

Black No More Study Guide

Black No More by George Schuyler

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Contents

Black No More Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	11
Chapter 4.....	13
Chapter 5.....	15
Chapter 6.....	18
Chapter 7.....	20
Chapter 8.....	22
Chapter 9.....	24
Chapter 10.....	26
Chapter 11.....	28
Chapter 12.....	30
Chapter 13.....	32
Characters.....	34
Objects/Places.....	41
Themes.....	43
Style.....	46
Quotes.....	49
Topics for Discussion.....	51



Plot Summary

Black No More by George Schuyler is a satirical novel, published in 1931, that looks at the United States' race problem by considering what would happen if black people could be turned white. This hilarious and relevant story follows Max Disher, who undergoes a new scientific transformation and becomes a white man named Matthew Fisher and a leader in a white supremacist group. Also invested in the implications of this transformation are several militant organizations and interest groups, all of whom are hypocritical opportunists and all of whom have much to gain or lose when it comes to racial identity and politics.

After being rejected by a pretty white girl from Atlanta, black Harlem resident Max Disher decides to become white. He is the first to undergo Dr. Crookman's treatment at the Black-No-More sanitarium. Crookman's company thrives, though it causes anger among white supremacists, and thousands of black people spend all their money on the treatment, leaving their black neighborhoods and moving into white society.

In Atlanta, Max, now Matthew Fisher, joins forces with Rev. Henry Givens, who is the leader of a white supremacist group called the Knights of Nordica. Rev. Givens' daughter, Helen, is the same pretty white girl who rejected Matthew, and the two marry. In order to make money, Matthew denounces the work of Black-No-More. Black militant organizations, faced with decreased funding, also call for the end of Crookman's company. One day, Bunny shows up in Atlanta as a white man, and Matthew hires him as his assistant.

For a steep profit, Matthew stops labor strikes all over the South by keeping low-income workers focused on white supremacy and the evil of Black-No-More. Nonetheless, soon there are only a couple thousand black Americans left in the country, and Southern politicians worry that they will lose their Democratic seats. Matthew works to control the upcoming election by uniting with the white supremacist group, the Anglo-Saxon Association of America. Mr. Snobbcraft, its leader, privately commissions Dr. Buggerie to collect genealogical data about the nonwhite ancestry of millions of people to prove the purity of top Anglo-Saxon leaders.

The Democratic Party nominates Rev. Givens and Snobbcraft as its presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and the Republican Party nominates President Goosie for another term. The campaign grows bitter, and a hospital for women delivering biracial children is even burned down.

Right before the election, Buggerie informs Snobbcraft that his genealogical data proves that both of them—and many other white supremacists—have nonwhite ancestry. The two men realize that the data has been stolen by the Republican Party. Meanwhile, Helen delivers a dark-skinned child, and the Givens find out about their own their nonwhite ancestry as mobs break out in reaction to Buggerie's data. Matthew announces that he is black, and he and Helen and the Givens and Bunny escape the country to Mexico.



Snobbcraft and Buggerie also attempt to escape, but their plane crashes near Happy Hill, Mississippi, where residents are holding a revival. Snobbcraft and Buggerie attempt to disguise themselves by wearing black shoe polish, but residents think that the men are black and try to lynch them. They let the men go when they realize that the men are white, but then they see a newspaper linking Snobbcraft and Buggerie to nonwhite ancestry and lynch them anyway.

Four years later, Dr. Crookman announces that those blacks who underwent his treatment are now more white than natural whites. Prejudice develops against those with light skin, and it becomes popular to have a darker skin tone. Both whitened blacks and natural whites begin staining their skin.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Black No More, a hilariously satirical novel, considers what would happen if black people could turn white. When Dr. Junius Crookman develops this very technology, Harlem resident Max Disher is the first to undergo his treatment. Max begins his new life in Atlanta as Matthew Fisher where he becomes a leader in a white supremacist group and wins the hand of a white woman who rejected him when he was black. Meanwhile, the country begins to dramatically change as more and more black people switch their racial identity and multiple interest groups and militant organizations work to shut down Crookman's business for very different reasons.

The story begins on New Year's Eve, 1933, as a dressed-up Max Disher waits outside the Honky Tonk Club. His friend, Bunny Brown, arrives. The two men have been close since they served together in World War I. Now Max is an insurance agent, and Bunny is a bank teller. They are known throughout black Harlem for being dashing young men, and they both prefer to date light-skinned women. Having just been dumped by his girlfriend, Minnie, Max shares his worry with Bunny that Minnie looks down on him for being black. As Bunny's suggestion, the two go inside the club.

In the club, people of all different races are present, listening and dancing to the jazz band. Max and Bunny notice a group of white people who are seated at the table next to theirs. Among them is a particularly beautiful girl with golden-brown hair, to whom Max is immediately attracted. One of the men from the table asks Max and Bunny if they will purchase liquor for them. Whoever is selling liquor nearby refuses to sell to white men. Max buys the liquor, hoping to be invited to the adjoining table so that he can talk to the beautiful girl, but he does not receive an invitation. Once the white men and a few of the women leave the table to dance, Max introduces himself to the girl and asks her to dance. She refuses and calls Max a nigger. Max learns from a waiter that the girl is from Atlanta, which is Max's hometown.

The next morning, Max learns that Dr. Junius Crookman, a black doctor and an old acquaintance, has found a way to turn a black person white. Max decides that undergoing such a procedure would better his life and allow him to win the beautiful girl's affection so Max goes to the Phyllis Wheatley Hotel where Crookman is staying. He listens as Crookman explains to reporters that the "cure" for blackness is achieved by stimulating a nervous disease called vitiligo, which removes pigment from the patient's skin. Crookman also introduces the two men who funded his trip to Germany where he conducted his research. They are Hank Johnson and Chuck Foster. Johnson is a banker for the Numbers gambling racket, and Foster is a realtor. Crookman then introduces Sandol, a black Senegalese man whom he turned white, as proof of his method.



After the reporters leave, Max asks Crookman if he can volunteer for the procedure. Crookman must first set up his sanitarium in New York so Max waits, thinking only of becoming white and getting to Atlanta. On the day the sanitarium opens, a crowd gathers outside, and Max arrives. He hesitates briefly when he reaches the procedure room and sees the machine in which he must sit, but two attendants strap him to its chair.

Chapter 1 Analysis

From the first page of the first chapter, race and the absurdities of racial identity are at the forefront of Schuyler's novel. Max is presented as "coffee-brown" with "negroid features" and his ex-girlfriend, Minnie, as a "yallah" flapper (pp. 1). The characters are characterized first and foremost by their race(s), and stereotypes quickly emerge. Women of mixed African and Caucasian origin are supposedly fickle and uppity, and when Max asks the white girl at the club to dance, she refuses because she "never dance[s] with niggers" (pp. 8), indicating that black men are not only all the same to her but also unworthy of her attention. Later, when Dr. Crookman refuses to write articles or give lectures about his procedure, he is looked down upon by the public, and people say only a "Negro" would act in such a way (pp. 13), as if his race explains his specific behavior.

