure that he can continue his various frauds.

## Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ The great mass of white workers, however, was afraid to organize and fight for more pay because of a deepset fear that the Negroes would take their jobs. They had heard of black labor taking the work of white labor under the guns of white militia, and they were afraid to risk it. They had first read of the activities of Black-No-More, Incorporated, with a secret feeling akin to relief but after the orators of the Knights of Nordica and the editorials of *The Warning* began to portray the menace confronting them, they forgot about their economic ills and began to yell for the blood of Dr. Crookman and his associates. Why, they began to argue, one couldn't tell who was who! Herein lay the fundamental cause of all their ills. Times were hard, they reasoned, because there were so many white Negroes in their midst taking their jobs and undermining their American standard of living. None of them had ever attained an American standard of living to be sure, but that fact never occurred to any of them. So they flocked to the meetings of the Knights of Nordica and night after night sat spellbound while Rev. Givens, who had finished the eighth grade in a one-room country school, explained the laws of heredity and spoke eloquently of the growing danger of black babies.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Rev. Henry Givens

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 82

### Explanation and Analysis

With Matthew as the second-in-command in the Knights of Nordica, the organization's membership grows, particularly among working-class white people. In this passage, the book illustrates how racial divisions are used to undermine class consciousness. Even before Black-No-More began its treatments, racial divisions were being used to distract from a racially unified labor movement—as the passage describes, white people were terrified of Black Americans taking their jobs at lower wages, giving everyone a lower standard of living. Yet instead of unionizing and working to fight for their benefits, the white working classes simply demonized Black Americans.

This Knights of Nordica movement illustrates how that idea is continuing even as Black people are becoming white. And yet, white people still believe that formerly Black people are “taking their jobs,” and that only by rooting out those people will the problem be solved. This is ironic, as banding together to fight for better conditions would be the most


effectives way for them to gain the benefits and wages that they deserve.


Instead, their ignorance and desire to be placated about their race (by someone equally ignorant like Givens) simply turns working-class people against one another. The absurdity of this idea is present especially in the fact that Givens speaks about the “growing danger of black babies,” as if infants could somehow be the source of all the working class's problems. This reference to children suggests that fixating on race corrupts innocence, but the book also makes the point that racism ultimately harms everyone. It fosters hatred and division, and people like Matthew and Givens can then take advantage of that ignorance and division.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ The erstwhile class conscious workers became terror-stricken by the specter of black blood. You couldn't, they said, be sure of anybody any more, and it was better to leave things as they were than to take a chance of being led by some nigger. If the colored gentry couldn't sit in the movies and ride in the trains with white folks, it wasn't right for them to be organizing and leading white folks.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Hortzenboff, Blickdoff

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 96

### Explanation and Analysis

After Matthew's operatives spread rumors in Paradise, South Carolina that the head of the labor movement may have been formerly Black, people refuse to work with the man, and the labor movement essentially dissolves. This quote illustrates how people like Matthew take advantage of people's racial prejudice in order to make them less class-conscious. They are more afraid of being led by someone who was formerly Black than they are concerned with gaining the benefits that they all deserve. The fact that the town is called Paradise is an ironic commentary on the fact that it is anything *but* a paradise, and the people's hatred is responsible for keeping it that way.

The quote also illustrates how this continues to divert power and wealth to the elites and upper classes. In exchange for spreading the rumors, Matthew was able to

extort the factory owners Blickdoff and Hortzenboff, gaining \$15,000 as a result. In addition, the longer the conflict is drawn out between the white and Black working classes, the more members the Knights of Nordica is able to gain, and the more money Matthew makes. In this way, the book emphasizes how white workers' racial prejudice simply ends up benefiting the wealthy, to the detriment of all vulnerable, working-class people.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☝☝ "What's got my goat is my wife being in the family way." Matthew stopped bantering a moment, a sincere look of pain erasing his usual ironic expression.


"Congratulations!" burred Bunny.


"Don't rub it in," Matthew replied. "You know how the kid will look."

"That's right," agreed his pal. "You know, sometimes I forget who we are."

"Well, I don't. I know I'm a darky and I'm always on the alert."

**Related Characters:** Bunny Brown (speaker), Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Helen Givens/The Blonde Girl

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 106

### Explanation and Analysis

When Helen becomes pregnant, Matthew expresses his apprehension to Bunny about the fact that their child will have dark skin. This exchange illustrates the complicated way Matthew thinks about his identity, and the fact that who he is seems so unstable to him. While Bunny is able to forget that both of them were formerly Black, Matthew doesn't feel the same ease, because he worries about being found out. This is because Matthew's new skin color and identity are at odds with his bloodline, so he doesn't feel fully settled in either aspect of his identity. Always being "on the alert" suggests that he knows his deception is dangerous, but there's no way for him to feel truly comfortable. As he experienced in New York, he no longer fits in with Black American society, and yet he knows that his position in white society is tenuous.

The fact that all of this conflict centers around Matthew's baby is particularly telling, because it shows how something as innocent as a baby has been completely corrupted


because they have the potential to destabilize people's positions in society. To help Matthew get out of this problem, Bunny sets Matthew's family's home on fire so that Helen will have to go to a lying-in hospital to have her baby. The stress from the incident ends up making her have a miscarriage, which relieves Matthew. This horrible sequence of events illustrates how untenable deception is, how fruitless it is to define identities by skin color or bloodline, and how harmful racism is to the most innocent and vulnerable.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ Rev. Givens, fortified with a slug of corn, advanced nervously to the microphone, fingering his prepared address. He cleared his throat and talked for upwards of an hour during which time he successfully avoided saying anything that was true, the result being that thousands of telegrams and long-distance telephone calls of congratulation came in to the studio. In his long address he discussed the foundations of the Republic, anthropology, psychology, miscegenation, cooperation with Christ, getting right with God, curbing Bolshevism, the bane of birth control, the menace of the Modernists, science versus religion, and many other subjects of which he was totally ignorant. The greater part of his time was taken up in a denunciation of Black-No-More, Incorporated, and calling upon the Republican administration of President Harold Goosie to deport the vicious Negroes at the head of it or imprison them in the federal penitentiary. When he had concluded "In the name of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Amen," he retired hastily to the washroom to finish his half-pint of corn.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Harold Goosie, Rev. Henry Givens

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 116

### Explanation and Analysis

As the Republicans gain support in the South, Matthew has the idea for Givens to give radio addresses to change American people's minds about Black-No-More and the Democrats. The description of these addresses here illustrates how Givens uses people's ignorance to his advantage. Even though the book states that Givens himself is "totally ignorant" on the many subjects he speaks about, he speaks in the same vein as Matthew at his first Knights of



Nordica meeting, knowing that saying something convincingly enough will get him the power and influence that he wants. The fact that he touches on Christianity and Jesus Christ several times plays into the book's recurring critique of Christianity, implying that it is an ideology that makes ignorant people feel morally superior while also enabling them to become suggestible to any other ideologies that Givens might impart.

Givens also gives a glimpse into what those other ideologies might be, as he stokes racial resentment even further. He calls out Black-No-More and again relies on false anthropological statements to make his case for white supremacy and racial integrity. Stoking racial divisions in this way helps divide the working class—for example, Givens simultaneously critiques Bolshevism, which is the Communist government in Russia during this time. Making these critiques of Bolshevism undermines the labor movement because it prevents workers of all races from wanting to unite and gain the benefits and wages they deserve.

Lastly, it is clear that Givens is using all of this ignorance and racial resentment for his own purpose. He has not only become very wealthy from spewing these ideologies but also gains a great deal of political power, becoming the Democratic nominee for the upcoming presidential race. In this way, the book suggests that ignorance and racial resentment are both tools used by elites to bolster their own power while dividing others.



## Chapter 10 Quotes


Other Northern newspapers assumed an even more friendly attitude, but the press generally followed the crowd, or led it, and in slightly veiled language urged the opponents of Black-No-More to take the law into their hands.

Finally, emboldened and inflamed by fiery editorials, radio addresses, pamphlets, posters and platform speeches, a mob seeking to protect white womanhood in Cincinnati attacked a Crookman hospital, drove several women into the streets and set fire to the building. A dozen babies were burned to death and others, hastily removed by their mothers, were recognized as mulattoes. The newspapers published names and addresses. Many of the women were very prominent socially either in their own right or because of their husbands.

The nation was shocked as never before. Republican sentiment began to dwindle.

**Related Characters:** Dr. Junius Crookman

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 133

### Explanation and Analysis

As the presidential race heats up, and tension grows across the United States, a horrific incident occurs when people set fire to one of Dr. Crookman's hospitals. This is the first major incident of violence in the book, and it demonstrates how dangerous ignorance is. People are willing to believe in the press's biased reporting, raising alarms about Black people infiltrating the white race—and ignorant hatred and fear that the press stokes then leads people to act violently.

In addition, the gruesome outcome of this violence—a dozen children being killed—shows how corrosive the country's fixation on race is, to the point that innocent infants are being murdered over it. The white masses have been convinced that Black children are somehow the source of all of their problems, when in reality, Crookman's treatments show that race is entirely superficial. And it is sadly ironic that the “mob seeking to protect white womanhood” in reality means killing their children and driving women out of hospitals just after giving birth, suggesting the mob's hypocrisy in that it doesn't actually care about protecting women.



But perhaps even more telling is the response to the incident. Rather than being horrified at the violence against women and children, the country is shocked at the fact that some prominent women in society were formerly Black or had formerly Black husbands. Dwindling Republican sentiment suggests that people are more on the side of the mob than they are on the side of vulnerable children. Thus, this incident demonstrates how people still remain fixated on race as a way of oppressing others and creating hierarchy, even when given a solution to racial resentment.

## Chapter 11 Quotes

☞ “There was so much of this mixing between whites and blacks of the various classes that very early the colonies took steps to put a halt to it. They managed to prevent intermarriage but they couldn’t stop intermixture. You know the old records don’t lie. They’re right there for everybody to see...

“A certain percentage of these Negroes,” continued Buggerie, quite at ease now and seemingly enjoying his dissertation, “in time lightened sufficiently to be able to pass for white. They then merged with the general population. Assuming that there were one thousand such cases fifteen generations ago—and we have proof that there were more—their descendants now number close to fifty million souls. Now I maintain that we dare not risk publishing this information. Too many of our very first families are touched right here in Richmond!

**Related Characters:** Samuel Buggerie (speaker), Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Dr. Junius Crookman, Rev. Henry Givens, Arthur Snobbcraft

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 144

### Explanation and Analysis

As the presidential election looms, Buggerie reveals some of his statistical findings—that over 50 million people (including Snobbcraft, Givens, and Buggerie himself) all have Black ancestry. This illustrates two of the book’s major points: first, like Dr. Crookman’s research earlier in the book, it suggests that race isn’t as clearly delineated as people believe. At the time, many people believed that white people were biologically superior to Black people, which is what allowed white people to justify discrimination and segregation. Yet the fact that so many people share ancestry across races complicates this idea, because it suggests that people of different races aren’t as biologically dissimilar or “pure” as one might think. Thus, this obsession with categorizing people based on race is simply maintained because it allows people to oppress others and establish hierarchies that work to their advantage.



Second, this finding suggests another of the book’s key implications: that while there are people like Matthew Fisher who are clearly deceiving others about their identity (trying to hide his history as a Black American), these findings suggest that no one fully understands their identity. Everyone, it suggests, is engaged in some form of deception. Even Buggerie and Snobbcraft, who believed firmly in their purity and wanted to exclude people from voting—because of genealogical tests—had Black ancestry themselves. This shows how fruitless it is to try to define one’s identity based


on skin color or bloodline—particularly because of the oppression and hatred that these racial divisions foster.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ Must he go on forever in this way? Helen was young and fecund. Surely one couldn’t go on murdering one’s children, especially when one loved and wanted children. Wouldn’t it be better to settle the matter once and for all? Or should he let the doctor murder the boy and then hope for a better situation the next time? An angel of frankness beckoned him to be done with this life of pretense; to take his wife and son and flee far away from everything, but a devil of ambition whispered seductively about wealth, power and prestige.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Matthew Fisher Jr., Helen Givens/The Blonde Girl

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 152

### Explanation and Analysis

After Helen gives birth to a Black child, Matthew Fisher Jr., the physician asks Matthew if he wants to get rid of the baby, and Matthew briefly considers doing so to keep his identity hidden. This darkly absurd passage captures not only Matthew’s personal conflict, but the broader conflict surrounding race in the U.S. First, it shows how Matthew grapples with his identity, invoking the classic angel and devil conflict to show that he doesn’t want to keep deceiving people, but he fears the consequences of revealing the truth about himself (that he used to be Black). This reinforces the idea that Matthew’s identity isn’t totally secure—his hidden history can completely destabilize his life. And there is a truth to his fear, as people are still fixated on finding distinctions in race even though neither bloodline nor skin color capture the truth about people’s identity.



The book also shows the potentially dire consequences that come from this fixation, as Matthew thinks about killing his own son (and killing any future children that Helen might have) to prevent his world from crumbling around him. The fact that he even considers this shows just how corrupting racism is, in that the most vulnerable members of society are at the highest risk of its consequences.

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

“Well,” said Bunny, grinning, “it sure is good to be able to admit that you’re a jigwalk once more.”

“Yes, Bunny,” said old man Givens, “I guess we’re all niggers now.”

**Related Characters:** Rev. Henry Givens, Bunny Brown (speaker), Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Matthew Fisher Jr., Helen Givens/The Blonde Girl

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 155

### Explanation and Analysis

After Helen and Givens learn that they have Black ancestry, and after Matthew reveals to Helen that he was formerly Black, they all decide to escape the country together. Helen and Givens’s reactions are particularly telling, as they illustrate that defining identity by bloodline and skin color is both futile and deceptive. Givens, for instance, is still using racial slurs and clearly still believes in white supremacy. Learning about his ancestry hasn’t changed this, and thus defining his identity because of that ancestry doesn’t fully capture his identity.



On the other hand, Helen’s realizes that dividing people based on race is “foolishness.” She recognizes no one can be truly sure of their identity, and that fixating on it is therefore useless. Instead, she wants to appreciate her husband and son regardless of their histories, because she understands that Matthew is still the same person regardless of his skin color. The book notes that many Americans are in line with her thinking, which shows how widespread this struggle with identity is.

However, the book’s outcome doesn’t provide the most hopeful path forward, as angry mobs drive Givens, Helen, Matthew, and the rest of the family out of the country. This suggests that the American society is still so fixated on race that there’s no way for these characters to live openly and freely, acknowledging all aspects of their identity, in the context of the United States’ fraught race relations.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

●● This section of the state had been untouched by the troubles through which the rest of the South had gone as a result of the activities of Black-No-More, Incorporated. The people for miles around were with very few exceptions old residents and thence known to be genuine blue-blooded Caucasians for as far back as any resident could remember which was at least fifty years. The people were proud of this fact. They were more proud, however, of the fact that Happy Hill was the home and birthplace of the True Faith Christ Lovers’ Church, which made the prodigious boast of being the most truly Fundamentalist of all the Christian sects in the United States. Other things of which the community might have boasted were its inordinately high illiteracy rate and its lynching record—but these things were seldom mentioned, although no one was ashamed of them.

**Related Characters:** Samuel Buggerie, Arthur Snobbcraft

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 165

### Explanation and Analysis

As Snobbcraft and Buggerie make their escape from Virginia and crash their plane in Mississippi, the book shifts perspective to the nearby town of Happy Hill. The opening description of Happy Hill reinforces the book’s continued connection between ignorance, Christianity, and violence. Those in Happy Hill belong to one of the most Fundamentalist Christian sects in the United States, but at the same time, they have a high illiteracy rate and a high lynching record. In this way, the book associates the residents’ lack of education with prejudice, and violence, as well as with extremist religious thinking. All of this reaffirms the idea people tend to latch onto ideologies that make them feel superior, which also opens them up to believing falsehoods that can push them to violent extremes.

Moreover, it is ironic that the people are all “blue-blooded Caucasians” and are proud of that fact, because by the end of the book, it’s revealed that some of the people living in the town are Black Americans who have turned white. The book also seems to be making a sly commentary on the fact that people can trace their ancestry back about 50 years, when Buggerie’s research shows that many people have Black ancestry dating back several generations. Thus, this illustrates the fact that identity isn’t fully stable, and many people don’t recognize the truth of their history.

●● The crowd whooped with glee and Rev. McPhule beamed with satisfaction. The flames rose higher and completely hid the victims from view. The fire crackled merrily and the intense heat drove the spectators back. The odor of cooking meat permeated the clear, country air and many a nostril was guiltily distended. The flames subsided to reveal a red-hot stake supporting two charred hulks.

There were in the assemblage two or three whitened Negroes, who, remembering 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. Even so they were looked at rather sharply by some of the Christ Lovers because they did not appear to be enjoying the spectacle as thoroughly as the rest. Noticing these questioning glances, the whitened Negroes began to yell and prod the burning bodies with sticks and cast stones at them. This exhibition restored them to favor and banished any suspicion that they might not be one-hundred-per-cent Americans.

**Related Characters:** Alex McPhule, Samuel Buggerie, Arthur Snobbcraft

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 176-177

### Explanation and Analysis

When the Happy Hill residents discover that Snobbcraft and Buggerie have Black ancestry, the townspeople brutally torment them, shoot them, and burn them at the stake. This lynching illustrates how dangerous ignorance is. Rev. Alex McPhule convinced the people in Happy Hill that God would send a sign, hoping explicitly that He would send Black Americans for the town to lynch as an indication that God is listening to them and loves them. This horrific line of thinking illustrates just how corrupted the people of Happy Hill have been. Rather than adhering to traditional Christian morality, McPhule has simply manipulated them into extreme thinking and used them to bolster his own power in the town—all of which leads to extreme acts of violence.

This fascinating reversal between Snobbcraft, Buggerie, and some of the whitened Black people in the town also illustrates the dynamic of deception and fear that now permeates many towns across the country. First, it demonstrates that even when people are whitened, they still fixate on race and discriminate and oppress people, to the point that these citizens are literally willing to kill people over distant blood relatives. If to be “American” is to take part in this brutal lynching, as the book suggests, it shows how inescapable these dynamics have become in American society.

Finally, the book also indicates how unstable identity has become. Whitened Black people take part in lynchings even though they want to help Snobbcraft and Buggerie because they fear being discriminated against themselves. Snobbcraft and Buggerie are lynched simply for having Black ancestry, even as they discriminated against others and tried to implement racist political policies. These complicated reversals suggest that no one understands the full truth of others' identity, or even their own identity. It also shows that this kind of discrimination and racism hurts everyone involved, regardless of what side a person is on.

●● What was the world coming to, if the blacks were whiter than the whites? Many people in the upper class began to look askance at their very pale complexions. If it were true that extreme whiteness was evidence of the possession of Negro blood, of having once been a member of a pariah class, then surely it were well not to be so white!

**Related Characters:** Rev. Henry Givens, Harold Goosie, Dr. Junius Crookman

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 178

### Explanation and Analysis

Almost four years after the presidential election involving Goosie and Givens, Dr. Crookman comes out with a report explaining that the people who took the Black-No-More treatment are now two to three shades lighter than “real” white people—an announcement that shakes society once more. This passage puts a final point both on how superficial race is and how obsessed Americans still are with it. As people start to examine different shades of whiteness, people begin to darken their complexions in an effort to prove that they are truly white. This absurd paradox suggests that the underlying definitions of Blackness and whiteness have become truly irrelevant.

And yet the impact that race still has on society is anything but irrelevant, as people once again start to discriminate against each other, or try to profit in new ways through selling products that darken people's skin. This shows how even when people are ostensibly the same—everyone has essentially become white—Americans can't help but fixate on race in a new way to differentiate people, even though it is an entirely fabricated construct.

The passage also hints at why being able to prove one's



whiteness is so critical—because it is evidence of having been a member of the “pariah class.” This reinforces how race has always been about ostracizing people and creating hierarchy. The fear of being part of the hierarchy’s bottom rung is so strong that people continue to separate themselves from others rather than simply trying to tackle discrimination at its roots.

●● One Sunday morning Surgeon-General Crookman, in looking over the rotogravure section of his favorite newspaper, saw a photograph of a happy crowd of Americans arrayed in the latest abbreviated bathing suits on the sands at Cannes. In the group he recognized Hank Johnson, Chuck Foster, Bunny Brown and his real Negro wife, former Imperial Grand Wizard and Mrs. Givens and Matthew and Helen Fisher. All of them, he noticed, were quite as dusky as little Matthew Crookman Fisher, who played in a sandpile at their feet. Dr. Crookman smiled wearily and passed the section to his wife.

**Related Characters:** Max Disher / Matthew Fisher, Matthew Fisher Jr., Helen Givens/The Blonde Girl, Mrs. Givens, Rev. Henry Givens, Bunny Brown, Charles “Chuck” Foster, Hank Johnson, Dr. Junius Crookman

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 180-181

### Explanation and Analysis

In the book’s final passage, Dr. Crookman looks in the newspaper and sees the Givens/Fisher family, along with several of his colleagues, on a beach in Cannes—all “as dusky as little Matthew Crookman Fisher,” who is mixed-race. This ending passage sums up some of the overall fallout from the book’s events. First, it hammers home the book’s satire by showing that even after being given an opportunity to

overcome the “race problem,” as Dr. Crookman puts it, Americans still want to fixate on race as the basis of social hierarchy. Eliminating racial differences hasn’t actually led to the elimination of race or discrimination—instead, it has simply prompted people to fixate on race in a new and different way, by focusing on how dark a person’s skin is rather than how light it is.

Second, it reinforces again how unstable identity has become. Definitions of what Black and white mean have now been flipped, such that their very definitions have become meaningless and only based on a previously established hierarchy. It proves that trying to identify oneself based on skin color or bloodline is futile and arbitrary.

The passage also reminds readers of another key outcome of what has happened: Dr. Crookman has used racism to become incredibly wealthy and influential, to the point that he is now the U.S. Surgeon General. He has also manipulated others so that he never had to change his skin color; he simply influenced society so that darker skin became more valuable than lighter skin. Whether this was his plan all along—perhaps indicated by his smile—is unclear, but it shows that he has ultimately used racism for his own benefit, at the expense of massive upheaval in the society.

Lastly, the book strikes a complicated note about the future and the U.S.’s hope of overcoming race. It is meaningful that one of the only people who hasn’t had to change his identity is Matthew Fisher Jr., because again, society has changed its definition of what constitutes valuable or ideal skin color. This seems like a positive note, suggesting that in the future, children might simply be accepted for who they are. However, the book also implies that they may be living in France, still in exile from the United States, perhaps suggesting that these racial dynamics may never truly be overcome in the United States.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

On New Year's Eve, 1933, Max Disher stands outside the Honky Tonk Club in New York City, watching crowds of people enter the cabaret. Max is tall, with coffee-brown skin and dapper clothes. Despite the evening's cheer, he's quite sad—he and his girl Minnie quarreled earlier that day and broke up. He thinks that it's probably for the best—she was “stuck on her color” because she was light-skinned and always wanted him to spend a lot of money on her.

Just then, Max's friend Bunny—a short, plump Black man in a fedora and a camel coat—greets Max. Max tells Bunny that Minnie broke up with him, and he's particularly frustrated because he spent so much money on two tickets for the Honky Tonk for that evening. Bunny suggests that they go in together, positing that they could get into some party afterward to find another girl for Max.

Max and Bunny enter the smoky Honky Tonk Club and weave through its maze of tables. The pair have been friends since the war, when they served together in France. Max now works in insurance, while Bunny is a bank teller. Both have a critical weakness: they prefer “yellow” women, who are often so sought after that they get flighty and fickle. As they find a table, Max proclaims that he's going to only date Black women from then on—he tells Bunny that you can trust a Black girl. Or he could get with a white woman, whom he says are generally less trouble.

Just then, a party of white people enter the club in their evening dress. One of them is a blonde girl who looks like a model. Max and Bunny stare at her covertly; they comment quietly on the woman's beauty but lament that they could never get with her because she sounds Southern. Still, Max can't help but be drawn to her.

Black No More's opening passage hints at some of the key conflicts in the novel. Max is steeped in a world defined by racial prejudice—to the extent that not only are white people viewed as inherently superior to Black people, but even those with closer proximity to whiteness (for example, Minnie, because she is light-skinned) feel a degree of that same superiority.



Max illustrates some of the ramifications of Minnie's expectations as a light-skinned person, in that he felt he had to spend a lot of money on her in order to keep her happy. Otherwise, she could easily find someone else because her light skin makes her seem more valuable to people. This establishes how even shades of skin color have a great impact on how people move through the world and expect to be treated.



Again, the book emphasizes how much race factors into people's relationships. It illustrates how “yellow” women (meaning light-skinned women) are sought after because of their skin. And even though Max talks about finding a white woman to be with, this comment is likely sarcastic. At the time the book is set (the 1930s and 40s), segregation was still in place in the U.S., and interracial marriages were illegal.



As Max comments on the blonde girl's accent, the book sets up an association between Southern, rural white people and ignorance. Here, it's implied that the girl is likely more ignorant and prejudiced because she is from the South, where people are even more divided based on race.



Suddenly, one of the white men in the same party comes over to Max and Bunny's table. They tense as he approaches, but he asks where he can buy some decent liquor. Max says there's a store down the street, but Bunny notes that the store clerks would probably think the man was a prohibition officer, so the man asks if they would mind buying him some. Max agrees quickly, hoping that the people might then invite him to their table. But when Max returns to the Club with the liquor, the man simply gives Max the change for his trouble, and Max returns to Bunny.

*This exchange illustrates several dynamics that exist between the men because of their racial disparity. First, Max and Bunny are aware that at any point, they could be the victims of violence by white men simply because they're Black, implied by the fact that they tense up when this man approaches. The man also treats Max like a servant, asking him to get their liquor and treating him poorly by giving him change as payment rather than treating him as an equal by inviting him to their table. These are subtle but impactful undertones that highlight the inequality between them.*



Soon after, the floor show starts in the club. The act includes a black-faced comedian, a man singing "mammy songs," three Black soft-shoe dancers and a group of practically nude chorus girls. The New Year arrives, and after the celebration, many of the patrons get up to dance as the blues play. The beautiful blonde girl, however, remains sitting with another girl. Max decides to get up and ask her to dance, but Bunny warns him that this is a bad idea—the other men might beat him up.

*These acts reflect the popular vaudeville songs and dances of the 1930s. It is notable, however, that at this time, entertainment was transitioning from minstrel shows (which featured racist depictions of Black Americans) to vaudeville. These acts reflect some of the remnants of the older forms of skits and music—such as the comedian wearing blackface or the man singing "mammy songs" (a stereotype of a Southern Black woman enslaved by a white family). Thus, even in entertainment at a primarily Black club, racist stereotypes are used as entertainment to make money.*



Ignoring Bunny, Max saunters over to the table and approaches the blonde girl for a dance. She says icily that she would never dance with him, calling him a racial slur, and Max returns to Bunny, crushed. Just then, a waiter Max knows passes by, and Max asks about the girl. The waiter says that she's been there every night—she's a rich girl up from Atlanta for the holidays. Max is amazed that she's from his hometown, and he thinks it's no wonder she turned him down. Still, it's funny to him that she wanted to come to a Black club.

*This is another example of some of the discrimination and ignorance that Black people like Max face, as the blonde girl doesn't want to dance with Max simply because he's Black. He also recognizes the irony and the hypocrisy in wanting to enjoy Black culture (coming to the Honky Tonk club) but not actually appreciating or treating Black people equally.*



At 3 a.m., Max hails a cab back to his apartment in Harlem. At home, he dreams about the blonde woman—of dancing and dining with her, but also of sitting on a throne while millions of white slaves bow before him. Then he has a nightmare of gray men with shotguns, dogs, a bonfire, and a screeching mob. He wakes up in a sweat in the late morning as the phone rings.

*Max's dream has a great deal of foreshadowing. First, it depicts the threat of racist oppression and racially motivated violence in the images of him being chased and almost lynched by a screeching mob. But it also foreshadows his desire to profit off of the white masses in the image of a million white slaves bowing before him.*



On the phone, Bunny tells Max of an interesting story in the *Times*: Dr. Junius Crookman—a medical student they used to know—has just announced that he found a way to turn Black people white. Bunny says that Crookman is going to open a sanitarium in Harlem, and this is Max's chance to get with the blonde girl from the previous night. Max dismisses the idea, but after he gets off the phone, he gets excited about the prospect.

*The book portrays Dr. Crookman's treatment as a way for people to overcome oppression based on race. Bunny's suggestion even provides an example of how this treatment could benefit Max: he'll no longer face discrimination from women like the blonde girl.*



Reading in the newspaper that Crookman is staying at the Phyllis Wheatley Hotel, Max decides to go and ask Crookman if he could be the first person to try out the treatment. He realizes that if he were white, he wouldn't have to deal with Jim Crow, insults, or discrimination. He would be "a free man at last"—and he could also meet the blonde girl from Atlanta.

Max hurries over to Crookman's hotel and finds Crookman's room. There, reporters of all races are crammed into the sitting room while Crookman, tall and polished, with ebony skin, is speaking. Crookman discusses the development process for his treatment, explaining that some Black people suffer from a disease called vitiligo, which removes skin pigment and makes white patches appear on the skin. He thought that if someone could discover a means of artificially inducing this disease, it might be a way to solve the "race problem" in the U.S.—and that's what he has done.

Crookman explains that people's hair and features are also changed in the process—in three days, a Black man would become white to all appearances. He does note that this does not affect the person's genes and that their offspring would be Black. However, he states that he has found a way to transform **babies** as well. He introduces a man who looks like he's from Norway named Sandor, but Crookman says that the man is actually Senegalese, showing remarkable before and after pictures. The reporters are awed.

After a few more questions and photographs, Max Disher reintroduces himself to Crookman. He offers himself up as a volunteer, and Crookman assures him that once their sanitarium is up and running, Crookman can help Max out. At that moment, one of Crookman's business partners, Charles Foster, warns that there will be problems when mixed-race **babies** start appearing. But another partner, Hank Johnson, says that they'll cross that bridge when they get there.

The next day, the newspapers all run stories about Crookman's enterprise (he refuses to share his process), and Max keeps up with all the sanitarium's developments over the following weeks. He wants to be the first to get the treatment and then go to Atlanta; he's head over heels in love with the blonde girl.