While racial stereotypes seem to be deeply embedded in some of the characters' minds and thus not always consciously recognized or seriously contemplated, Max frequently and consciously considers race. When he learns that the beautiful girl who rejected him is from Atlanta, for example, he reflects on the fact that white people come to black Harlem for the experience, but they come only to look—as if his neighborhood is a spectacle—and not to get to know the inhabitants like himself. Race is so involved in Max's life that it even haunts his dreams. After his New Year's celebrations, he dreams of white slaves, an inverse of the U.S.'s racial system of slavery, and he dreams of gray men with shotguns and gasoline-drenched branches, which recalls lynchings that were common in this country well beyond the time period in which the novel is set. Max's life is marked by the color of his skin because, according to society, his blackness makes him inferior to white people, and so it seems to him that being white would significantly better his life. Thus, he volunteers for Crookman's procedure, sure that it will end the discrimination that he experiences and even result in him meeting the girl from Atlanta.

Here, the reader must remember that the novel is a satire, which is a literary tool that uses irony and wit and humor to critique. Thus, Max's willingness to become white may reflect his character's sincere desire, but the reader must also consider what the author is saying about the 1930s society that he is critiquing. That Max is so interested in a procedure that turns a person from black to white indicates that he finds little valuable about being black. Max also observes that this procedure will accomplish what the Civil War did not. According to this logic, if the Civil War was to have ended slavery and provided equality for all people, then that equality is to be achieved here through eliminating blackness and making everyone white. Of course, that is not so much an equalization of all people as an elimination of some people. The idea of turning

everyone white is absurd, and the author is using its absurdity to emphasize the racial imbalance of society.

The use of satire is present in the larger themes of the novel, but also in smaller details. For example, Max thinks that the apparatus or chair used to accomplish Dr. Crookman's so-called whitening procedure looks like "a cross between a dentist's chair and an electric chair" (pp. 16). A dentist's chair makes some people uncomfortable, but an electric chair symbolizes painful death and punishment, and so the machine that will turn Max white is, from the beginning, a dangerous symbol. Max, of course, does not see the critique that his observation is actually making, but the reader does.

Dr. Crookman's name itself is another instance of satire. Composed of the words "crook" and "man," his name seems to describe his character, and this forces the reader to consider if and why the doctor is or could be a crook. Only the rest of the novel can reveal this, but the reader sees that the public already looks down on Dr. Crookman for not giving lectures or writing articles, and so it is the reader's job to separate the opinions of other characters from the deeper critique that Schuyler is making.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

After the procedure, Max feels ill, but when he sees his reflection, he is overjoyed at being white. As he walks down the hallway toward the sanitarium's front door, he sees many people whom he knows waiting in line for the procedure and is amazed that they do not recognize him. Guards escort Max through the crowd outside, and he is immediately mobbed by reporters. A taxi pulls up, and Max jumps in to escape the press. He realizes, as the cab drives off, that a pretty young woman is already in the cab. Her name is Sybil Smith, and she is a reporter from *The Scimitar*. She promises to pay Max one thousand dollars for his story. He asks her to dinner, and she agrees. At the newspaper's office, Max tells the story of his transformation and receives his money.

Max and Sybil walk down Broadway, and Max is shocked at the freedom that he feels as a white man. No one pays attention to him or thinks it odd that he is with a white woman. Max and Sybil go to dinner and then to a cabaret. Max finds it dull, though, and notices that the black people with whom he frequented clubs in Harlem seem to have more fun than the white people who now surround him. He dismisses this thought and focuses on the beautiful women around him.

At the end of the night, Max drops Sybil off at her apartment and takes a cab back to Harlem to collect his things. He stops by Boogie's place where all his friends hang out. He knocks, and Old Bob, the doorkeeper, tells him to go away. Max convinces Bob that Bunny will know him so the doorkeeper summons Bunny to the door. Bunny recognizes Max by his smile and invites him inside where Max shares his story with all of his friends. Later, Max and Bunny walk past the sanitarium, preparing to part ways, and they see the huge crowds that are gathered even at five in the morning. There are riot squads there to control the masses of people. Max offers to pay for Bunny's transformation, and Bunny takes the money and goes inside.

Max goes to his apartment building where he frightens his landlady, Mrs. Blandish, also known as Madame Sisseretta Blandish. He explains his transformation, and Mrs. Blandish guesses that Max will move out, disdainfully suggesting that black people have no pride in their race. Max packs his things and takes a taxi to Pennsylvania Station where he will board a train to Atlanta.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In chapter two, Max's painful transformation is complete, and the social effects of becoming white begin to be made known. The satire continues here when Max observes that he now has "pork-colored skin" (pp. 19). This quick observation actually carries a scathing criticism with it. Pork is associated with pigs, and if white skin is pork-colored, then white people are being associated with being pig-like—which, according to



stereotypes about the pig, would mean that whites are greedy, rude, and stupid. This is an instance of irony, which is when there is a discrepancy between what is literally said and what is actually meant. The reader is able to see that what seems like a simple description to Max is actually a much deeper comment on race and racial stereotypes, but as a character in a satire, Max is unaware of the deeper meaning. He is just excited to be white and now "indistinguishable from nine-tenths of the people of the United States" (pp. 19). Here, Max's excitement is another instance of irony. Being indistinguishable really means being anonymous and, ultimately, unimportant. Max has no reason to be excited if he has become unimportant, and so the reader understands what Max's character does not.

As Max leaves the sanitarium, he is hounded by press, but he decides to keep quiet and demand payment for his story because he knows that he will need money to enjoy being white. This means that it is not enough for Max to be white but that he must be white and wealthy in order to live life fully. Here, the novel introduces an economic element in its social critique, suggesting that power is gained through money and also that people believe they need money to be happy. The reader sees that Max is adding more requirements for achieving a life of freedom. Being white is no longer enough; now he needs money too.

Indeed, if anything, it seems more and more complications arise in Max's plan. Once he sells his story, he sees that *The Scimitar* immediately publishes a photograph of him next to the article. This upsets him because now everyone will know who he really is when they pass him on the street. His status as a white man is changed because he is not just a white man anymore but a white man who was once a black man. Max underwent the procedure in order to escape his ancestry and his history, but he realizes that it has followed him anyway.

Also, when Max and Sybil go to the cabaret in the Times Square district, Max realizes that the atmosphere is dull, which he did not expect. He misses the joy of the black clubs that he usually visits, and he finds a difference between the white patrons here and the black patrons in Harlem. At the cabaret, the enjoyment seems forced and unnatural, and he thinks that the white patrons lack rhythm and seem inelegant. When Max takes a cab back to Harlem at the end of the night, he immediately feels peace at being among the familiar streets of his neighborhood, and he stops by his friends' hangout. The doorman will not let him in, though, because Max is now a white man and a foreigner in his neighborhood. The door to his previous life is figuratively closed just as this literal door to his friend's house will no longer open for him.

When Bunny and Max leave Boogie's place, they are quiet, though they are old friends and usually have much to talk about. They find that they are now separated by their different races and unable to connect as they used to do. This is not to say that race itself separates people, but that the complex race relations—the history of race—in the United States separate these two friends. Perhaps afraid of losing Bunny, Max offers to pay for Bunny to become white. At that moment, they near the Sanitarium and watch its vertical electric sign. At the bottom of the sign is a black face, and an arrow leads to the top where there is a white face. This sign symbolizes Max's (and many others') belief

that being white is better than being black. On the sign, being white is literally above being black.