*Max's declaration that he would be a "free man at last" in becoming white suggests that in the United States, oppression and racism didn't simply end when slavery was abolished in the mid-19th century. Jim Crow laws—a series of racist segregationist laws enacted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—still confined Black Americans politically, economically, and socially.*



*Dr. Crookman suggests here that the only thing that truly distinguishes white and Black people are skin color and a few other physical features—a radical idea at the time. Suggesting that changing these features would solve the race problem in the U.S. illustrates that race is completely socially constructed. In some ways, his assessment assumes that getting rid of racial differences would get rid of racism in the U.S. because there would be no basis for racial oppression.*



*Sandor's case here illustrates that Crookman's treatment has been effective at making Black people indistinguishable from white people (at least until they have children), illustrating that race is malleable and is therefore is, in some ways, a completely fake construct. The idea that children will even be treated shows just how fixated people are on race—so much so that innocent infants are viewed as a problem that has to be fixed simply because they're born mixed-race.*



*The fact that the treatment does not affect people's children is a key idea, because it still makes people distinguishable from one another based on race. Thus, as much as Crookman wants to use his treatment to get rid of race (and therefore racism), Foster foreshadows that the treatment's limits will become pitfalls in doing so.*



*While Dr. Crookman's motivations seem pure as he works to help fellow Black Americans, the doctor's very name implies that he is a crook. Moreover, the fact that he is protective of his treatment suggests that his motivations may not be so pure, and that he wants to make money from eradicating racism.*





When the sanitarium is ready for business, throngs of people wait out in front of the building, curious about what's happening inside. Inside, Foster asks Crookman what he'll do about changing people's dialects, but Crookman assures the man that Black people speak just the same as their white neighbors: there are no color dialects, only regional dialects. Moreover, when considering Black people's features, there are many white people who have lips as thick and noses as broad as many Black people. He also notes that there can't be too much difference between Black and white people in the U.S., because many Black people have some white ancestry.

Just then, Max enters the building, ready for the procedure—he's the first on the list. Crookman instructs him to sign the register and get into a bathrobe, and Max heads into the receiving room. When Johnson looks out at the people lining up for an appointment, he notes that they'll be rich in no time.

As Max undresses, he starts to grow nervous, wondering whether something could go wrong. He also thinks about the many wonderful evenings at different Black cultural mainstays in the city and hesitates, wondering whether to go through with the procedure. But when he envisions his future as a white man, he resolves to continue. In the treatment chamber, he sees what looks like a dentist's chair crossed with an electric chair, around which are lots of instruments and bottles of colorful fluids. He gasps in fear, but the two attendants strip off his robe and bind him in the chair. There's no retreat—it is "the beginning or the end."

## CHAPTER 2

After the procedure, Max feels weak, nauseous, and sore, having been fed revolting concoctions for three days. But when he sees himself in the mirror, he is amazed at his white complexion, hair, and features. Now he won't experience discrimination or obstacles—he feels new life and strength. Six hours later, he leaves the facility; he recognizes many people in line waiting for the treatment, but none of them recognize him. He's excited to now be indistinguishable from the majority of people in the United States.

*Dr. Crookman again underscores how races are socially constructed. Even though people believe that Black people have different dialects or features, in reality, these beliefs are simply based on stereotypes. Dialects have more to do with region and class, while people's features can't be too different because most Black people have white ancestry. This also introduces the idea that identity isn't fully stable—even though people have one image of their identity, in reality, people rarely have a full picture of their bloodline or genes.*



*Here, Johnson suggests that the treatment is going to make him, Crookman, and Foster rich because of the high demand. Although they want to help overcome racism, they are also profiting off of it and fellow Black Americans in order to make their money.*



*Max acknowledges the beauty and joy in his life as a Black man, but his thoughts illustrate that the racial discrimination he faces overshadow the valuable and enjoyable aspects of being Black. Moreover, the fact that Max acknowledges that the treatment is "the beginning or the end" suggests that he is going into this treatment completely blind, not knowing exactly what his life might look like afterward. The ominous wording hints that there is some danger in taking the treatment without fully understanding the ramifications, because he and other Black people taking the treatment don't know how society might change based on their actions.*



*Max's newfound liveliness and strength demonstrates the freedom and assurance that he feels as a white man that he never could as a Black man. The book also emphasizes that race is a construct, as Max can just become white simply by changing his skin color—no other change is needed. Yet despite this idea, Americans still fixate on race and use it as a way to divide and oppress people.*



Moments later, however, a mob of reporters address Max, asking him questions as the first person to go through the treatment. He refuses to answer the questions, thinking that they'll have to pay to get his story. Just then, a cab drives up and Max leaps in—only to find that it's already occupied by a pretty white girl. She tells him that she got a cab for him and that she's a reporter from *The Scimitar*. She'll pay him \$1,000 to sell his story to her, and he agrees, astonished at the sum.

The girl introduces herself as Sybil Smith, and Max asks if she would like to come to dinner with him that night. She responds flirtatiously that she won't know until she's had the experience. They then drive down to her office, and Max gives his story to a stenographer. When he leaves the building a few hours later, *The Scimitar* is already circulating the extra edition with a huge picture of him.

Seeing the story, Max is grateful that he gave his name as William Small, and he's annoyed that his picture is now all over the papers. He underwent the treatment to escape the conspicuousness of having dark skin, and this publicity will keep him conspicuous. Sybil comforts him, telling him that there are so many people that look like him that no one will recognize him, and she takes his arm as they walk down Broadway together. Max is amazed at his newfound freedom and assuredness.

Max and Sybil dine and dance together and then go to a cabaret, but Max notes that the white establishments are somewhat dull. It seems to him that the Black joints in Harlem have much more joy and abandon while also somehow being more refined—even the dancing at the cabaret is less elegant and graceful. He feels a momentary pang of disillusionment before looking at all the beautiful white women around him.

Max and Sybil part at 3 a.m., and when he returns to Harlem, he stops at his friends' regular hangout. But when he knocks, the person at the door is suspicious of him, telling him to go away and that the place is closed. Max asks if Bunny is in there, and the man agrees to get him. When Bunny comes to the door and hears Max's voice, he's shocked to see a white man, and he instructs the doorman to open up for Max.

*Immediately after receiving the treatment, Max understands how he can benefit from racism and Dr. Crookman's treatment as well. He capitalizes on his transformation as leverage to get money from journalists, using his newfound power for his own profit. This continues a pattern throughout the book of people using racism to their own advantage.*



*Max is already receiving some of the benefits of whiteness. Whereas the blonde girl refused to dance with him simply because he was Black, now he is easily able to go out with a white woman. He hasn't changed inwardly at all, but because of people's fixation on race, their perception of him has completely changed.*



*Here, Max introduces another key idea: that he plans to try to keep his identity a secret. He wants to deceive people because it allows him this greater freedom and assuredness. Blending into white society and creating a new persona for himself, rather than standing out as a Black man, allows him to begin this deception.*



*Here, the book explores the irony of Max's transformation: he finds Black society more interesting than white society, even though he desperately wants to be a part of white society. The bias toward viewing white society as the ideal or the goal has been born out of racism and ignorance, particularly because Black people have always been excluded from white society and therefore have never been able to truly evaluate it.*



*The book suggests here that segregation hurts all people. Just as Max can't participate in aspects of white society as a Black person, he is now barred from participating in the more enjoyable Black society that he's familiar with. Again, though race is a construct, it is a construct that is ingrained in society's institutions.*



Pretty soon, everyone in the place is looking at Max, astonished at his transformation. Max tells Bunny that he's going to head down to Atlanta, and as they walk home together, they realize that they're soon going to be parted—not by an ocean, but by “the great sea of color.” Max tells Bunny he could get white, too—he offers to pay for Bunny's treatment now that he has good money from selling his story. Bunny agrees gratefully, and Max gives him 100 dollars.

Coincidentally, Max and Bunny walk past Crookman Sanitarium, where a sign out front says “Black-No-More,” with a neon arrow pointing from a white face to a Black face. Even though it's close to 5 a.m., there is already a huge crowd outside the building, alongside a riot squad trying to maintain some order in the noise. People cheer as a whitened person emerges, and vendors sell peanuts and hot dogs. Bunny shakes Max's hand and enters the building to try his luck at getting the procedure. Max says goodbye, telling Bunny to look him up in Atlanta.

After Bunny leaves, Max stands in the crowd, feeling at home surrounded by all the other Black people. For a moment he wants to stay with them and share in their experience, but he realizes that he has to move on from the past and start his new adventure being white. The other people there would largely be suspicious of him anyway. He thinks again of how freeing it is to be white and to have a little money.

When Max returns to his apartment, his landlady, Mrs. Blandish, doesn't recognize him. When he explains his story, she is amazed but also horrified. She owns a hair-straightening parlor, and she knows that Dr. Crookman's work will likely kill her business. She asks if Max is going to live downtown now, accusing him of not having any pride in his race. Uneasy, Max doesn't reply and simply goes to pack, thinking about the trip down to Georgia and how he finally feels like an American citizen.

## CHAPTER 3

Dr. Crookman consults with Hank Johnson, wondering how they're going to keep up with all the demand for his treatment. They've already bought more buildings and equipment, but Foster also worries about the reaction in the press. White newspapers, particularly in the South, are already condemning their work—and they've only been running for two weeks. Foster worries that they'll outlaw Crookman's practices, but Johnson says that he can get to the legislature first, now that their success has made them money.

*Even now that race is starting to become an arbitrary construct now that people can cross the racial divide, those on opposing sides of the divide are still separated by a “sea.” This again suggests a kind of insurmountable fixation on separating people based on race just as severely as if they were separated by geography.*



*The huge crowds outside Crookman Sanitarium highlight the idea that so many Black people want to avoid the discrimination that they face in their everyday lives and participate in the advantages and privileges that white society offers. But it also shows how much Dr. Crookman stands to profit now that people are trying to take the treatment en masse.*



*Even though Max appreciates the freedom and newfound benefits of being white, he suggests that he still isn't fully free. Now, as a whitened person, can no longer engage with the people and culture that he once was a part of and loved.*



*As a Black man, Max was constantly othered and made to feel that he wasn't fully American—thus, becoming white is a means of trying to escape the racism and discrimination he faced. Separately, Mrs. Blandish (who is a fictional stand-in for Madam C. J. Walker), laments the idea that Max doesn't have pride in his race. But ironically, she makes money off of hair straightening products that make Black people more like white people. This implies that her criticism of Dr. Crookman's business is hypocritical, because she's essentially doing the same thing that he is.*



*While overcoming racism may have been Dr. Crookman's initial aim, the book illustrates how the treatment has given Crookman, Johnson, and Foster a great deal of wealth and political power. The book also demonstrates how this creates a perpetual cycle of even more advantages. This cycle is made possible only by taking advantage of the Black working class, showing how elites use racism to make and then grow their wealth and power.*



Reading the papers, Dr. Crookman rattles off a few lines of one editorial, in which the author suggests that maintaining the purity of the white race must take precedence over the law and people should “not permit the challenge of Crookmanism to go unanswered, even though these black scoundrels may be within the law.” Another editorial raises the alarm on the fact that “your daughter,” having married a white man, may find herself with a Black **baby**—calling Crookman’s work devilish.

Johnson tells Crookman to ignore the papers’ alarmism—particularly as they already made \$70,000 dollars in just two weeks (\$50 per treatment). Johnson thinks about how he was on a chain gang only 10 years before—two full years of being abused and poorly fed—and now he is one of the leading Black businessmen. They’ll be richer than Rockefeller within the year.

Chuck Foster also thinks about how he built his career: becoming a real estate agent in New York on the tide of the Great Migration, working his way up through Harlem society and subsidizing Crookman’s work. But despite the success, he is nervous about their future and worried about all the publicity.

Crookman, meanwhile, is exhausted, having overseen so many transformations and fended off so many questions from the newspapers. He never had so hectic a life—he was born and raised in Harlem to poor parents, though they were proud of belonging to Black society. He worked his way through college and wanted to solve the “most annoying problem in American life.” Without the race problem, he thought, Americans could concentrate on something more productive.

Crookman is surprised at the opposition to his work from some Black people. He prides himself on being a great lover of his race—having studied its history, struggles, and achievements—and he simply wanted to remove all obstacles for his fellow people.

*These editorials illustrate a paradox: racism doesn’t end even when people all look the same. The second editorial is clearly directed at white men, as it refers to “your daughter” marrying a Black man. Together, they perpetuate racism and oppression based on any difference that they can find between white and Black people. In addition, the book sets up a tie between ignorance and violence, as the first editorial suggests that the best way to deal with Black-No-More is through this kind of vigilante violence, while also implying that the doctor is a criminal.*



*Creating Black-No-More has allowed people like Johnson and Crookman to overcome some of the discrimination and obstacles that they (as well as their fellow Black Americans) have faced. But even if Crookman’s motivations for creating Black-No-More were pure, the book still highlights how they are making enormous amounts of money by profiting off of racism.*



*Even the history that Foster cites shows how he has already profited off of the social and economic changes that result from racism. Becoming a real estate agent in New York during the Great Migration—when Black Americans began to migrate from the South to the North and the West in order to avoid discrimination—allowed him to essentially profit off of the Jim Crow (segregation) laws that caused the migration in the first place.*



*Again, Crookman emphasizes that he hopes Black-No-More will help equalize society, remove obstacles for Black Americans, and overcome racism. He acknowledges that race is just a construct—but at the same time, his description of it as the “most annoying problem in American life” suggests that he understands how heavily people fixate on race.*



*Even though Crookman is trying to remove obstacles and discrimination, his treatment still suggests that white is the ideal race. By convincing everyone to become white, Black Americans’ historical and cultural identity will largely be lost as people try to integrate themselves into white society. This suggests that taking the treatment is hypocritical and paradoxical, since it aims to solve racism by affirming that white people are superior to Black people.*





Interrupting Crookman's reverie, Johnson tells the doctor to go home and get some sleep—there's a car waiting for him out back to avoid the mob. Just then, Crookman's wife, who passes as white, arrives to accompany him home, and Johnson and Foster are amazed at how white she looks. Foster replies that everything that looks white isn't necessarily so.

Meanwhile, there is a lot of commotion at Harlem's financial institutions, as many people are trying to withdraw funds in order to afford Dr. Crookman's treatment and then transferring their accounts to a white bank. Accounts are closing at the post office, too, and "For Rent" signs pop up all over Harlem.

People are simply abandoning apartments, leaving behind "ostracism, segregation, and discrimination" even if it means giving up their security deposits. Black people were already paying exorbitant rentals because the demand for housing exceeded the supply—they often paid more than white tenants in other parts of the city for smaller and worse apartments. Now, there are more white people in Harlem than ever before, and Black Americans from all over the country are arriving in New York City to wait their turn at Crookman's.

Mrs. Blandish, however, is less than joyful—no one is coming into her beauty parlor anymore. She had been doing well for years and was acclaimed in the community. Because she was successful at making Black people appear as much like white people as possible, she was recently elected for the fourth time as a Vice President of the American Race Pride League. But now, she is losing clients and friends.

At that moment, a young woman named Miss Simpson passes, and Mrs. Blandish calls over to her asking to say hello. Miss Simpson tells her that her husband, Charlie, left her after getting the procedure, and she's saving up to do the same thing. Mrs. Blandish is dismayed as the woman leaves. When Mrs. Blandish was young, she wanted to be white, but now she likes her business and her social position in Harlem—as a white woman, she would have to start all over again. She doesn't want to be an elderly white woman scrubbing floors and toilets. But she also concedes that she doesn't want to be the butt of prejudice anymore. She is in a quandary—one that is shaking all of Harlem's people and businesses.

*The detail of Crookman's wife being white-passing (meaning that she's Black but light-skinned enough to look white) could perhaps be read as a critique of Crookman for marrying someone who looks white despite his pride in his race (a criticism that recurs throughout the book). Author George Schuyler married a white woman, so Crookman's white-passing wife could be a nod to the complicated feelings that Schuyler may have had about his own interracial marriage in relation to his advocacy for Black Americans.*



*Again, even though Dr. Crookman is purportedly trying to make people's lives better, at the same time, his treatment causes Black society to descend into chaos while he profits off of it.*



*Even the chaos in Harlem, however, has its benefits, as the book explicitly states that Black Americans are leaving behind "ostracism, segregation, and discrimination" when turning white. Discrimination in housing is just one example of the kind of systemic oppression that Black people at this time faced as a result of their race.*



*Again, the book pointedly critiques figures like Madam C. J. Walker, who marketed a similar set of hair care products and treatments as Mrs. Blandish. The book points out the hypocrisy in pretending to have pride in one's race and simultaneously marketing products that make Black people as much like white people as possible—similar to Dr. Crookman's Black-No-More treatment.*



*Mrs. Blandish's thoughts provide an alternate perspective on the idea of becoming white. Even though she recognizes the value of avoiding prejudice and discrimination, she also understands that she wouldn't be avoiding all misery in becoming white, and that white people often face classism (prejudice based on social class) as well. This introduces the idea that both white and Black working-class people are taken advantage of, and that they should work together to get the conditions they deserve.*



## CHAPTER 4

Matthew Fisher (Max Disher's new alias) arrives in Georgia. For three months, he searches for the blonde girl who shunned him at the Honky Tonk, his desire for her growing stronger and stronger. In that time, he does not find life as a white man to be what he expected. He is largely bored, finding white people to be a lot like Black people, except less courteous and interesting.

Sometimes, when Matthew misses other Black folks, he goes down to Auburn Avenue, but the people there all regard him with suspicion. He also grows frustrated with white people's ignorance concerning the "inferior mentality and morality" of Black Americans. Having experienced both societies, Matthew can firmly say that this is not the case—that white society is largely a let-down.

Matthew also realizes that he has to find a job, but work is scarce even for white people—being white does not guarantee him employment. Additionally, he sees how the newspapers are fanning white people's racism, particularly in their opposition to Dr. Crookman's efforts. He realizes that Black-No-More treatment threatens white businesses that have long used cheap, unorganized Black labor to make greater profits.

Recognizing this problem, Matthew wonders how he can capitalize on it and avoid working too hard. He then sees an advertisement in the paper for the "**Knights of Nordica**," a group fighting for white race integrity. There is an "Imperial Konklave" that night to organize against Crookman's treatments, led by Rev. Henry Givens, the Imperial Grand Wizard. Matthew thinks this is just his opportunity.

*The fact that Max (now Matthew) is able to seamlessly blend into white society again reinforces the idea that race is simply a construct, and yet people fixate on it heavily. In addition, the book begins to play on identity, showing how unstable it is given the fact that Max can simply adopt a new name and, as a result, make a new life for himself.*



*The book's irony lies in the fact that Matthew has lived as both a Black man and white man and actually prefers Black society. This suggests that white and Black society are fundamentally equal, and that Black society may, in fact, be better in some ways. And so, when people like this man claim that Black Americans have "inferior mentality and morality," it only shows the man's own ignorance and bigoted ideology, the sole purpose of which is to make himself feel superior.*



*In this passage, Matthew starts to recognize how institutions like the media or businesses fan the flames of racism. Dividing the work force as these institutions do prevents workers from unionizing, not only to the detriment of the Black workers who could use protections from racial pay gaps, but also to the detriment of white workers who lose power in not banding together with those workers. In this way, the book suggests that forcing the working classes to focus on race rather than class prevents them from attaining the benefits they deserve.*



*The description of the Knights of Nordica directly calls back to the real-life Ku Klux Klan, which had members often referred to as "knights," used words that would replace c's with k's, and whose leader was a "grand wizard." The formation of this group in response to Black-No-More demonstrates that even when the country is given an opportunity to overcome racism and discrimination, society (particularly white people) still focuses on differences between the races and simply frames the problem in a new way.*



That night, Matthew attends the meeting. Before going into the building, he stops by a soda fountain and asks the young man working there about Givens. The young man explains that he used to be in the Ku Klux Klan before it died out, and now he's starting the **Knights of Nordica** to take up a similar mantle.

When Matthew walks into the building, he tells the stenographer there that he's from the New York Anthropological Society and wants to chat with Rev. Givens about his newest venture. Impressed, the woman goes into Givens's office and leads Matthew in shortly after.

Givens is a short, almost bald, ignorant ex-evangelist who came originally from a rural town north of Atlanta. He worked with the Ku Klux Klan following the Great War and worked hard to withdraw as much money from its treasury as possible to retire once the Klan declined. But then, when Black-No-More started up, he founded the **Knights of Nordica** in the hopes of regaining a full treasury.

Givens asks how he can help Matthew, but Matthew turns the question around and asks how he can aid Givens's organization. Matthew says he doesn't want white people's blood to be "polluted with that of inferior breeds," which he read in a newspaper at one point and was the extent of his knowledge of anthropology. Matthew describes how thousands of Black people have already joined the white race and now they are opening more sanitariums in other cities. He says that this is a menace and that these places must be closed. The Reverend nods, listening to Matthew and thinking that he will be a valuable asset.

Givens invites Matthew to join them at the meeting tonight and tell the audience what he has relayed, and Matthew agrees. Though Matthew despises and fears the white masses, he plans to use them as a stepladder to gain money. When Matthew leaves, Givens congratulates himself on attracting such talent to the organization so early in its founding.

Meanwhile, Matthew is elated when he returns to the hotel. He asks others in the hotel about Givens, and one man—a native Atlantan—tells Matthew that Givens is ignorant, and that other white people will fall for anything, particularly now that the Klan is gone. At Givens's house, meanwhile, the reverend brags to Mrs. Givens about talking to a famous anthropologist.

*The book ties the Knights of Nordica and the KKK even more closely here. To take up the same mantle as the KKK implies that it would carry the same mission of vigilante violence in the name of white supremacy. In this way, the Knights of Nordica represents the dangers of ignorance and bigotry in the same way that the KKK does.*



*Matthew again reinforces the idea that identities in the world of the novel are unstable, as he is easily able to lie about who he is and convince the woman that he is an anthropologist from New York.*



*Givens becomes another example of a person using racial bias in order to make himself wealthy. While he does actually believe in white supremacy (ignorantly, as the book explicitly points out), he is also profiting off the white working classes by stoking that racial resentment.*



*Matthew's argument is not based in any kind of fact—he is making up his own identity and simply repeating ignorant ideologies that are designed to get him into Givens's good graces and make Givens feel superior. In referencing "inferior breeds," he is playing off of a falsely constructed ideology—but one that is pernicious, that society is reluctant to let go of, and that continues to fuel racism.*



*Here, Matthew illustrates his deep hypocrisy: he knows that he doesn't actually believe in what he's saying, but he also wants to profit off of the white working class by fueling racist beliefs.*



*Here, the book sharply critiques Givens and the other white people who will fall for anything. Givens's lack of education means that he has no idea he isn't actually talking to an anthropologist, though he and the rest of the Knights of Nordica likely wouldn't care if they knew this. They simply want someone to validate their racist beliefs and to make them feel superior.*



Mrs. Givens, for her part, doesn't like what's happening with the young people like her daughter Helen, who's away at school. She thinks they are all getting away from God. Mrs. Givens is a Christian—though she often lies and takes God's name in vain, she hates Black people, she may not have been a virgin on her wedding night, and she stole money as head of the ladies' auxiliary of the Klan.

Meanwhile, Helen is 20, beautiful, and civilized—and she considers herself to be unlike her parents. She knows how to wear clothes, but any form of mental effort makes her head ache, so she never uses her brain. When she was 16 her parents sent her to a finishing school. This gave her knowledge about how to dress and act in exclusive society, which enabled her to get into the best circles.

Helen at first refuses to go to the **Knights of Nordica** meeting, saying that common people are crude and uninformed. But Givens points out that without common people, they would never have afforded their home and could never have sent her off to school. Mrs. Givens tells Helen that she should go to meet the anthropologist from New York. Intrigued by her mother's description of the brilliant young man, Helen agrees to go.

At the meeting that night, many white working-class people arrive in their cheap finery. Givens opens the meeting with a prayer and several spirited songs from a choir. Matthew views the spectacle with some amazement—the meeting is very similar to the religious meetings in Black churches. He quickly realizes that the people will believe anything that's shouted at them loudly and convincingly enough.

For an hour, Matthew tells the people what they already believe: that white skin indicates superior intelligence and morality, that God intended the United States as a white man's country, and that he wants to keep it that way. He also tells them that their children might unknowingly marry Black people if Black-No-More is allowed to continue. The audience enthusiastically applauds him.

*The book indicts Christianity as a perpetuator of ignorance, portraying it as an ideology that easily manipulates people by making them feel morally superior. This, in turn, enables people to act however they want because they are so firm in their belief that being Christian automatically means that they're virtuous.*



*The book portrays Helen as very ignorant, much like her mother. While she is unwilling to exert any mental effort, at the same time she is automatically granted entry into the best circles. This illustrates the systemic inequality in U.S. society, since Helen is successful and privileged simply because she comes from a wealthy white family.*



*Givens explicitly states that telling people to focus on race is what facilitates his wealth. As an added benefit, the working classes (whom Helen labels "crude" and "uninformed") then focus on race rather than fixing wealth inequality, ensuring the upper class's continued fortune and power because the working classes aren't organizing for better wages or benefits.*



*In comparing this meeting to religious meetings in Black churches, the book again critiques Christianity as a perpetrator of ignorance. It suggests that this kind of ignorance (of believing anything said convincingly enough) isn't limited to white Americans but can also be true Black Americans.*



*Here, Matthew illustrates how ignorance is dangerous: by simply telling people the things that they want to hear, he is able to arouse massive support and money while also stirring up deep hatred.*





As Matthew finishes, he notices for the first time the beautiful blonde girl sitting in the front row—the girl who spurned him so long ago. Matthew asks Givens if he knows who the girl is, and Givens says that it's his daughter, Helen. Givens asks if Matthew would like to meet Helen, and Matthew gives an enthusiastic yes.

*This episode demonstrates how much advantage Matthew has gained in becoming white: he is able to garner great support and also win over a woman like Helen, who rejected him so cruelly when he was Black. In this way, the book shows how Black people are discriminated against and the added difficulties they face, because Matthew would not have been able to do this when he was still Max.*



## CHAPTER 5

A private plane lands in Los Angeles, and a distinguished-looking Black man steps out beside several white assistants. One of the white mechanics asks who he is (using a racial slur), and the other one tells him that it's Dr. Crookman—the fellow turning Black people white. The men dream about having his money, and they wonder why he surrounds himself with white people—before realizing that they might be Black people that he turned white. The mechanics conclude that the **Knights of Nordica** ought to do something about this problem.

*The white mechanics' antipathy toward Dr. Crookman is tied to both race and class consciousness, as the men are clearly racist with their use of slurs but also envy Crookman for his money. The problem is that because of their racial bias, they have no way of achieving better wages or bridging wealth inequality. Instead of blaming elites of all races for their working conditions, they are fixated on blaming Black people.*



On the seventh floor of a beautiful building, Crookman, Johnson, Foster, and several of their associates toast champagne to their continued success. They acknowledge, however, that opposition to their enterprise is growing every day. Crookman surveys what they've done. They've built 50 sanitariums from coast to coast with each servicing 105 patients at a time; they have an equipment factory and a chemical plant, four airplanes, a radio station; their expenditures total over \$6.25 million while their income is \$18.5 million. Crookman concludes that in the next four months, they can double their output and by the end of the year cut the treatment fee to \$25.

*This laundry list of Crookman's achievements just how incredibly his business has grown. But again, all of this wealth and achievement has come from profiting off of the Black working class and the discrimination that they face. So even though Crookman is trying to help them overcome oppression, he is also taking advantage of them for his own benefit.*



Johnson states that after they finish in the United States, they can move on to the West Indies—he doesn't ever want their enterprise to end. Dr. Crookman thanks Foster and Johnson for their ingenuity and start-up money, and their dealings in Washington that stopped lawmakers from passing bills outlawing their practice (which cost nearly \$1 million). In addition, because of Johnson's secret corps of young women, now many legislators cannot openly oppose their efforts. For the next few hours, the three directors continue to report on their progress and exult in the perks of rich living.

*Here, the book illustrates how taking advantage of the working class and amassing all of this wealth then enables Dr. Crookman and his associates to continue growing that wealth by bribing and blackmailing politicians. This demonstrates how the U.S. economic and political systems are rife with corruption, as elites can use their power and money to maintain influence over the working classes.*



Meanwhile, Black society is in turmoil. Everyone is straining to get the Black-No-More treatment and they stop attending churches, giving to Black charities, or going to Black-owned businesses. Black politicians, meanwhile, lecture about Black solidarity so that they can maintain political power and wonder whether they should try to stop Black-No-More. They try to appeal to white politicians, most of whom have been bribed by Hank Johnson.

Meanwhile, the joyful atmosphere of Black neighborhoods is gone: the music, laughter, and abandon are absent, as everyone is scrounging for money to pay Dr. Crookman's fee. People travel from all over to find one of the sanitariums, particularly from the South, because there are no sanitariums there. Various Southern communities tried to prevent this migration, but Hank Johnson bribes officials in the neighborhoods with bootleg liquor and money, making them turn their heads the other way as Black people leave in droves.

The National Social Equality League is aghast—for forty years they worked for full social equality for Black people. This organization had to depend greatly on white people's charity, but now their income has been decreasing—particularly because often high-profile incidents of discrimination caused people to donate. The officials, many of whom live in palatial apartments, worry about the fact that actually achieving social equality will prevent them from living their rich lives.

The N.S.E.L. founder, Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, calls a conference of Black leaders around the country. For \$6,000 a year, the Beard wrote editorials denouncing the white people he secretly admired and lauding the greatness of Black men and women he pitied and despised. He deified Black women but only employed light-skinned ones. He talked at white banquets about “we of the black race” and admitted in books that he was part French, part Russian, part Native American, and part Black.

At the meeting, Dr. Beard draws up a resolution addressed to the U.S. Attorney General. He does this because his staff worried that the other Black leaders wouldn't possess the education necessary to write the document. Dr. Jackson, Beard's dark-skinned secretary, addresses the room, explaining that Black-No-More is proving disastrous to their organization and that something drastic has to be done to preserve the integrity of Black society.