Considering the huge crowd of people waiting outside the sanitarium to become white, it seems that a large number of these fictional black Harlem residents are eager to give up their own racial identities. Considering the cabaret scene that Max found so boring, this would be unfortunate because the exuberant joy that Max finds in the people of Harlem would be lost. While the novel's portrayals of white Times Square and black Harlem are generalizations in themselves, the satire makes an important point that to lose any whole group of people would be to lose an important culture.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Dr. Crookman discusses matters of his company, called Black-No-More, Incorporated, with Hank Johnson and Chuck Foster. They are waiting on a new electrical apparatus and also need more space than the sanitarium provides. Foster and Dr. Crookman worry about the strong editorials appearing in Southern newspapers that decry their business. In particular, the editorialists are upset because they feel that Dr. Crookman is ruining the purity of the white race, and they call for whites to rise up against this new trend of blacks "getting white" (pp. 32).

Hank Johnson is not worried, though, and thinks back on his own history. He spent two years on a Carolina chain gang, moved to New York, and worked his way up through the Numbers gambling racket. Now, he reflects that he will be one of the most important black men in the world thanks to his involvement in Crookman's business.

Foster has had a calmer life than Johnson. He worked his way into Harlem real estate as a realtor. There were early rumors about his deceptive business practices, and he has worked to rid his reputation of those bad associations by giving out scholarships and financing Crookman's studies in Germany. Foster does not like the new fame that Crookman's success has brought to his life, though; he prefers to be popular but not so watched.

Crookman himself is tired from all the responsibilities of his new business but believes it will solve the "Negro problem" by eliminating black people from the United States (pp. 35), though he loves his race and collects African masks and painting. He is married to a woman with distant black ancestry but who appears completely Caucasian. Just as Crookman is about to leave and go rest, his wife arrives and escorts him home.

Elsewhere in Harlem, hundreds of people are withdrawing their funds from banks in order to undergo Crookman's procedure. Many residents are moving out of Harlem, and there are more white people walking the streets during the day than usual. Max's landlady, Madame Sisseretta Blandish, who also operates a hair-straightening shop, is losing all her customers because they are becoming white, and she has been asked to either pay rent or give up her shop by her landlord. Blandish used to want to be white, but she likes her social position in Harlem, and she knows that if she became white herself, she would be just another white woman who would have to work to support herself.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In chapter three, there is developing anger, particularly in the South, over Dr. Crookman's medical business. White supremacists are angry that the purity of their race is being threatened by black people who can suddenly become white and move



undetected among those born naturally white. One editorialist is particularly angry that the offspring of those who become white will still be born black. The editorialist is convinced that interracial couples will form, perhaps without the white member of the couple even realizing it, and that their offspring will be biracial. This anger from white supremacists, though not a clear threat right now, creates tension in the novel because if increasing numbers of blacks continue to undergo Crookman's procedure, the white supremacists' anger may escalate to violence.

This chapter also provides back-story on several characters. Dr. Crookman, for example, truly believes that eliminating blackness will solve the racial problems that plague the United States. Here, absurdity is again used to reveal the illogical nature of such a belief. To solve racial problems would be to find a way in which people of all races could live together equally and in which society and politics were not unfairly controlled by a racial majority. Turning black people into white people would simply confirm the dominance of the white race.

The reader also learns that Crookman loves the black race. Indeed, he believes that ridding black people of their blackness will help them achieve progress, though it does not seem to have crossed his mind that changing the race of a whole population indicates that those members of society are not capable of making progress as themselves. Here, Crookman's intention to rid the country of blackness grows even more absurd and ironic.

Throughout Harlem, more and more black residents are pulling their money from the banks, undergoing the procedure to become white, and leaving their neighborhood. As the country remains segregated by race, many of these residents are living in Harlem because it is a black neighborhood. Now that they are white, they can move elsewhere and pay lower rents. Thus, many black residents are willing to trade their racial identity for a chance at a better life.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In Atlanta for three months, Max now goes by the name Matthew Fisher. He is nearly out of money, has failed to find the beautiful blond girl, cannot find work, and is bored with life as a white man. Sometimes he goes to Auburn Avenue, which is a predominantly black area of town, but no one will speak to him there because he is white.

Matthew is confused as to why so many Southern newspapers seem unfriendly to Black-No-More, Incorporated until he realizes that the business is bad for white businesses. If white laborers no longer had black people to think of as a menace, they might think of other things, like organizing labor and demanding higher wages. White businesses, therefore, want their workers to see race as a problem so that their workers do not unionize. Matthew considers this an opportunity to make money, and when he sees that the white supremacist group, the Knights of Nordica, run by Reverend Henry Givens, is holding a rally that very night, he goes to find Rev. Givens.

Rev. Givens is an ignorant and greedy ex-evangelist who also worked for the Ku Klux Klan. Matthew introduces himself to Rev. Givens as an anthropologist from New York and pretends that he is dedicated to preserving the purity of the white race and interested in stopping the work of Black-No-More. Givens is excited to have attracted a scientist, though he does not know what an anthropologist is, and invites Matthew to speak at the rally.

Rev. Givens arrives home in a good mood, which surprises his wife, Mrs. Givens. Mrs. Givens is a hypocritical woman who likes to pride herself on being a Christian. Really, she lies, smokes, hates black people, and is as greedy as her husband is. Their daughter, Helen, is twenty. She is beautiful, superficial, and unintelligent, but she spent the winter in Manhattan and thinks that she is civilized. Helen does not want to go to the rally, but when she hears about the scientist who will be speaking, she agrees to go.

The rally's audience is made up of poor, white working class people. A man enthusiastically leads everyone in song, and Matthew speaks to the crowd. At the end of his hour-long speech, he notices a beautiful girl in the front row, and he realizes that she is the blond from the club in New York. He asks Rev. Givens who she is, and Rev. Givens tells Matthew that the girl is his daughter. He promises to introduce them.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Just like in chapter two, Max—who now goes by the name Matthew—is not as impressed with white life as he thought he would be. Rather, he is actually bored and has had trouble finding work in Atlanta. He misses the "good-fellowship of the Negroes" (pp. 43) and is angered when he hears racially prejudiced remarks from the whites who



now surround him. His disappointment indicates that he has lost something by becoming white and that perhaps Crookman's treatment is not the fix-all that he thought it would be.

In the interest of making money, Matthew joins forces with Rev. Givens and pretends to be a fellow white supremacist. Here, Matthew's actions deviate from the expected actions of the protagonist of a novel, who typically acts admirably and somehow wins the reader's sympathy so that the reader is on the protagonist's side. Instead of acting like a protagonist, Matthew actually begins to act like an antihero, or a protagonist who acts contrary to his expected role. Though he is not sincere when he talks about preserving the integrity of the white race, he is nonetheless working with a racist and possibly violent organization for financial profit, and it becomes hard for readers to sympathize with him. Since this is a satire, Matthew's actions stand out all the more as the author uses his character to reveal that no one in the novel is entirely admirable or sympathetic.