*In addition to Crookman, Black politicians are also trying to use their wealth and status to maintain their power. Meanwhile, this conflict between the various interest groups simply drags out problems within the community and creates chaos that only hurts Black Americans. Both sides only care about themselves, but they still insist that they are trying to help average people.*



*Again, even though Dr. Crookman's intentions might have been noble, now there is widespread corruption in an attempt to make sure that Crookman's company can continue earning money—all to the detriment of Black neighborhoods and culture, as the book describes here. Crookman and his associates are more concerned with making money than with considering the welfare of the people they are taking advantage of.*



*The N.S.E.L. is a thinly veiled parody of the NAACP, an organization founded in 1909 whose mission is “to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.” And yet the book critiques the organization's hypocrisy here, implying that the N.S.E.L.'s leaders actually hope for acts of discrimination because that is how they convince white people to donate to their organization and pay their salaries.*



*Beard, as the head of the N.S.E.L., is a direct parallel to W. E. B. Du Bois, who founded the NAACP and has a similar background to the character. Here, it's clear that the book is going to satirize real-life Black leaders. This passage suggests that Beard is hypocritical in preaching racial solidarity and yet inwardly participating in racist structures (like only employing light-skinned women) or holding racist beliefs (like pitying and despising fellow Black Americans).*



*The book continues to demonstrate Beard's hypocrisy: he again tries to champion the integrity of Black society while at the same time devaluing his peers. He assumes that they can't achieve his same intellectual standard, seemingly because he has internalized anti-Black racism.*



Jackson then turns to Walter Williams, a tall, heavyset white man with blue eyes, and discusses the situation in the south. Williams says that he has always been proud to be a part of Black society (his great-grandfather was mixed-race, it seemed), and that he can't understand what has come over the rest of Black society.

*Williams criticizes Black society even though, as a white man for all intents and purposes, he likely does not face the same discrimination as the average Black person. But even before Black-No-More, people have been able to manipulate their identities in ways that suit them.*



More men speak, including Colonel Mortimer Roberts, a Black man from Georgia who is appalled at the idea that Black people would try to whiten themselves. He insinuates that they should all be aligning with militant organizations in the South to stop this whitening business. Another man, Claude Spelling, says that an underpaid Black worker should patronize Black stores instead of going to cheaper and cleaner chain stores.

*The book uses Roberts and Spelling to level another critiques of Black leaders: that they are willing to work with racist organizations just for the sake of promoting racial solidarity. (Real-life activist Marcus Garvey had ties to white supremacist leaders because he and the leaders both argued for racial segregation.) The book also suggests that Black leaders expect average Black Americans to support racial solidarity to the detriment of their own financial well-being, even as these leaders have amassed a great wealth.*



The next speaker, Joseph Bonds, heads the Negro Data League. He collects informative data showing that poor people go to jail more often than rich people, that most people are not getting enough money for their work, and that there is a connection between poverty, disease, and crime. By showing this data to white people, he has successfully gotten them to give more money so that he can collect more data—with little benefit actually going to Black people as a result.

*This passage again critiques leaders like Bonds who are able to take advantage of racism by conducting studies about systemic inequality. None of the studies have any effect on remedying that inequality, but they make Bonds wealthy as a result. This again suggests that the leaders don't necessarily care about solving inequality because they make so much money off of studying it.*



Finally, a Reverend preaches fervently about the problems with Black-No-More, leading to a kind of spiritual in the meeting. Beard, annoyed, interrupts this emotional display by saying that they have a resolution asking the U.S. Attorney General to arrest Crookman and his associates. Though some are hesitant, they all agree to send it.

*The book continues to portray the leaders' actions as ironic, as they join in the spiritual meeting almost as a performative gesture, simply to prove their connection to Blackness. And again, even though they all preach racial solidarity, they aim to attack Crookman and his associates rather than working with them.*



Later, Walter Brybe, the U.S. Attorney General, receives the resolution and talks to Gorman Gay, the National Chairman of the Republican party. Gay says that the N.S.E.L. doesn't have any money, and they have to remain loyal to Hank Johnson. Brybe agrees, but he notes that a lot of white people are frustrated with Black-No-More. Gay again scoffs, saying that they don't need to worry about it—working class white people don't have any money either. Brybe then gets off the phone and writes a letter saying that he can't interfere with a legitimate business whose methods are within the law, giving the statement to the press.

*Here, Gay explicitly lays out how little elites care about the working class—either Black or white. They are only interested in the people and policies that will enable them to make more money, and in this case, it is by aligning themselves with Black-No-More. In this way, the book shows how so many elites are corrupt (Walter Brybe's name, like Crookman's, alludes to this), intent only on stoking their own wealth.*



Santop Licorice, the founder and leader of the Back-to-Africa Society, reads Brybe's letter in the paper with malicious satisfaction—he was always delighted when Beard was rebuffed. For years, Mr. Licorice had been profiting off of advocating for Black Americans to emigrate back to Africa—their first step was always paying five dollars for membership in his society and other sums to get them to Africa.

But now, Licorice has been as hard hit as the other Black businesses and ventures. Why would anyone go back to Africa for \$500 when they could stay in the United States and get white for \$50? He hopes that Black-No-More's activities will be stopped, and in the meantime, he attacks other Black organizations while preaching racial solidarity in his weekly newspaper.

Putting the paper aside, Licorice asks his secretary where their treasury is. She tells him that the Sheriff got most of it yesterday. He asks if there's anything they can sell so that he can take a trip to Atlanta, but she says no. They trade sarcastic barbs, and he says that if they can't get some money, they won't be able to pay her salary. He then starts on a long letter to Henry Givens.

## CHAPTER 6

On Easter Sunday, 1934, two important events take place. The first is a huge mass meeting for the **Knights of Nordica** celebrating its one-year anniversary and its newly acquired one millionth member. The second is the wedding between Matthew Fisher (Grand Exalted Giraw) and Helen Givens. Rev. Givens is thrilled with Fisher's work—membership has grown exponentially, and the treasury is bursting with money, despite Givens's corruption.

As the money flowed in, Matthew's reputation as an organizer spread throughout the South, and he suddenly became a very eligible bachelor. Beautiful women threw themselves at him, but he had eyes only for Helen. Helen, meanwhile, was always taken with his intelligence, but she waited until the **Knights of Nordica's** treasury grew to accept his marriage proposal. And so, when they wed, both were happy—though Helen was annoyed that Matthew associated with low-brows, and Matthew disliked her ignorance.

*Santop Licorice is a clear analogue for Marcus Garvey, who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association. This organization advocated for solidarity between members of the African diaspora and helped people immigrate back to Africa as well. But the book critiques how Licorice advocates for this idea not because he truly believes in it (because he doesn't go back to Africa himself), but instead to fuel his own wealth.*



*Again, the book points out Licorice's hypocrisy in preaching racial solidarity while not embodying that solidarity himself. Like the other Black leaders, he is interested in profiting off of the Black working class for his own financial gain.*



*This passage is another pointed critique of Marcus Garvey. Like Licorice does here in reaching out to work with Henry Givens, Garvey was also heavily criticized for working with white supremacist groups in order to push his own agenda—a clearly hypocritical move when trying to advocate for racial equality.*



*Having critiqued the Black leaders in the novel and how they are taking advantage of working-class Black Americans in the previous chapter, the book now focuses on critiquing the leaders of white supremacist groups, who do the same thing with working-class white people.*



*Again, Matthew shows his hypocrisy. He aims to take advantage of the white working-class people whom he believes are ignorant, but he does so in order to marry an ignorant person and to gain wealth. Moreover, he does so while stoking the very fear that harms people like him, who have become white.*



During his and Helen's courtship, Matthew also started raising money through the leading businessmen in Georgia. He told them about the **Knights of Nordica** and how it was in direct opposition to the Bolshevik-funded Black-No-More and its Communist interests. He then asked them for a small contribution, which they readily gave. Every time contributions slowed, he printed Communist tracts and distributed them around the mills and factories, which would immediately increase contributions.

At the same time, the great mass of white workers was afraid to organize and fight for more pay because of the fear that Black people would take their jobs and work for less money. When they first heard about Black-No-More, they were relieved—but when they heard of its menace, they forgot their economic troubles and railed against Dr. Crookman. Now there were many formerly Black people taking their jobs and undermining the American standard of living—even though none of them had ever attained that standard of living.

Despite his increasing wealth, Matthew maintained close contacts with the merchants and manufacturers, showing how his work saved them from the white working class's discontent by making them race-conscious instead of class-conscious. He then asked for large sums of money to continue that work, which they would give.

Matthew's success threatened the Reverend Givens, however, as many people said that Matthew should be the Grand Wizard, and Givens was suspicious of any man more educated than he was. However, he was thrilled when Matthew asked him for Helen's hand—this meant the **Knights of Nordica** was safe in the family.

One morning a few weeks after his wedding, Matthew receives a visit from a B. Brown. A short, plump man enters and greets him, saying, "Don't recognize me, do you Max?" Shocked, Matthew learns quickly that the man is Bunny Brown. He asks why Bunny didn't come to Atlanta earlier—Bunny explains that he was in jail for sleeping with a white man's wife. When the man discovered them, Bunny attacked him. Matthew says it was lucky that Bunny wasn't Black when that happened.

*Matthew exhibits how, even though he purports to be working in the interests of average people, he is actually aligning himself with businessmen, in opposition to Black-No-More. He suggests that Black-No-More is "Communist" and spurs people to unionization. He uses these words as critiques, which shows that he is intent on making people race-conscious rather than class-conscious in order to bolster his own wealth and power.*



*Here, the book demonstrates the effect of Matthew's work on the white working class. Because groups like the Knights of Nordica make white workers much more concerned about Black people infiltrating their ranks, they don't realize the power that they could have in unifying as one working class and gaining the benefits they deserve. Instead, they blame the Black working class for earning lower pay even though this could be remedied by banding together.*



*Matthew benefits from dividing people based on race, thereby ensuring that they do not organize based on class. Even though he purports to work for the Knights of Nordica's interests, in reality, he gains lots of money by taking advantage of its members.*



*Again, the book reinforces both Givens's ignorance (in that he is skeptical of anyone more educated than him) and also the idea that he is mostly motivated by a desire for wealth. Above all, he wants to make sure that the money he earns from the Knights of Nordica will remain in his family.*



*Bunny's arrival not only reinforces how easy deception and manipulating one's identity is, but it also reminds readers of the danger that Matthew and Bunny face if someone were to find out that they used to be Black. Bunny's story also illustrates the advantages they have as white men: whereas here he goes to jail for a short time for attacking a white man and sleeping with his wife, if he were Black, he could have experienced much worse.*





Matthew offers Bunny a job as his right-hand man for \$5,000, which Bunny gladly accepts. Matthew tells Bunny about his time with the **Knights** and his marriage to Helen—the same girl who turned him down that night in the Honky Tonk. Matthew also cautions Bunny never to call him Max and warns that no one can find them out.

Matthew then gives Bunny his first task. A few months earlier, he hired Santop Licorice to fight Beard and the N.S.E.L., and he asks Bunny to see if paying Licorice is still worthwhile. Bunny asks why he's opposed to Black-No-More and also paying Licorice to fight *other* people opposed to Black-No-more. Matthew simply says that it's strategy—the longer they can draw out the fights between the groups, the longer the money rolls in.

Two days later, Bunny heads up to New York to ask after Santop Licorice while also approaching Beard and the other Black leaders to ask them to speak to white audiences for the **Knights of Nordica**. The N.S.E.L. is in a precarious situation, Matthew knows, because both the Black masses and the white philanthropists have deserted them, and he feels that they can speak to Knights of Nordica audiences—their racial integrity talks would click with the white people.

As Bunny travels, he picks up a paper whose headline reads, "Wealthy White Girl Has Negro **Baby**." From then on, there are frequent reports of this happening. Though some of the women involved have recently become white, the blame for this problem usually falls on the fathers. The entire nation becomes alarmed, and hundreds of thousands of people flock to **Knights of Nordica** meetings. For the first time since 1905, chastity becomes a true virtue, and men and women are much more suspicious of meeting and marrying.

Black-No-More, meanwhile, seizes on this opportunity to drum up more business, establishing lying-in hospitals where mothers can have their **babies** and then give them a 24-hour treatment to make them white. As a result, the country breathes easier.

*Here, Matthew emphasizes how even in their new personas, Matthew and Bunny cannot be fully secure, reinforcing how identity is mutable. Defining it purely by race or bloodline is difficult, because in the world of the novel, a person's race and external appearance can change. But at the same time, there's a chance that people will continue to judge Matthew and Bunny for who they used to be.*



*Matthew's reasoning here reinforces that he doesn't actually care about social progress one way or the other. What he really cares about is simply being able to continue making money off of racial resentment by getting more and more people to join the Knights of Nordica.*



*The book continues to illustrate the Black leaders' hypocrisy both in suggesting that Santop Licorice (standing in for Marcus Garvey) is working with a white supremacist group and that leaders like Beard might do the same thing because they are so desperate for money.*



*This news causes a renewed focus on racial bias, as white people grow concerned about having Black children. This is in spite of the fact that Dr. Crookman's treatment has shown that there are no discernable differences between the races outside of superficial features. This illustrates how Americans' fixation on race is inescapable, even when those superficial racial differences are eliminated.*



*The fact that babies can receive the treatment only emphasizes how changeable (and thus insubstantial) race is. But it also shows how this obsession with race and racial difference has corrupted innocent children, as people judge them based on their outer appearance and want to "treat" them. In addition, it again shows that Dr. Crookman wants to make as much money as possible and take further advantage of racial bias by establishing the lying-in hospitals and using his treatment on babies.*



In two weeks, Bunny Brown returns, explaining that Licorice isn't doing anything to help Matthew, and the Black leaders are nowhere to be found. None of the Black newspapers are running, and the only people who live in Harlem now are becoming white—soon, Licorice will be the only Black man left.

*Bunny hints at the irony in the Black leaders' actions: most of them have decided to become white, again showing their hypocrisy in preaching racial solidarity.*



## CHAPTER 7

One morning in June 1934, Matthew Fisher receives a report from an operative in Paradise, South Carolina that the workers in the Paradise Mill (many of whom are **Knights**) want to unionize in protest of the unfair wages and hours there. Matthew takes a plane there immediately to meet with the owners of the factory: two German men named Blickdoff and Hortzenboff who emigrated after the war.

*This incident illuminates how the workers are trying to be more class-conscious, even as people like Matthew are stoking racial resentment to try to turn white workers against Black workers.*



At the meeting, Matthew tells Blickdoff and Hortzenboff that he wants to protect the workers, who are members of the **Knights of Nordica**. The two men explain that they can't afford to pay higher wages. Matthew says that if they pay him \$10,000, he can calm the workers. Otherwise, he'll get them run out of business. They are aghast at the threat, saying they'll call in the militia—but Matthew points out that half the members of the militia are in the Knights of Nordica. Matthew then ups the demand to \$15,000, saying if they don't hurry, he'll keep raising the price. The men quickly write a check, which Bunny takes on the plane back to Atlanta.

*Here, Matthew shows his true colors. Not only is he getting rich off of white workers becoming members of the Knights of Nordica, but he is also playing his power over the workers to his advantage. He is extorting the factory owners so that he can then fight against the workers' interests. In this way, Matthew is playing both sides and preventing the workers from becoming class-conscious in order to simply gain wealth for himself.*



The next evening, Matthew calls a mass meeting in Paradise at the **Knights of Nordica** hall there. The undernourished and desperate workers look to Matthew for leadership, and he reminds them that nothing is dearer to them than the maintenance of white supremacy. He insinuates that there are likely some Black people even in their midst who have been turned white. He notes that these people make poor union material because they always run away from a crisis. He ends with a plea for liberty, justice, and fairness, to tumultuous applause. Afterwards, people crowd around the table to sign up to be members.

*The first part of Matthew's plan involves what he has always done, which is to stoke racial resentment. In stating that nothing is more important than preserving white supremacy, he is laying the groundwork for the idea that the workers should fight against Black workers rather than banding together with them to demand better conditions and wages.*



Swanson, the chairman of this chapter of the **Knights of Nordica** and the leader of its radical militant wing, is thrilled with the results of the meetings and promises Matthew that the union will soon bring the Paradise Mill owners to justice. But two days later, Matthew sends his secret operatives to Paradise. Soon after, a rumor swirls that Swanson was formerly Black and originally from Columbia. When he admits that he lived in that city previously, the workers conclude that the rumor must have been true. When Swanson calls another strike meeting, no one comes, and people start ignoring him completely and complaining at the mill that they don't want to work with a "nigger." As a result, Swanson leaves the city.

A few millworkers then try to continue organizing, but rumors start about those men not having always been white as well, and they are similarly discredited. Quickly, workers decide that it is better to leave things as they were than to be led by someone who had not always been white.

The labor movement in New York City watches the situation in Paradise closely, and they, too, send organizers to the town to stir up a revolt. But when the workers learn that the representative from the labor organization lives in Harlem (synonymous in their eyes with Black), they refuse to let him lead them. Another organizer is not allowed into the **Knights of Nordica** hall because he's Jewish.

Soon, all is quiet and orderly in Paradise. Blickdoff and Hortzenboff build a swimming pool, tennis court, baths, and a playground for their employees to improve morale (although they don't give them time to enjoy these amenities). They also give bonuses of one week's vacation each year to employees who have worked there more than 10 years. There are no such employees, but the mill workers are overjoyed.

While the local Baptist preacher commends all involved for handling the situation in such an American and Christian way, it is clear that Paradise will never be the same again: rumors fly around, and people often ask each other about their birth and blood. Any person who can't disprove charges of Black ancestry is forced to leave. The workers are so busy talking about these issues that no one thinks of discussing wages and hours of labor.

*This episode illustrates just how harmful stoking racial resentment is to the labor movement in Paradise. Because rumors fly that Swanson used to be Black, the workers refuse to be led by him, thereby completely disorienting the movement. Their use of a racial slur suggests that their bigotry is overpowering their desire to rise up and demand the benefits and working conditions that they deserve.*



*It is particularly ironic that, despite the workers' resistance to being led by someone Black, their hatred is being fueled by someone who was formerly Black—Matthew. This again demonstrates both his hypocrisy and his disregard for anything besides his own wealth and power. He doesn't actually want to get rid of racism; instead, he wants to profit off of it.*



*Here, the workers' prejudice and ignorance are pushed to its extreme. They immediately associate anyone in Harlem with being Black, and their prejudice and ignorance also makes them anti-Semitic.*



*Here, the book illustrates how easily ignorance can be manipulated. The workers don't realize that they can't actually take advantage of the benefits they've been given—they still count this as a success, and their meager victory placates their desire to organize.*



*This passage demonstrates the impact that Matthew's fearmongering has had on Paradise. The name of the town is ironic, considering the fact that the workers are still working under the same poor conditions that they always have—and this is due to the fact that they are more focused on racial resentment than their own job benefits. In addition, this section highlights how mutable identity has become—even though skin color and bloodline don't really define a person's identity, people are extremely focused on the potential for deception.*



In August, Blickdoff and Hortzenboff are in Atlanta on business, and they ask Matthew how he prevented the strike. He tells them that those are secrets of his trade—and he is doing the same thing all over the country. The workers are far more interested in maintaining white supremacy than in their high death rate and brutal working conditions.

*Matthew is dismantling the labor movement entirely by making the white working class focus on race. On the other hand, the book suggests that they could fight their high death rate and brutal working conditions by uniting with Black (or formerly Black) workers rather than vilifying them.*



## CHAPTER 8

Black-No-More has nearly turned everyone white after two years, except for those in prisons, orphanages, nursing homes, and similar institutions. In the North, the whitening process is viewed indifferently, because it meant getting rid of a problem at no cost. But in the South, Black people are of economic, social, and psychological value to whites. They built the South's wealth and continue to be scapegoats whenever the white workers grow restless.

*This passage suggests that the country (particularly the South) is obsessed with maintaining racial differences because it is an easy way to establish hierarchy. The white working class believes that they will lose some power without an "inferior" race to oppress.*



Southern white people's deep concern with chivalry, race pride, and the protection of white women are all rooted in Black men's presence. The economic loss the South endures because of this ethnic migration is immense. Facilities that are only used for Black people now remain empty, as they are generally too dingy and unattractive for white people. Thousands of houses are redone because of the rapidly increasing white population. Salaries are higher because employers have to pay each person the same.

*Here, the book demonstrates how eradicating race is a key step toward improving the society, as it allows all people to gain things like higher wages or better facilities. And yet, white people (particularly in the South) fixate on race as a way to maintain hierarchy and their perception of having wealth and power.*



Taxes increase overall, and the upper classes and political oligarchy are worried about the future—particularly the prospect of a widespread revolt against medieval industrial conditions. Now that formerly Black people have much more access to voting, the South shifts Republican and threatens to destroy the Democratic Party. People even worry about workers forsaking both parties and going Socialist. Politicians and businessmen shudder at the thought of old-age pensions, eight-hour workdays, unemployment insurance, a minimum wage, abolition of child labor, birth control information, maternity leave, and overall economic equality.

*Up until this point, the book has largely explored the economic ramifications of getting rid of race. But this passage illustrates how alleviating some of the oppression (now that Black people can vote as white people) can shift political power away from parties who are benefiting from that oppression. And again, it suggests that elites from both parties are worried about the new unified working class because it could divert wealth and power away from politicians and businessmen.*



These visions of the future prompt Rufus Kretin, Democratic Senator from Georgia, to meet with Rev. Givens, Matthew, and Bunny. Kretin explains that the Republican vote is growing and asks if they can help keep the workers in line. Rev. Givens says Matthew will think of something, as he and Bunny are as "shrewd as some o' them old time darkies." Kretin says that they have plenty of money to make it happen—they just need votes.

*Givens again reinforces that they are intentionally suppressing the labor movement for their own political and financial benefit. Additionally, his racial slur and comment reinforces his bigotry but also highlights the irony in the situation: Matthew and Bunny are still considered Black, even though their identity has become ambiguous because they've changed their skin color.*



Later, Matthew and Bunny brainstorm in Matthew's office. Matthew says that he'll have to return to talking about race—hatred and prejudice always fire people up, they're trained to react to it. He says he's not worried about getting the job done—what he's worried about is that Helen is pregnant, and he knows the kid will likely be Black. He can't send Helen to a lying-in hospital or it would look suspicious. And if he tells her the truth, she'll likely want a divorce.

Bunny asks if Helen has to know she's going to one of Crookman's hospitals, and Matthew says that Helen wants to have the **baby** at home. In response, Bunny says that he can fix everything for \$5,000, and Matthew agrees. Through a formerly Black waiter Bunny knows (who used to be Joseph Bonds), he tracks down Santop Licorice (who is also white now). He tells Licorice and Bonds what he wants them to do, saying he'll pay them \$1,000 each to set aside their scruples, and they agree.

The next day, a fire destroys Rev. Givens's home, and Rev. Givens and Mrs. Givens, along with Helen and Matthew, have to find a new place to stay. Helen is deeply upset, and Matthew suggests that they can go away somewhere to rest her nerves—thinking of the **baby**. Helen agrees, and Matthew wonders about the origin of the fire.

The next morning, Matthew confronts Bunny, saying that he has a lot of nerve to set the fire—though he is secretly pleased. Bunny plays dumb, pretending that he had nothing to do with the fire. Matthew grins at his cunning, but then a phone call interrupts their conversation, and Matthew learns that Helen has had a miscarriage and lost the **baby**.

## CHAPTER 9

Several mornings later, Matthew tells Bunny about an idea to save the South from the Republicans. Givens will get on the radio once a week, appealing to the American people to call on the Republican administration to close up Crookman's sanitariums and deport everyone connected with Black-No-More. They'll also denounce the Republicans and connect them with the Pope and Black-No-More. Matthew has one more idea in addition, but he's keeping it a surprise.

*Here, Matthew is reminded of the fact that he is constantly deceiving people, as he is lying about his identity and about what his child's identity will be. His deception illustrates that bloodline or skin color cannot be the sole determiners of a person's identity, particularly because his bloodline and skin color now conflict with each other.*



*Ironically, even Bunny is using racism to profit off of Matthew here, essentially making \$3,000 while helping him avoid telling Helen the truth about his identity. This also illustrates that extent to which people like Helen are still fixated on race—learning her husband was formerly Black would be enough to drive him from her, despite the fact that he's still the same person.*



*Bunny's plan to set Givens's home on fire illustrates the kind of extreme actions the men are willing to take to protect their identities and to avoid people finding out that they are Black. This again reinforces how unstable they feel their identities are, despite the fact that race is entirely constructed.*



*The fact that Helen lost the baby as a result of Matthew trying to keep his identity a secret illustrates how racism corrupts innocence. The fixation on race is so severe that Matthew is equally desperate to avoid oppression or violence if his true identity is revealed. However, this comes with dire consequences: the death of Matthew's future child.*



*The idea to have Rev. Givens give these radio addresses again illustrates the idea that he'll be able to manipulate people by spewing lies that they aren't knowledgeable enough to dispute—like tying Republicans, Catholicism, and Black-No-More together. This again shows the danger of ignorance, as ignorant people can be easily swayed.*





Rev. Givens starts his sermons the following Thursday on a popular Atlanta program. Givens talks for more than an hour and says absolutely nothing true. He discusses the foundations of the republic, anthropology, Christianity, curbing Bolshevism, denouncing science, and he spends a large amount of time criticizing Black-No-More and calling on the Republican president Harold Goosie to deport the men leading it.

The resulting unrest from Givens's speech soon prompts action in Washington. A few weeks later, Goosie announces that he is appointing a commission of leading citizens to study Black-No-More thoroughly and to make recommendations. Congress approves \$100,000 to cover the Commission's cost. He then appoints five Republicans and two Democrats to the Commission—mostly politicians out of a job.

The Commission tours the country and inspects all the sanitariums and lying-in hospitals. They take hundreds of depositions and drink large quantities of liquor. Two months later, they issue a preliminary report pointing out that the sanitariums are operating within the law. They recommend minor changes in the marriage laws to prevent intermarriage, more competent district attorneys, the closer supervision of dance halls and cabarets, and censorship of books and movies. Two months later, they come out with a full report that exactly nine people read.

Matthew receives praise for forcing the government to take action, and now he's ready for his next trick. He tells Bunny about Anglo-Saxon Association of America, a group who can trace back their ancestry almost 200 years, but who don't like the **Knights of Nordica** because they think the Knights are all morons. However, the Association has the money to win the next presidential election. He plans to meet with them in the hopes of joining the two organizations.

Matthew meets with Arthur Snobbcraft, the President of the Anglo-Saxon Association. Snobbcraft strongly supports the sterilization of Black people, immigrants, and Jews, he has created numerous racial integrity laws, and he hates democracy. He wants to get a genealogical law on the books disenfranchising all people of Black or unknown ancestry. Matthew knows that this law would never be passed, but to have any hope of passing it, they would need to win the national election. The directors of the Anglo-Saxon Association realize that they can furnish the money for the campaign, and the **Knights of Nordica** can provide votes.

*Givens's addresses show how despite his litany of lies, he is able to gain political support as he sways public opinion on Black-No-More and a host of other issues. This is due to the fact that people are ignorant and therefore susceptible to falsehoods.*



*The president immediately calls for a commission to investigate Black-No-More after Givens's address, which shows how powerful Givens's manipulation is. Even though he said nothing true, the influence he had over ignorant people enabled him to influence the government.*



*The Commission's report ironically shows that very few people are actually interested in informing themselves on the issue or figuring out ways to solve the economic and social crisis. Instead, people would rather continue to focus on racial differences, because doing so is an easy way to scapegoat others and create social hierarchies.*



*The Anglo-Saxon association, positions itself as being at odds with the Knights of Nordica, but in reality, it's very similar. Both organizations use white supremacy and racial resentment in order to gain political power and wealth.*



*Arthur Snobbcraft is yet another example of a person who wants to maintain racial division for the purpose of oppressing others and elevating himself. Matthew, meanwhile, wants to take advantage of this prejudice to bolster his own political and financial power. Even though he knows a genealogical law would never pass, he still takes advantage of this hatred in order to get what he wants.*



All parties depart the meeting in high spirits. Back in Richmond, Mr. Snobbcraft and the other directors meet with a New York statistician named Samuel Buggerie, who is highly respected for creating elaborate charts to prove widely accepted ideas like rich people have smaller families than the poor, that imprisonment doesn't stop crime, and that laborers migrate in the wake of high wages.

Buggerie is nervous, bald, and a descendent of one of the First Families of Virginia. He claims the best way to tell pure whites from imitation whites is to study family trees. He tells Snobbcraft that there are almost 20 million people in the United States who possess a non-Nordic genealogical strain and are therefore unfit for citizenship and procreation. With the right funds, he can produce statistics that would be so shocking that the Republicans would lose the country unless they adopted the Democratic plank of genealogical examinations to determine whether a person can vote. The directors vote to give him the funds.

## CHAPTER 10

Some time later, Hank Johnson, Chuck Foster, Dr. Crookman, and Gorman Gay gather at the physician's hotel. Gay explains that the Republicans are having a tough time getting ready for the fall presidential campaign. Foster assures Gay that Black-No-More won't need favors much longer, because they've done about all the business they can do: the following week, they're closing all but five of their sanitariums (though they are keeping open the lying-in hospitals).

Gay warns that the hospitals will be in constant danger. To win the campaign and protect the hospitals, the Republicans need millions of votes and at least 20 million dollars. That's why he's there—he knows they are rolling in wealth and he needs five million dollars from them. He tells them to think of what might happen if these poor women are stuck with their Black **babies**. Hearing this, Foster and Johnson agree to give the money.

The Republicans indeed need a lot of money to re-elect President Goosie, as Givens's addresses are stirring up much Democratic sentiment. However, at the Democratic National Convention in July 1936, the Anglo-Saxon crowd wants to nominate Arthur Snobbcraft, while the **Knights of Nordica** are intent on nominating Givens. The Northern faction of the party is holding out for Governor Grogan of Massachusetts. Through 20 ballots, the vote remains deadlocked, until leaders retire to a hotel suite to try and sway the different factions.