As Matthew watches the rally's crowd sing and prepares to give his speech, he has the revelation that the meeting is similar to some of the religious gatherings of poor black people. Suddenly he no longer feels nervous about standing before the crowd. This is one of the first instances in the novel where similarities are found between whites and blacks, and it is ironic that the similarity is the people's stupidity. According to the satire, the one thing that all those who belong to the lower-class have in common is their ability to believe whatever they hear. People are united in their ignorance, and now Matthew knows that he can lie to this crowd about being a bigoted white anthropologist.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Dr. Crookman is in Los Angeles to open Black-No-More's fiftieth sanitarium and to discuss the state of his company with Hank Johnson, Chuck Foster, and others. Black-No-More has been open for seven and a half months now, and Crookman plans to cut the fee for the procedure so that more black people can afford to become white. Though there is increasing opposition to the company, Hank and Chuck have worked hard to keep it running, including stopping every legislative bill written to shut the company down.

Throughout the country, black society is rapidly changing. Many are so concerned with raising the money to undergo Crookman's treatment that they have stopped going to church, paying their dues in fraternal organizations, and frequenting the shops where they used to get their hair straightened and their skin whitened. Loss of business has hurt these shops, many of which are owned by black community members. Corrupt black politicians are also losing their grip as their voters leave their neighborhoods for white society. Crowds of black Southerners come North to receive treatment too.

The National Social Equality League, a militant black organization, is another group that has been affected by Black-No-More. Funded by donations from white citizens, its income has rapidly decreased. Its leaders, used to living wealthy lives, call a conference with the country's black leaders to address the problem of Black-No-More. Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard, the founder of the League, begins the conference by introducing his secretary, Dr. Napoleon Wellington Jackson, who will serve as chairman of the new Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity. The men go around the room introducing themselves and giving speeches that are more complaints than plans of action. Those present include reverends, the presidents of schools, and businessmen. When they begin singing, Dr. Beard pulls out a resolution that his office has prepared ahead of time. It is addressed to the Attorney General and demands that Crookman and his associates be arrested and Black-No-More shut down. Beard quickly passes the resolution to send the letter and stifles any protest.

When the Attorney General, Walter Brybe, receives the Committee's resolution, he calls his friend, Gorman Gay, the National Chairman of the Republican Party. Gay tells Brybe to keep the Committee at bay because Gay is working with Black-No-More. Brybe sends Dr. Beard and the press a letter informing him that Black-No-More has done nothing illegal and that he cannot take any action against the business.

Santop Licorice, founder of the Back-to-Africa Society, sees Brybe's reply to Beard and is pleased. He dislikes Beard and is upset that he was not asked to join the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity. Licorice's society advocates that all black United States citizens return to Africa, though Licorice has never been, and he is



constantly in court for fraud. His society is out of money, thanks to Black-No-More, and in an attempt to raise funds, he sends a telegram to Henry Givens.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In chapter five, nearly every group or organization mentioned is corrupt and hypocritical. Dr. Crookman, for example, points out that Hank Johnson has managed to stop every legislative bill that would put Black-No-More out of business and that Hanks' work somehow involved one million dollars, which indicates that Hank probably used bribery to stop these bills. Hank has also put many officials and lawmakers in a position in which they cannot oppose Black-No-More through the use of young female operatives, which hints that the female operatives put the men in sexually-compromising situations and that Hank is using those situations as a kind of blackmail. Hank also goes where ever there is white supremacist opposition to Southern blacks heading North for Crookman's treatment and supplies free liquor and new currency, which distracts the opponents and, since they are so easily distracted, reveals the weakness of their beliefs. In this way, Hank knows how to use the system in his favor, but his actions are far from morally-upstanding.

The National Social Equality League is marked more by hypocrisy than overt corruption. It is designed as an organization to advance equality and to guarantee the rights of African Americans, but its officials actually become excited when they hear about a lynching because the lynching proves that there is a need for their existence and means that they can ask white patrons for more money. Here, the satire points out what happens when a League like this one gets its priorities mixed up. Instead of working to end lynching, the members of this League are opportunists who are more concerned with raising money and maintaining their wealthy lifestyles. In this novel, the problem of hypocrisy extends beyond just this one organization, though. Black leaders rarely get together because it just leads to fighting. Again, the use of satire is evident, and the reader sees how absurd and ineffectual it is that people all working for the same overarching cause would fight so much and, on the other hand, how much they could potentially accomplish if they did work together. Here the author is criticizing the lack of unity among black leaders. Written in the 1930s, the novel addresses problems that were contemporary to that time, and it was intended, in part, to bring about social change.

Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard is the founder of the National Social Equality League. In the novel, Beard lives a wealthy and secluded life, secretly admires whites, and is "thankfully unfamiliar" with the suffering of many black citizens, the very topic on which he speaks and writes (pp. 65). Even his long name aligns him more with European culture and history than African culture and history. Shakespeare was, of course, a famous English playwright and poet, and Agamemnon was a key commander in the Trojan War of Greek mythology. Also, when Beard addresses the newly-formed Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity, his speech is confusing and full of abstract concepts. He also uses the passive voice instead of the active voice,



which carries less action and agency on the part of the speaker. All of this means that Beard's many words actually mean very little when the reader looks at them closely.

After Dr. Beard begins the first meeting of the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity, each of the men in the room speaks, and they all prove to be somehow hypocritical or insincere as well. Perhaps funniest is Dr. Joseph Bonds who is in charge of the Negro Data League. The League collects data to prove that more donations are needed in order to collect more data. The circular effect of this reveals that little is being done in the way of actual and helpful research, and that is why much of the information that the League gathers is obvious. For example, the League determined that many black citizens are not making enough money for the work that they do, but that was a widely-acknowledged fact by many in 1933.

The chapter ends with Santop Licorice, another hypocritical philanthropist and the founder of the Back-to-Africa Society. He advocates that all African Americans should return to Africa, though he has never been there himself. He is constantly asking his members for money, some of which goes to a fund that helps him cover his legal fees since he is always being charged with fraud, and he denounces all other African American organizations. He is certainly a man who cares more about his wallet than what is best for the people for whom his organization is supposedly working. Licorice even calls Henry Givens, Imperial Wizard of the Knights of Nordica, in order to make money now that his funds are gone. Of course, by associating with Givens, the reader knows Licorice's intentions are not pure, and so the chapter ends on a note of suspense as the reader must wait to learn what Licorice plans to do with Givens.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

On Easter Sunday, 1934, a crowd gathers at the Knights of Nordica auditorium to celebrate the first anniversary of the secret society, the gaining of its millionth member, and the wedding of Helen Givens and Matthew Fisher. Rev. Givens and Matthew have made a huge profit over the last year, and Matthew is now Grand Exalted Giraw. He has also been editing the newspaper *The Warning* for the last six months, writing of the evil of Black-No-More with such passion that sometimes he almost believes it himself.

Matthew has also been making money on the side by convincing Atlanta businessmen of the threat of organized labor in the form of movements like trade unionism and Communism. He promises that the Knights of Nordica will keep down such radical movements and help to stabilize Southern industry if the business men will donate money. Matthew's plans seem to work because white workers who otherwise might be interested in unionizing believe the propaganda that they hear about Black-No-More and remain focused on racial prejudice instead of labor reform. While Rev. Givens is uneasy with all of Matthew's success and his purported education, he is happy to have Matthew married to Helen because that will keep the Knights of Nordica in the Givens family.

One day Bunny Brown shows up at Matthew's office. He has undergone Crookman's treatment and is now white. Matthew hires him as his assistant. He tells Bunny that the Knights of Nordica have had Santop Licorice on their payroll for a few months and that Licorice is fighting the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity. Matthew sends Bunny to New York to see if Licorice is doing enough work and also to approach Dr. Beard and the other members of the Committee to see if they will speak to white audiences for the benefit of the Knights of Nordica. Since both groups want to see the end of Black-No-More, and since the black leaders have lost all income from donations, Matthew hopes that they will consider it.