*Buggerie's work isn't far off from Joseph Bonds. In this sense, the book critiques Black and white elites alike for using studies of racism to bolster their own wealth and power without trying to remedy those kinds of social injustices.*



*Again, even when people are all functionally the same race, people like Buggerie are still trying to get others to fixate on race and underscore people's differences based on bloodline. But ironically, as his preliminary research already alludes to, there are a lot more people in the United States with mixed-race heritage than he thought. This suggests that most people don't have a clear picture of their identity, and that identity can't be solely defined by bloodline or skin color.*



*Here, the book establishes the scale at which Crookman has turned Black Americans white—so much so that they are actually shutting down business. But even though almost all Americans are white at this point, Gay makes it clear that people are still fixated on race—so much so that the next presidential election is even centered around the issue.*



*The book again illustrates how racism corrupts innocence in America. Even though race has nearly been eradicated as a concept, Black babies are still in terrible danger because white people feel compelled to fixate on race—despite the fact that Crookman has shown it to be completely constructed.*



*The array of potential nominees for the Democratic Party illustrates how focusing on race has enabled white elites like Givens and Snobbcraft to gain not only immense wealth, but also to vie for incredible political power.*



The leaders quarrel over who is helping each other the most, but no one is able to come to an agreement for more than 12 hours. They even go over picking an alternative to all of their candidates, but no one is satisfactory. At the end of the day, Matthew gives an ultimatum: nominate Givens, or the **Knights of Nordica** will withdraw their support for the Democrats entirely. This finally gets everyone to give in to him, and the delegates nominate Givens for President and Snobbcraft for Vice President.

A few days later, Republicans nominate President Goosie for reelection, and they adopt a nebulous platform stressing the party's record in office and its slogan. Listening to Goosie's speech in New York City, Dr. Crookman thinks that it sounds almost identical to the one Givens gave a few days earlier. Over the next months, the campaign gets underway, and each candidate makes vague statements and promises.

Meanwhile, Samuel Buggerie releases a partial report about the births and marriage records: one quarter of the people in one Virginia county possess non-white ancestry. These findings have been replicated in other disparate parts of the country. He decides to publish his full report just before the election, inspiring fear about maintaining racial purity and ensuring the Democrats' success.

The political campaign is long and bitter: on the Democratic side are those who are "pure" white while the Republican supporters know they are "impure" or have reason to suspect it. There are disputes even within families as people become suspicious of each other. Dr. Crookman's hospitals are denounced viciously, though Northern newspapers suggest that homes would be wrecked without the hospitals.

Generally, the press follows the crowd, and they start to insinuate that the opponents of Black-No-More take the law into their own hands. Soon after, a mob sets fire to a Crookman hospital, killing 12 **babies**. The papers name and denounce mothers who make it out alive with mixed-race children—many of them are socially prominent. The nation is shocked, and Republican support dwindles.

*Matthew's ultimatum shows how much influence he has been able to gain by playing up white people's focus on race. It also shows how ignorance makes people particularly susceptible to manipulation and helps give people like Matthew the power to choose who the presidential nominee will be.*



*Here, the book offers another critique of politicians and elites: even though Goosie and Givens are in opposing political parties, their speeches sound largely the same. This suggests that politicians are merely doing whatever they can to get themselves reelected and to stay in power, not actually helping the people they're meant to serve.*



*Buggerie's preliminary research not only reinforces Dr. Crookman's early study that Black and white people share a large degree of heritage, but it also shows that identity is unstable no matter a person's race. Many people who believe they are "pure" white have Black ancestry, despite using their "pure" ancestry as a tool to oppress others.*



*Because so many people have become white, this skepticism about identity and deception is rampant—people have no idea how to trust even their family members' identities. This illustrates how identity has become completely destabilized in society, as people are constantly questioning one another.*



*This horrific incident illustrates how ignorance—people who believe that "impure" white people or children should be outed or demonized—leads to a violent action and, as a result, a complete corruption of innocence. It is particularly telling that this violence leads to further support for the Democratic Party, not less, showing how people have completely forgone their morals out of hatred and the desire to be superior.*



Gorman Gay is at his wit's end, and Joseph Bonds and Walter Williams, two of his campaign staff, also don't know what to do. Though Williams had passed as Black for years because of a mixed-race grandparent, he now embraced his white heritage when the National Social Equality League was forced to cease operations. Bonds, former head of the Negro Data League, had become white—but both had been unable to stomach the Democratic crowd.

Williams and Bonds discuss Beard, who has also become white and who is now working for Dr. Buggerie at the Anglo-Saxon Association—though the Association doesn't know who he is. They comment that he probably hates the Democrats and might have some information that can help him.

Williams travels to Richmond to meet with Beard, and Beard reveals that Buggerie has been investigating people's family trees and has been discovering some astounding facts. He tells Williams that they're keeping the information in a basement on index cards, and that they probably wouldn't want anything to happen to their information before they're able to fully compile it. Soon after Williams leaves Beard, Williams strolls by the Anglo-Saxon Association's headquarters and notes the guards around the place.

## CHAPTER 11

About a month before the election, Matthew reveals to Bunny that Helen is pregnant again. He tried to send her to Palm Beach, thinking the travel would make her miscarry, but it didn't: she's due in three weeks. Bunny suggests that Matthew try to make a run for it, but Matthew says that Helen is the only woman he's ever loved, and she spurs him to be more ambitious.

Bunny then suggests that the best thing to do is to siphon away as much money as Matthew can and keep his plane ready. When the **baby** is born, he should tell Helen everything and offer to take her away with him. If she won't go, leave, and if she will, everything's fine. Bunny says that this is the best bet.

*Williams's transition from identifying as part of Black society to then identifying with white society (even without taking the Black-No-More treatment) again reinforces that the way people define their identities isn't fixed. The book suggests that white and Black racial identities can be manipulated, and as such, these definitions of bloodline and skin color become meaningless.*



*Here, the book again critiques the Black leaders who preached racial solidarity for their own profit, but who have now become white and are still working in their own interests. For example, Beard is working for the Democrats despite the fact that they have adopted a white supremacist platform.*



*Again, both the Republicans and Democrats are attempting to use (or cover up) Buggerie's research, depending on whatever they believe will improve their party's political standing. They want to sway the ignorant masses in whatever way they can in order to maintain their political power.*



*Matthew has been corrupted by racism and his fear of being found out—so much so that he is actively trying to sabotage his wife's pregnancy in order to keep up his deception. This not only illustrates people's continued obsession with race, but also how that racism is corrupting and harming innocent children.*



*Here, Bunny introduces the idea that Matthew being open about his identity is the best course of action, suggesting that neither Matthew's bloodline nor his skin color truly define him.*



Two days before the election, the situation is unchanged: the Democrats assume they'll win, and the Republicans are gloomy. Republicans try to dig up a scandal against Givens and Snobbcraft but are dissuaded by setting a bad precedent—there are also politicians in *their* ranks who are guilty of adultery, drunkenness, and bribes. Several lying-in hospitals have been attacked, and 200 citizens who know nothing about either candidate are arrested for fighting over who is the better man. Police are on alert to suppress disorder, except when they create it.

Meanwhile, Arthur Snobbcraft is jovial and confident that he will be elected as Vice President—until Buggerie comes into his office and says that they can't use any of his research. Showing Snobbcraft a summary of his work, Buggerie says it's too inclusive—over half of the population has no record of its ancestry beyond five generations. He says that many social leaders—especially Anglo-Saxons—are descendants of colonists who often intermixed with Black slaves.

Buggerie goes on, explaining that a certain percentage of the resulting mixed-race children then lightened sufficiently to be able to pass for white and merged with the general population. Their descendants now number close to 50 million people. He says that even in Snobbcraft's own family, which descended from King Alfred, shares a lineage with laboring people, prostitutes, and convicts. One of Snobbcraft's own maternal ancestors was the offspring of an English serving maid and an enslaved Black slave. At this, Snobbcraft is furious.

Buggerie says that he and Givens also have Black ancestry in their lines, as well as Kretin. Snobbcraft asks about Matthew, and Buggerie says that they have no record of the man, and he is likely a Black man who has been whitened. Buggerie emphasizes that they have to destroy all of the material as soon as possible. Snobbcraft agrees to go to headquarters to burn it.

When Buggerie and Snobbcraft arrive at the vault with the material, however, they find the guards trussed up and gagged—and the vault emptied an hour earlier. Buggerie is actually relieved, saying that the Republicans won't be able to get anything out of the cards in time to affect the election, and he has the only summary—the one he showed to Snobbcraft in his office. Buggerie suddenly realizes that he left the summary in the office, and when they return, they find a note left for them from the "G.O.P.," thanking them for leaving the report.

*Again, the book skewers the hypocrisy of leaders in both political parties and the police, as none of them have much integrity. This passage also explores yet again how ignorance breeds violence. People who know nothing about either candidate break out into fights and attack lying-in hospitals, showing how ignorance can easily become dangerous.*



*Buggerie's research puts a scientific point on the argument that no one can be fully secure in their identity—even people who are certain that they are "pure" white people, as the Anglo-Saxons did, likely have a Black ancestor in their history. But even with this knowledge, Buggerie and Snobbcraft still want to oppress Black people, illustrating how identity cannot be fully defined by bloodline and skin color.*



*At this time, the United States population was about 122 million with 108 million white Americans and 11 million Black Americans. As such, more than one-third of white Americans at the time had Black ancestry. The data reinforces that focusing on bloodline or skin color to determine a person's identity is confusing and pointless, because few people have a full picture of their racial makeup.*



*Buggerie continues on, illustrating just how widespread this delusion about "pure" ancestry is. So many of the Democratic leaders (ranging from Givens and Kretin to Matthew) are hypocritical. They rail against people with Black ancestry and support white supremacy, even though their whiteness is now being called into question and people will likely turn against them.*



*Ironically, Buggerie's research becomes his own downfall. Whereas he thought that he would be able to manipulate ignorant people by showing them how many people have Black ancestry, instead his own ignorance about his identity and this widespread misconception that white people don't have any Black ancestry will likely create intense political and social upheaval in the U.S. The chapter's final ominous note also suggests that the findings may have horrific ramifications for Buggerie himself.*





## CHAPTER 12

The next day, Matthew and Bunny sit in their hotel room sipping cocktails, worried about Helen's pregnancy. Matthew wonders how it will all come out. He thinks about all that he's done: he was once a Black insurance agent, and now he's a white millionaire with unlimited power and a beautiful wife. Soon, he might return to oblivion. Bunny tells Matthew that the plane is ready to take off whenever he needs it, and he assures Matthew that he would go with the man.

Suddenly, the phone rings, and Matthew learns that Helen has given birth—it's a boy. He and Bunny rush over to Matthew's home and Matthew waits outside Helen's bedroom for the doctor. The physician emerges, and he gravely tells Matthew that his son is very, very dark, and that he or Helen must have Black ancestry. The physician offers to get rid of the **baby** for Matthew, which Matthew briefly considers. But he wants children and thinks that it's probably a bad idea to keep murdering them. In his head, Matthew contemplates admitting the truth and running away with Helen and his son, but he also considers his wealth, power, and prestige.

In a few short seconds, Matthew reviews the past three years: New Year's Eve at the Honky Tonk Club, the first glimpse of Helen, becoming white, escaping discrimination, organizing the **Knights of Nordica**, the stream of successes. Shaking Matthew from his thoughts, the butler bursts into the room with a newspaper from Bunny. The headline reads, "Democratic Leaders Proved of Negro Descent" and lists the leaders, including Givens, Snobbcraft, Buggerie, and Kretin, but it doesn't list Matthew. Bunny then comes into the room.

Reading the article lifts a weight off of Matthew's shoulders, and just at that moment, Givens arrives with a newspaper in hand and dashes into Helen's bedroom. Matthew and Bunny follow him just in time to see Helen's horrified reaction to the headline as she faints. As the nurses try to revive Helen, Givens begs Matthew to get them out of this problem. He says that people nearly mobbed him as he left his office. Matthew soothes Givens and Helen, saying he'll stick by them. He then asks Bunny to get the cars ready so they can go to the airport.

*Matthew's reflection on his transformation not only reinforces how mutable his identity is, but it also illuminates the oppression that he faced as a Black man. Because people are so fixated on race and so intent on perpetuating oppression that Matthew has become wildly successful by playing on people's ignorance and fear. He will only return to the "oblivion" of being a Black insurance agent if people find out about his former identity, despite the fact that he won't have changed as a person at all.*



*Matthew's concern about racism and maintaining his own identity corrupts innocence: he actually considers murdering his newborn son just to keep up the ruse about his identity. This is a testament to how afraid he is to return to the kind of discrimination he faced, and to give up his newfound wealth if people find out about his identity.*



*Again, this short reverie illustrates how much progress Matthew has been able to make in his life simply by becoming white, even though he knows there is no discernable difference between the races. However, because of Americans' fixation on race, he has had to hide his identity desperately while taking advantage of that racism in the Knights of Nordica. The newspaper also illustrates to him that he is not the only one engaged in deception and whose identity is unstable in the public eye.*



*Givens and Helen are shocked by their Black ancestry and are desperate for Matthew to accept them, which shows how much of a frenzy Buggerie's research has caused. Again, it illustrates how racism is still embedded in the country, as anyone who has any association with Black ancestry is automatically belittled in the public eye.*



In that moment, Helen regains consciousness, and she apologizes profusely to Matthew, illogically attributing the **baby's** skin color to her own hidden ancestry. She begs him to forgive her for humiliating him and tells him that she loves him. He says soothingly that she hasn't disgraced him, and he reveals that he's the one responsible for the baby's skin color, feeling a great load lifting off of him. Helen is relieved, and she loves him more than ever. She thinks that they have all that they need, and that all the problems with race and color are foolish.

Givens says, "I guess we're all niggers now," which the doctor corrects as "Negroes" before explaining that he, too, has Black ancestry—only his isn't so distant. The doctor says he hopes the Republicans win, and Bunny says it's almost certain—it's likely no one will be able to find Givens or Snobbcraft soon.

Mr. Givens, Mrs. Givens, Matthew, Helen, Bunny, and Matthew Jr. all speed away in Matthew's plane to Mexico. Givens is depressed, having really believed all that he preached about white supremacy and race purity. When they arrive in Mexico City, they receive a telegram informing them that Senator Kretin has been lynched and Snobbcraft and Buggerie have fled as well. Goosie and Gump have been almost unanimously reelected, and the government has declared martial law.

Matthew asks who the woman is who sent it, and Bunny says that she's the last Black woman in the country—she's a race patriot. Givens comments that it looks like life will be better for them in Mexico than in Georgia.

## CHAPTER 13

The story flashes back to 11 p.m., the evening before election day. Snobbcraft and Buggerie secretly escape to a stately country home near Richmond, Virginia. A man named Frazier answers and tells them that everything's ready. Snobbcraft yells at Frazier saying that he should have had the plane outside and ready, calling him "poor white trash." Buggerie says not to antagonize the man, noting that he's their only chance to get away.