Meanwhile, there are frequent reports of white women giving birth to black babies. This leads to increased chastity and more cautious marriages since there is no way "of telling a real Caucasian from an imitation one" (pp. 88). Black-No-More, which has one hundred sanitariums now, begins to provide lying-in hospitals for pregnant women. If a woman delivers a black baby, the hospital provides a twenty-four hour treatment to turn the baby white.

When Bunny gets back from New York, he tells Matthew that Licorice is doing no work for the money that he is receiving and that he couldn't find any of the black leaders. Except those there to get whitened, there are hardly any blacks left in Harlem at all.



Chapter 6 Analysis

The various characters that Schuyler has introduced throughout the first five chapters begin to come together in chapter six. Helen and Matthew unite in marriage, Bunny Brown reappears as a white man, Santop Licorice is working for the Knights of Nordica, and Matthew sends Bunny to solicit Dr. Beard and the other members of the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity to speak to the Knights as well.

Most apparent from this chapter, though, is the sense of the double-life that Matthew leads. He has been working with Rev. Givens and the Knights of Nordica now for a full year, and even he admits that he is so good at writing his editorials that he almost believes them himself. Of course, in these editorials, Matthew expresses the supremacy of the white race and the danger of Black-No-More for the purity of the white race, opinions that he does not endorse and actually despises. His outward life has become one big act, while his inner life is a total secret. No one knows that he used to be black, and no one knows his name is really Max Disher—until Bunny reappears. Bunny is an old friend, and so Matthew gives him a job, but Bunny does pose a threat to Matthew. If Bunny accidentally uses Matthew's real name or reveals any detail from their past, they may very well be exposed. Matthew's life as Grand Exalted Giraw would be over, as well as his marriage, and the possibility of violence would be a real threat. After all, Rev. Givens is already a bit uneasy about his son-in-law who is clearly smarter than he is.

Bunny is not the only threat to Matthew's new life, either. All over the country, white women are having black babies, and each instance is proving to be a scandal in a newspaper. Since Matthew and Helen are newly married, they may very well start a family, and if they do, their child will be born half black. This, of course, would also expose Matthew's past.

Overall, it seems that Matthew is juggling an incredible number of people, including members of the Knights of Nordica, Atlanta businessmen, and his own new family, and trying to keep them all happy. Even Bunny cannot keep track of the various alliances, but if Matthew understands anything, it is that his current life will not last. He and the Knights of Nordica are making money off trying to stop Black-No-More, and as soon there are no more blacks to turn white, Black-No-More will be out of business and Matthew and the Knights of Nordica will too. Matthew's only hope, then, is to slow down that process as much as possible, which is why he wants to reach out to Dr. Beard and the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Matthew receives word from a secretive operative in Paradise, South Carolina, that the workers there, many of whom are Knights of Nordica members, are ready to strike because of their long hours and low wages. Matthew and Bunny fly to Paradise and meet with the mill owners, Mr. Blickdoff and Mr. Hortzenboff, who have also given money to the Knights of Nordica. Matthew tells the mill owners that they can give him fifteen thousand dollars and he will prevent a strike or Matthew will back the workers and they will have to pay far more. Mr. Blickdoff and Mr. Hortzenboff give him the money.

Back in Atlanta, Matthew holds a conference with a team of his secret operatives and sends them to Paradise. They spread rumors that the strike chairman, a man named Swanson, used to be black. The other workers believe this, stop associating with Swanson, and drive him from town. The same occurs for three other workers involved in organizing a strike. The rest of the mill workers become so concerned with figuring out who among them is black that they decide not to strike.

Radical labor organizers in New York even visit Paradise, confused as to why the strike ended before it ever happened. Though the organizers are white, they are ignored by the mill workers because they suspect one is black and they know the other to be a Jew. Even after the town quiets down, things are not the same, and those residents who realize that they cannot prove that they are white are forced to leave town. Similar situations occur in many other towns thanks to Matthew and the Knights of Nordica.

Chapter 7 Analysis

In chapter seven, Matthew participates in even more questionable behavior and further solidifies his status as the novel's antihero. Matthew has secret operatives everywhere, including in Paradise, South Carolina, whose job it is to pick up on possible strike situations and report them to Matthew. Instead of being genuinely interested in the workers, who are often Knights of Nordica members, or the mill owners, Matthew wants only to make money off the situation, and he does so by playing every angle possible. In Paradise, he first bribes the owners out of fifteen thousand dollars, then he gives a speech that makes it appear that he supports the workers, and then he has operatives plant rumors about the racial purity of the strike ringleaders in order to shut down the potential organization of labor. In cheating everyone, it becomes clear that Matthew's greed has overtaken his life.

While the mill workers in Paradise express racist beliefs and are members of the Knights of Nordica, there is something pitiable about them too. They are poor, have bad health, and are forced to work for long hours and to send their children to do the same.



They have no one to stand up for their rights, and they seem quite hopeless because of that. Even when the mill owners build them a swimming pool, they do not have the time to use it, let alone enjoy it, and so the town's name, Paradise, becomes quite ironic considering the reality of its citizens' lives. All the while, Matthew manipulates the citizens by keeping their focus on race, and in doing so, he actually furthers their racism, which is something the real Max despises. The quest for more money controls him, though, and he seems to feel no guilt at furthering the Knights of Nordica's racist agenda, which makes it hard for the reader to empathize with him as a character.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Black-No-More has been in business for two years, and the only blacks who are left are in prisons, asylums, and other institutions. The American South, however, depends on the presence of a black underclass to keep its poor white citizens happy. The racial migration of blacks to whites has also had a severe economic impact on the South. Properties that blacks once rented are having to be repaired and updated to suit white tenants, and schools that whites deemed fit for black children are being upgraded to suit white children. All of this means that taxes are being raised, and Southern politicians feel threatened about losing their seats to Republicans.

One of these politicians, Democratic Georgia Senator Rufus Kretin, visits the Knights of Nordica office in March, 1935, to speak with Matthew about stopping the growing Republican vote. Matthew agrees to stop the vote and tells Bunny privately that he will use his typical white supremacy argument to win people over. Bunny is worried that people will not fall for that argument anymore, but Matthew believes that people will react to it like they always do.

Matthew then tells Bunny that Helen is expecting a child. He is worried about what will happen when she realizes that the child is half black. He wants to send her to a lying-in hospital, but he knows that she would be suspicious. She also refuses to leave her parents' home because she loves it there. Bunny says that, for five thousand dollars, he can fix the problem.

Bunny goes to a cafe that evening and recognizes the face of his white waiter to be that of Dr. Joseph Bonds, who used to run the Negro Data League in New York. Bunny offers him one hundred dollars to do a favor, and Bonds mentions that his friend Licorice, who works in back, will help. Bunny realizes that Bonds is referring to Santop Licorice, who is also white now. Both Bonds and Licorice stop by Bunny's place later that night to get their assignment and their payment money.

The next night, Rev. Givens's home burns to the ground, and Matthew tells Helen that she should go away for a little while to rest her nerves. The next day, Matthew learns that Bunny arranged for the fire. Then the telephone rings, and he learns that Helen has had a miscarriage.