*Helen is horrified to learn that she has Black ancestry and illogically believes that this is the reason for the baby's skin color, which illustrates just how destabilizing Buggerie's research has become. But in learning about Matthew's true heritage and realizing that race is simply a "foolish" construction, she recognizes that no one can be truly secure in their identity. Therefore, fixating on differences in skin color or ancestry is useless.*



*Givens's use of the slur, even as he is affirming that he is like a Black person now, illustrates a key point. Givens's identity hasn't changed—he's still racist despite his newly discovered heritage—but it shows how arbitrary and ultimately deceptive a person's skin color and bloodline can be.*



*The fact that Kretin was lynched because of his newly discovered identity illustrates how ignorance can foster violence in a way that affects even those trying to manipulate other people's ignorance. As a member of the Democratic party, Kretin helped stoke racial oppression and white supremacist ideology, and now he pays the price for it because the ignorant masses followed his ideology unthinkingly.*



*As Matthew escapes with his family, the book cynically suggests that the only way to truly cope with racism in the United States is to leave it entirely.*



*Snobbcraft's callous treatment of Frazier and his classist comment calling him "poor white trash" again illustrate that he cares very little about lower-class people. He only adopted white supremacist attitudes in order to bolster his own political power and wealth.*



Buggerie and Snobbcraft then bicker about whose fault it is that they're in this mess—Snobbcraft for ordering the statistical research or Buggerie for leaving the summary behind. They wait 10 minutes while Frazier inspects the plane and then they board, glad that they are able to get away from the mob.

Snobbcraft tells Frazier that they want to go to his house in Mexico, but Frazier protests that they don't have enough gas to go that far. As he considers what to do, they hear a cavalcade of cars and gunshots nearing the plane—a mob has followed them. Snobbcraft tells Frazier to just get out of there and they can get some gas later on. Fearing the mob will catch up with them, Buggerie pushes Frazier out of the cockpit and takes control himself.

As Buggerie and Snobbcraft take off, a bullet tears through the side of the plane. They are able to take off, but they have soiled themselves and have to change into spare clothes in the plane. Later, when they fly over Mississippi, they realize they will have to stop for gas. Realizing that there's a box of shoe polish in the pocket of his clothes, Buggerie concocts a plan to put the shoe polish all over their bodies and pretend to be Black. Then Frazier can go get gas, and they won't be recognized if people search the plane. The others agree to this plan, and Buggerie and Snobbcraft smear the shoe polish over their faces and arms.

Frazier tries to land the plane, but there's no good place to land. It bumps over logs and through weeds, and Frazier steers it into a ditch. The plane turns completely over, and one wing is completely smashed. Frazier is caught in the wreckage under the engine, cries out, and lays still—he's dead. Shaken and bruised, Snobbcraft and Buggerie crawl out of the cabin and wonder what to do now.

Happy Hill, Mississippi, has been preparing for the open-air revival of the True Faith Christ Lovers' Church. This section of the state has been relatively untouched by the troubles prompted by Black-No-More, as the townspeople have all lived there for generations and know themselves to be genuinely white. They are happy to be the most Fundamentalist of all Christian sects in the United States. The community could also have boasted about their high illiteracy rate and the lynching record. Happy Hill had long rid itself of the few Black people who lived there and any Black person who happened to come through the place.

*Just as Kretin experienced, Snobbcraft and Buggerie realize that fostering ignorance has led to a violent, uncontrollable movement—one that has become so extreme that it is now turning against them.*



*The white supremacist movement has become violent, to the point that people are coming after someone like Snobbcraft for his Black ancestry (despite the fact that many of the mob members likely have Black ancestry as well). It also shows how unstable people's identities are. Snobbcraft and Buggerie are still white and hold white supremacist beliefs, yet they're now facing the same violence that Black people have faced for centuries—all because of revelations about their bloodlines.*



*Here, the book illustrates how absurd the fixation on race has become in America. Eradicating race hasn't actually led to the end of racism; instead, it has made people focus on race in a new way. The irony is that the very people leading this oppressive movement are the people who have been harmed the most by it, to the point that they believe it is actually safer to pretend to be Black rather than to be a white person with Black ancestry.*



*Frazier's death underscores how dire the situation has become for Snobbcraft, Buggerie, and other people whose ancestries have been discovered. They are now facing fatal consequences for their deception.*



*The story shifts to the town of Happy Hill, Mississippi, which has been largely untouched by the events of the previous few years. Yet despite the town's relative cultural isolation, the book still makes a connection between Christianity (the Fundamentalist sect, rooted in the belief that they are superior to all others), ignorance (the low literacy rate) and violence (the fact that they have lynched any Black people who've lived there or passing through).*



Happy Hill has a sign on the general store and post office that Black people should “REDE & RUN. IF U CAN’T REDE, RUN ENEYHOWE.” The townspeople either hung or shot and broiled any person who ignored the warning. There was a large iron post in front of the stores on which Black men and women were burned, with a notch representing each person killed. The news that all Black people were becoming white was received with regret by the people of Happy Hill, and so they turned to religion with renewed fervor.

The story flashes back several weeks to when the Reverend Alex McPhule arrives, claiming to be the founder of a new true faith. The townspeople listen to him with rapt attention as he describes an angel who visited him and told him to preach the true faith of Christ’s love. McPhule preaches an old-fashioned “hellfire-and-damnation sermon” that soon has the others proclaiming Christ’s love.

Soon, Alex McPhule creates an altar in his cabin where people visit him to talk about his Christian message—mostly middle-aged wives and young girls. He wants everybody in the county to be part of his congregation and knows that this can only happen with the aid of a messenger from heaven—some kind of demonstration. He hopes that God will send a Black person for the congregation to lynch.

McPhule prays fervently, and two nights later, a bat flies in his window before flying back out again. He tells everyone in the congregation that an angel visited him, and the Lord will answer his prayer and send a sign. Soon, the people talk of nothing but The Sign. They are on edge for the great revival scheduled for Election Day and hope the Lord will make good on His promise.

Election day arrives, and many citizens cast their ballots for Givens and Snobbcraft, as they haven’t heard of the developments of the previous 24 hours. They then head to the revival, where Alex McPhule stands looking at their upturned faces. He knows his power is growing and he hopes the Lord will answer his prayers and send The Sign.

McPhule preaches and sings with the Happy Hill True Faith Choir, calling on God to save the white race. Suddenly, McPhule stops and shouts at God to save them and send them the Sign, composing a hymn on the spot and singing it over and over until the people join in.

*The townspeople make terrifying threats toward Black people, which again shows that they are bent on oppressing others to make themselves feel superior. At the same time, the book shows that they are anything but superior and are, in fact, quite hypocritical. They implicitly criticize Black Americans for not being able to read when they don’t have high literacy rates either and cannot spell the words on their sign.*



*McPhule’s easy ability to win over the town using Christian doctrine shows how ignorance is dangerous because it makes people easy to manipulate. As long as McPhule describes how his new faith will be to the townspeople’s advantage because it will save them from hellfire and damnation, they listen—again connecting Christianity to ignorance and gullibility.*



*McPhule’s professed faith—even if he believes in it and its implicit white supremacy—is simply a ploy to gain favor and prominence in the town. He wants to perpetrate violence against Black people just to show that God is talking to him. At the same time, the book implies that he is acting very un-Christian both in wanting to murder and also in taking sexual advantage of the women and girls.*



*The book continues to reinforce that people are willing to believe anything that makes them superior, and that their ideology and mob mentality has the potential to turn violent. Their constant discussion of the Sign collectively consumes them and works them up into a frenzy.*



*Just like other leaders throughout the book, McPhule recognizes that he is using ignorance and racism in order to bolster his own power and manipulate others.*



*McPhule continues to connect Christianity and white supremacy, reinforcing the idea that simply spouting ideology that makes others feel superior is an easy way to manipulate them.*



At the same moment, Arthur Snobbcraft and Samuel Buggerie approach the town in their nondescript clothing and blackened skin. Snobbcraft suggests washing off the shoe polish, but Buggerie says that it would be suicidal to turn up in the town as themselves because their picture has been all over the papers.

Nearby, they hear a meeting, and Snobbcraft is relieved—he knows that they'll be sincere Christians and will treat them right. Buggerie is nervous, suggesting that they should avoid crowds. But Snobbcraft dismisses Buggerie's concerns and heads over to the crowd. Seeing the men, people start to shout racial slurs, "Praise God!" and "Lynch them!"

Buggerie and Snobbcraft speed away, but the mob overtakes them. The mob marches the two men to Happy Hill, punching and kicking them during their triumphant march. Buggerie weeps and Snobbcraft offers money, but the two men are not liberated. The two men insist that they are not Black, but they are only beaten harder. They tell the mob to take off their clothes, and when the villagers pause and do so, they immediately apologize and become disappointed to see that the men are white. In the middle of this growing tension, a young man approaches with a newspaper, saying that the Democratic candidates have Black ancestry and fled town in planes that day—the people are bewildered and curse the two vanished candidates.

Later, washed and refreshed, Snobbcraft and Buggerie smoke in front of the general store with the crowd, relieved at their narrow escape. But suddenly, McPhule approaches them and points out that the picture in the paper is of Snobbcraft. The crowd quickly descends on them once more, ignoring their protests. They hold them down, strip them naked, and cut off their ears and genitals. Someone sews their ears to their backs and tells them to run. Despite their pain, the two men try to escape, but they only go a few feet when they receive six shots to their backs.

The mob then drags Snobbcraft and Buggerie, not yet dead, to a stake and binds them back-to-back while children bring scraps and kerosene. McPhule ignites the pyre, and the two men scream as they burn alive. The fire crackles as the crowd whoops with glee. In the crowd are two or three whitened Black people who were too afraid for their own lives to do anything, but others look at them rather sharply for not enjoying the spectacle appropriately. So, they yell and prod the burning bodies, banishing any suspicion that they are not 100 percent "Americans."

*The book has set up dramatic irony, in that Snobbcraft and Buggerie believe that they will be safer posing as Black, which is ironic to begin with. Yet clearly, walking into this town that is so primed for violence is a bad idea.*



*Even though the people are Christian, the book has set up the idea that Christianity can be easily used to manipulate ignorant people. Here, that manipulation results in violence.*



*The book again reinforces that mob violence can take dangerous hold over ignorant people. It also underscores the idea that even when the rest of the world is criticizing Buggerie and Snobbcraft for having Black ancestry, this is nothing compared to the violence that Black people have faced in the South. This near-lynching only stops when the townspeople realize that Snobbcraft and Buggerie are white. It is particularly notable that the townspeople (despite their supposed Christian morality) take triumph and joy in murdering people for no reason, as this implies that being Christian doesn't guarantee that a person is moral.*



*The horrific acts that Snobbcraft and Buggerie endure again illustrate just how dangerous ignorance and mob violence can be—and how much power it has given McPhule, given that he can easily make people act in these brutal and horrific ways. It also illustrates just how much the two men's plan has backfired, as they die because of the racism that they helped foster and gained their own power from.*



*This section contains one of the book's most scathing critiques. First, in implying that the people are "American" because they are white and acting violently, the book indicts America as a nation built on white supremacy. It suggests that buying into that system is a prerequisite to becoming American, even though race is almost entirely socially constructed. And it shows how identity and race have become completely convoluted, as Buggerie and Snobbcraft (who are white) are tortured and beaten for having Black ancestry, while formerly Black people are the ones who are perpetrating this violence.*





When the roasting is over, the more adventurous members take toes and teeth from the two bodies while McPhule looks proudly on. This is the crowning of his life's ambition—God answered his prayers. As he feels the hundred-dollar bill from Snobbcraft's clothes in his pocket, he is happy.

In the last days of the Goosie administration, the Surgeon-General, Junius Crookman, publishes a paper explaining that the Black people he had made white are two to three shades lighter than the "real" white people—a staggering announcement. Many people look askance at their very pale complexions, believing that now it is bad to be so white. The entire country starts examining shades of skin color again. Pale people who do not have blue eyes began to be whispered about. A song, "Whiter than White," becomes popular across the nation.

The new white people begin to grow self-conscious as they face greater and greater discrimination. Karl von Beerde founds the Down-With-White-Prejudice-League—some believe he is the same Dr. Beard who headed the National Social Equality League. Soon, tons of releases come out attempting to prove that those with exceedingly pale skin are just as good as anybody else.

Dr. Cutten Prodd writes a book proving that Nordic peoples were savage while Egypt and Crete were at the height of their development. Professor Handen Moutthe, the eminent anthropologist, writes a paper stating that the palest citizens are mentally inferior and that their children should be segregated from others.

People in the upper class begin to look for ways to get darker like tanning or bronzing their skin. Mrs. Sari Blandine (formerly Sisseretta Blandish) begins to study skin stains, taking off of work for a week and coming back to find that a recent arrival from Czechoslovakia took her job. But soon, she develops a skin stain that would impart a long-wearing light-brown tinge to the pigment. As a result, she becomes popular and famous, opening a shop in her front room.

*While McPhule attributes his actions and the mob violence to God answering his prayers, it is also clear that he has ulterior motives in taking money from Snobbcraft and delighting in the power that he can wield over the mob.*



*This announcement completely shakes the public and also calls into question what ulterior motives Crookman may have. Again, he is not eliminating racism; he is simply making people focus on different aspects of appearance (like eye color, or the fact that formerly Black people are a few shades paler than most people). Again, even though race is almost completely constructed and has become essentially meaningless, people still want to find ways to fixate on it.*



*The book takes one more opportunity to critique Black leaders' hypocrisy. While Beerde preached racial solidarity among Black people, he still had to give in and get the Black-No-More treatment. Now, he's paying the price by facing discrimination again as a white person with very pale skin.*



*This passage parodies reality in the 1930s, when people cherry-picked evidence in order to support the idea that white people were superior. The fact that in the story, people try to justify the opposite argument, illustrates both arguments' absurdity in the first place, and it suggests again that racial differences are completely superficial.*



*The book again critiques Sari Blandine/Sisseretta Blandish (who stands in for the real-life figure Madam C. J. Walker) as hypocritical. She purported to have great pride in her race, yet she both marketed products to Black people to be more like white people. Now, she markets the opposite, simply trying to bolster her own wealth.*



By the time President-Elect Hornbill is inaugurated, Blandine's stain has become widespread—young men avoid a girl without one, and white faces are startlingly rare. The United States becomes darker and darker. In two years, 15 companies imitate Blandine's product, and the shades grow darker and darker, until Zulu tan or even charcoal become the most popular.

One Sunday morning Surgeon-General Crookman sees in the newspaper a photograph of a happy crowd of Americans at Cannes. In the group he recognizes Hank Johnson, Chuck Foster, Bunny Brown and his Black wife, Mr. Givens, Mrs. Givens, Matthew, and Helen—all of whom are as dark as Matthew Fisher Jr., who played at their feet. Crookman smiles and passes the paper to his wife.

*In just four years, people's perceptions of race have completely flipped, to the point that believing in "white purity" or "white supremacy" or gaining an advantage as a white person means having dark skin. Any definitions of what these races really mean have been completely undermined.*



*By the end of the book, Crookman has completely destabilized notions of race and identity while also becoming incredibly wealthy—all while remaining Black himself. Meanwhile, he illustrates how people are still so fixated on race, albeit in a new way. And even though they aren't even in the United States anymore, they still struggle with what their racial identities mean. However, the fact that they are as dark as Matthew Fisher Jr., who doesn't have to change anything about his skin, perhaps suggests a hopeful note. It implies that in the future, people can live as they are rather than yearning to change their identities or facing discrimination for it, because definitions of race will have become meaningless.*





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