Meanwhile, Bonds and Licorice use their money to leave Atlanta, and they catch a train for New York.

Chapter 8 Analysis

At the beginning of chapter eight, the true extent of Black-No-More's work is made known, and in two years, virtually all of the black population has become white. What



many had seen as the solution to the problem of race has now created problems in Southern communities and in the Southern economy, and in an ironic twist, it appears the historically-racist South actually wants its black citizens back. Without them there, the South is forced to repair schools and rental properties, pay schoolteachers decent wages, rebuild roads, and raise taxes for a rapidly increasing white population. That the South misses its black population because the South now has to improve living conditions deemed fit for blacks but not for whites proves the South's maltreatment of its black population in the first place.

So too Southern politicians, who currently hold a Democratic majority, feel their control slipping away because of Dr. Crookman's treatment and the disappearing black population, and they worry that if Republicans take control in the South, labor will unionize and voters might even turn Socialist. The novel pokes fun at this fear, pointing out all the changes that Socialism might bring about, including minimum-wage regulation and paid vacations for prospective mothers. Of course, these are not "horrible visions" like the businessmen and politicians think they are. Many would actually consider them to be positive gains for human rights, and so the novel uses humor to reveal the exaggeration of the politicians' fears.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

To make sure that the Democrats keep political control in the South, Matthew decides to have Rev. Givens call on the Republican administration to shut down Black-No-More on national radio. Matthew will also start a campaign against the Republicans in The Warning, linking them to the Pope, Black-No-More, and other groups that Southerners do not like.

As planned, Rev. Givens speaks to a national radio audience for an hour without saying anything true, but the Knights of Nordica receive much positive publicity and support. In response to Givens's speech, Republican President Harold Goosie appoints a commission to study the question of Black-No-More. The commission issues its report two months later and finds that Black-No-More operates within the confines of the law. Only five people read the report.

Matthew's next step in taking control of the election is to bring together the Knights of Nordica and the Anglo-Saxon Association of America, a rich white supremacist group that believes that Anglo-Saxons should maintain leadership in America. With the Knights' high membership and the Association's money, Matthew believes that they can control even the Presidential election. Mr. Arthur Snobbcraft, President of the Anglo-Saxon Association, and the other directors agree to join forces with the Knights of Nordica, but without Matthew's knowledge, they also hire a statistician named Dr. Samuel Buggerie. Like Snobbcraft, Buggerie also believes that descendants of non-white genealogical strains should be unfit for citizenship and procreation, and for a hefty sum, he promises to produce statistics about the shocking number of people who fall into this category before the election. They hope that this will cause the Republicans to either adopt the Democratic stance on required genealogical examinations or cause them to lose the election.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter nine is filled with satiric names that are both funny and scathing. Rev. Givens's speech, for example, is broadcast by the Moronia Broadcasting Company, which has the word "moron" as its root, indicating that its listeners are unintelligent people. Indeed, after Givens's speech, in which he "avoided saying anything that was true," the radio station receives "thousands of telegrams and long distance telephone calls of congratulation" (pp. 116). It appears that the listeners did not realize that Givens's speech was made up of lies, and since millions of people listened, the novel is subtly saying that most of the country's citizens are morons.

The fictitious United States President's name is Harold Goosie, another satiric name. To be a "goose" is to be a foolish person. The word "goose" also brings to mind terms like



"sitting duck," which is a helpless or easy victim, and "lame duck," which is an elected official on his or her way out of office. All of these associations indicate that President Goosie is an ineffectual leader with little real power and, though he is eligible for another term, probably will not be reelected. This is supported by the fact that people like Matthew can control so much of the population from a position well outside of elected government. The President, whom people consider the most powerful person in the country, is revealed here to be actually quite powerless.

The Anglo-Saxon Association of America is introduced in this chapter, and its president is Arthur Snobbcraft, whose name is made up, in part, of the word "snob." He is certainly a snob, and an extreme and racist one at that, believing that Anglo-Saxons should maintain all power in the United States and that those without pure Nordic blood should lose their citizenship and their right to bear children. His statistician, Dr. Samuel Buggerie, agrees with this view, and Schuyler pokes fun at his character, whose name is two letters off from "buggery," a vulgar word for sodomy. Here, the reader sees that many of the characters' names in the novel are purposefully designed as jokes between the author and the reader and as commentary on the characters themselves.

Also important in chapter nine is Schuyler's focus on ignorance. As mentioned, Rev. Givens gets away with delivering an hour-long speech of lies, and no one calls attention to this. Bunny also makes fun of Matthew by telling him that he sounds like a college professor, which would normally be a compliment, but in this novel, the educated are often the ones who talk the most while actually saying the least. Dr. Buggerie, for example, is a highly respected man, and his book, *The Fluctuation of the Sizes of Left Feet among the Assyrians during the Ninth Century before Christ*, received strong reviews when it was published. In reality, though, only one reviewer actually read the book. The rest simply trusted that it was smart. A close look at the title, though, reveals the triviality of the subject, which is the changing sizes of left feet. Because the title is long and full of important-sounding words, however, people took the book's intelligence on good faith.

In this novel, then, to sound like a college professor is actually an insult, and the reader can no longer rely on accepted ideas of who is intelligent and who is not. Instead, the reader has to rethink what makes a person smart. When only nine people read the presidential commission's report on Black-No-More, for example, the reader would hope that the country's leaders and other important members of society would make up those nine, but instead, only a country jail warden, a proofreader, a janitor, the editor of an Arkansas newspaper, a stenographer, a dishwasher, a flunky in a Black-No-More office, a prisoner serving a life-term, and a gag writer take the time to read the report. They are, in the end, the smart ones because they read the document for themselves, and in doing so, they actively participate in their society instead of just taking Rev. Givens's radio speech as truth.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Gorman Gay explains to Dr. Crookman, Hank Johnson, and Chuck Foster that the Republican Party needs more money for its upcoming presidential campaign. While Black-No-More will soon be shutting down all but five of its sanitariums because there are only a couple thousand blacks left in the country, they still need to keep open their lying-in hospitals for white women who deliver black babies. Gay believes that the election will be a violent one and promises that the government will protect the hospitals if Black-No-More donates five million dollars to the Republican campaign. Crookman agrees to the plan.

At the Democratic Convention in July, 1936, the party members cannot agree on whom to nominate for their presidential candidate. The Knights of Nordica want to nominate Rev. Givens, and the Anglo-Saxon members want to nominate Arthur Snobbcraft. Finally, Matthew threatens that the Knights of Nordica will withdraw their support from the party, and the others relent, nominating Givens for President and Snobbcraft for Vice-President. Meanwhile, at the Republican Convention, President Goosie is nominated for reelection.

Dr. Buggerie tells the Anglo-Saxon Association's Board of Directors that he can prove a large portion of the population possess non-white ancestry, and he is asked to put his data in a simple form that the public will be able to understand. Meanwhile, the campaign grows bitter, and denunciations of Black-No-More grow violent. A mob sets fire to a Cincinnati lying-in hospital, burning to death a dozen babies and forcing other mothers to carry their biracial children into the street. The mothers' names are published, and many are revealed to be socially prominent women. Republican favor drops even more.

Both Walter Williams and Joseph Bonds are now Republican campaigners who sit in their office and pretend to work. Williams had decided to stop calling himself black and to call himself white when the National Social Equality League had been shut down, and Bonds had taken the position after returning from Atlanta with Santop Licorice. They hope for a Republican win so that they can continue not working. Williams knows that Dr. Beard is now white and is working for Dr. Buggerie so Williams goes to visit Beard. Williams learns that the Anglo-Saxon Association is planning to release its data, and Beard explains that not even Buggerie or Snobbcraft knows the extent of the information uncovered. Williams sees how heavily guarded the research facility is and reports the information back to Gorman Gay.

Chapter 10 Analysis

As the parties pick their presidential and vice-presidential nominees and as those nominees begin campaigning, the whole process is marked by dispute, vague speeches, and even violence. It seems the only reason that the Democratic Party is able to pick Rev. Givens as its nominee is because Matthew stays sober during the deliberations and is coherent enough to threaten the rest of the Party leaders into agreement. That there is no genuine compromise reached indicates a good deal of tension within the Party. So too Matthew and the Knights of Nordica still do not know about Dr. Buggerie and his data collection.

When Givens and Goosie officially become the two main parties' candidates, the campaign season begins. It is interesting that, while the two candidates and the parties for which they stand have drastically-opposed viewpoints, they are represented by the media in much the same way. Both are photographed in rural scenes and posing on the platforms of trains, and both are said to come from poor and honest backgrounds. It is not just the press that presents them in such a similar manner, though. Chuck Foster even mentions that the two candidates' party nomination acceptance speeches sound exactly the same, and both candidates, when speaking to the press, talk in vague abstractions that no one quite understands. Here, the novel pokes fun at the United States political system. Presidential nominees should be well-spoken and intelligent individuals who can clearly articulate their own views and the positions of the party which they represent. That neither Givens nor Goosie can do so does not bode well for the future of the country.

As Dr. Buggerie's data is nearly ready to be released to the public, there is the increasing threat that Matthew's history of blackness will be made known. If the election campaign is already so incensed that a mob had burned down a hospital full of women and children, one can only imagine what will happen to Matthew if the truth of his race is revealed. So too this chapter marks the reappearance of Walter Williams, Dr. Joseph Bonds, and Dr. Beard, all of whom are now white and working for groups that they used to abhor and probably still do. The read has to wonder what are they up to and how will they influence this already-tense election.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

A month before the election, Matthew reveals to Bunny that Helen will be having a baby in three weeks. He knows that she will not get an abortion and has even sent her to resorts, thinking that travel might cause a miscarriage. Matthew says that he loves Helen and does not want to leave her. Bunny suggests that Matthew prepare to leave and, when the baby's born, tell Helen the truth and give her the opportunity to run away with him.

Two days before the election, most of the country believes that the Democrats are going to take office and that Givens will be president. As Arthur Snobbcraft hosts a pre-election party, Dr. Buggerie informs him that they cannot release any of the genealogical data that he has gathered. The data reveals that the vast majority of people in the lower and upper classes have multiracial ancestries. Buggerie explains that Snobbcraft himself descended from a black slave and that his own family tree is made up of illegitimate children, thieves, and freed slaves. Rev. Givens is also descended from a biracial ancestor, and Buggerie believes that Matthew Fisher used to be black.

Snobbcraft and Buggerie go to the Anglo-Saxon Association's headquarters to burn all the data, but when they get there, they find the guards tied up and the vault empty. Buggerie insists that it will take the thief months to sort through the data, and by that time, Givens will already be president. Buggerie promises that he has the only summary sheet of the data, but he realizes that he left it at Snobbcraft's house. The two men rush back to find, in place of the summary, a thank you note from the thief for leaving the summary where it could be so easily found. The note is signed G.O.P., which is the Republican Party.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter eleven brims with tension as Helen prepares to deliver her baby, the election nears, and the genealogical data is stolen by the Republican Party. The baby, the election results, and the truth provided by the genealogical data are all, in a sense, ready to be born or to be made known, and now many of the characters have nothing more to do than wait. While for much of the novel, several key characters have worked to try to control other people and situations, the course of events is now out of their hands. Matthew can do nothing to prevent Helen and the Givens from seeing the color of his child; the Democratic Party, unaware of the genealogical data, cannot prepare for its potential release; and Snobbcraft cannot stop the spread of the data that he himself commissioned to be collected and that now proves that he is not a pure Anglo-Saxon.

Much of the chapter is made up of the interchange between Snobbcraft and Buggerie and their subsequent hunt for the data that has suddenly become quite personal to

them. It is the ultimate irony that Buggerie's data, meant to prove top Anglo-Saxons' purely white ancestry and reveal the nonwhite ancestry of nearly twenty million other people, would implicate Snobbcraft, Buggerie, Givens, and many other white supremacist Democrats as well. The data reveals that the vast majority of people in the United States have mixed racial ancestries, which means that the division between black and white, if there even is one, is actually not so clear at all. Rather, most people are some combination of black and white. The race factor, which has been so important to these characters, must now be considered in a new way.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Matthew and Bunny wait for the birth of Matthew and Helen's child. They receive the call that Helen has had a baby boy. At the hospital, Helen's physician, Dr. Broker, informs Matthew that his child has been born black. Dr. Broker offers to kill the baby to prevent a scandal. At that moment, Bunny sends a newspaper upstairs. On the front page is a story about the release of the genealogical data and the black ancestry of Rev. Givens and others. Givens appears, looking crazed, and throws himself on Helen's bed. Helen faints at the news. Just as Helen, who believes her child is black because of her ancestry, begs Matthew not to leave her, Matthew announces the secret that he has been guarding for three years—that he used to be black. Helen realizes that she is proud of her husband.

A mob has gathered outside the hospital, and the Givens must flee. Matthew, Helen, Bunny, Rev. Givens, Mrs. Givens, Dr. Broker, and his nurse all fly on Matthew's plane to Mexico. Bunny has cleared out the Knights of Nordica treasury, and all the money is on-board. Rev. Givens, however, is depressed because he truly believed all that he had preached about white supremacy.

When they arrive in Mexico, Bunny receives a telegram announcing that Senator Kretin has been lynched, Snobbcraft and Buggerie are in the process of flying out of the country, and President Goosie has been reelected almost unanimously. The telegram is from Madeline Scranton, and she ends it by asking Bunny when she can join him. Madeline is a black woman from Georgia who refused to be whitened, and Matthew is envious and happy for Bunny that he has won the affections of one of the last black women in the country.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Just as it seems certain that Matthew's history will be exposed, Dr. Broker offers him the chance to get rid of the child who is proof of that history. Matthew has already tried to cause his wife to have a miscarriage, and for a moment, the reader wonders if Matthew will agree to the death of an infant to save himself. As a character, Matthew has all along been selfishly preoccupied with the gain of money and power, and his status as antihero indicates that he very well might pick himself over his child.

At the last second, though, Matthew is saved by the appearance of the newspaper article and offered the chance to keep his history a secret by blaming the child's dark skin on Helen's ancestry, but he decides to tell Helen and the Givens the truth. This decision helps readers to sympathize with Matthew as a character and also to worry about what his honorable choice to be truthful will mean for his future. Almost shockingly, though, nothing bad happens. Helen is not disgusted by her husband as



Matthew expected her to be but proud of him, and Helen realizes that Matthew and their new child are more important to her than racial identity. So too Rev. Givens is too brokenhearted at the discovery of his own ancestry to be upset with Matthew. It seems that Matthew is able to ride his successes in the Knights of Nordica out to the end, escaping without harm and with family, in-laws, money, and his best friend too.

It is interesting, though, that Matthew would be jealous of Madeline's affections for Bunny. Throughout the novel, Matthew has preferred light-skinned women, and now Matthew is jealous at a time when there are few black women left in the country. It seems, then, that Matthew wants whatever (or whomever) is hard to come by. Perhaps he will not be as happy and content in Mexico as the reader might first think.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

On the eve of the election, Snobbcraft and Dr. Buggerie have Snobbcraft's employee and aviator, Frazier, prepare Snobbcraft's plane for takeoff so that they can leave town. Snobbcraft announces that they are going to his ranch in Chihuahua, but Frazier informs him that there is not enough gasoline to get there. At that moment, an angry mob arrives, and they are forced to take off. The plane runs out of gas as they are flying over Mississippi, and Buggerie and Snobbcraft are worried about being killed if people realize who they are. Buggerie finds a box of shoe polish in his pocket, and he and Snobbcraft paint their arms and faces black to disguise themselves. The plane crashes as they try to land, and Frazier dies.

Nearby in Happy Hill, Mississippi, residents prepare for a revival sponsored by the True Faith Christ Lovers' Church and led by Rev. Alex McPhule. The town, known for its lynching record, has long been without black residents, and the white residents are actually sad that there are no more blacks because that means there will be no more lynchings. Now there is only religion to stimulate the residents. Rev. McPhule, hoping to gain a wider following than just the people of Happy Hill, has promised that the Lord will send him a sign during his revival, and a large crowd shows up.

Snobbcraft and Buggerie come upon the revival as they are walking across the countryside. The crowd takes the appearance of the two apparently black men as the sign from God and chases them with the intention of lynching them. Once caught, Snobbcraft and Buggerie reveal their white chests to the revivalists, who then release them and allow them to wash their shoe polish off. As Snobbcraft and Buggerie clean up, a newspaper arrives announcing the genealogical data scandal, and the crowd realize that the two men they've caught are of black ancestry, and they decide to lynch them after all. Members of the crowd then mutilate the two men, shoot them, and burn them alive.

Nearly four years later, Dr. Crookman, now Surgeon-General, publishes findings that the new Caucasians who were whitened by Black-No-More are actually whiter than the old Caucasians, and so extreme whiteness now indicates black ancestry. A prejudice develops against those with particularly pale skin, and those who have undergone Crookman's treatment begin to protest against their new mistreatment and segregation.

Members of the upper class begin to look for ways to darken themselves. Mrs. Sari Blandine, who used to be Mme. Sisseretta Blandish, develops and patents Blandine's Egyptienne Stain which darkens the skin of users. By the time the next president comes into office, she has shops open all around the country, and white faces become rare. One morning, Dr. Crookman opens the paper and sees a picture of Hank Johnson, Chuck Foster, Bunny Brown and Madeline, Rev. and Mrs. Givens, and Matthew and



Helen Fisher taken on a beach in France. All of them are as dark as Matthew and Helen's son, Matthew Crookman Fisher.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Like every other group of people examined in Schuyler's novel, the residents of Happy Hill, Mississippi, prove to be a hypocritical bunch. Their religious services are followed by orgies, they drink corn liquor while claiming to be Prohibitionists, and their Christian values are overshadowed by their enjoyment of violence. Their town name becomes particularly absurd in light of its history of not just racism but the lynching of any black person who happens to be in the vicinity. The lynching post is even a landmark in this backwards town to which Snobbcraft and Buggerie come.

Schuyler's description of the lynching is graphic and disturbing, but it is important to keep in mind the irony of the lynching in this satiric novel. Like the residents of Happy Hill, Snobbcraft and Buggerie are white supremacists who would, perhaps, ordinarily encourage this kind of activity or at least not condone it. Now, however, they are the victims because the Happy Hill residents have seen the newspaper and know that Snobbcraft and Buggerie are of nonwhite ancestry. That information, of course, was indirectly provided by the very men it now condemns to die. In this scathing novel, racist characters like Snobbcraft and Buggerie are punished by the very methods—which are violence and the exposure of ancestry—with which they meant to punish others.

The novel ends by jumping ahead nearly four years in the future. In the ultimate twist, Crookman's Black-No-More treatments actually turned blacks whiter than so-called natural whites, and so now being too white is not only looked down upon but discriminated against. Books are published that declare that races with darker shades of skin have, over time, contributed more to world society and that pale Nordic people were historically savage. That these books are published so quickly in response to Crookman's findings indicates the authors' attempt to ride a popular wave of public opinion and probably also indicates the authors' insincerity. This would similarly indicate that the authors of books that argued for the higher status of paler races were also more invested in trying to appeal to popular opinion than in revealing any truth about race.

In response to Crookman's findings, those with enough money begin darkening their skin with stains, and Mrs. Blandine opens shops all over the country that provide just such a service. In this way, she becomes a parallel figure to Dr. Crookman, who opened sanitariums all over the country when it was determined that it was better to be white than black. Both benefit from the fickleness of the American public who are eager to change their appearance in order to feel part of the dominant group. Schuyler's point, of course, is that there is nothing fixed when it comes to the dominant group or popular opinion, and so not only do the blacks who became white, including Matthew Fisher and Bunny Brown, now stain their skin darker but the very whites who were so adamant about their superiority, like Rev. and Mrs. Givens, do it too.



Characters

Max Disher/Matthew Fisher

Max/Matthew is the main character of the novel and serves as more of an antihero than a typical protagonist. Whereas a protagonist typically acts admirably and somehow wins the reader's sympathy so that the reader is on the protagonist's side, an antihero acts contrary to his expected role.

Born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, Max Disher works as an insurance agent in Harlem at the novel's beginning. Tired of experiencing discrimination and being rejected by white women, Max undergoes Dr. Crookman's treatment, becomes white, and moves to Atlanta to look for the pretty girl who rejected him at the Honky Tonk Club. In Atlanta, Max goes by the name Matthew Fisher and joins forces with Rev. Givens of the Knights of Nordica in order to make money. Givens' daughter, Helen, turns out to be the very girl for whom Matthew had been searching, and the two eventually marry, despite Helen's prejudiced views and Matthew's secret history. Throughout the novel, Matthew's persona as a white supremacist leader takes over his own life to the point that he almost believes the discriminatory articles that he writes against Black-No-More.

As the novel's antihero, Matthew frequently displays a preoccupation with money. He is willing, first, to work with the Knights of Nordica in order to make a profit. Then, in order to earn more money, he takes it upon himself to solicit Atlanta businessmen for donations and even to prevent labor strikes in small Southern towns by pitting everyone involved against each other and encouraging racism. It becomes clear that Matthew is not making decisions based on any moral code but, seeing how to manipulate people for a gain, is driven by greed.

He is even so interested in preserving his comfortable lifestyle as a powerful white man that he is relieved when Helen has a miscarriage during her first pregnancy, and when she comes becomes pregnant again, he tries to cause another miscarriage. That does not happen, though, and when the baby is born half-black, Dr. Broker offers to kill the newborn so that Matthew can avoid a scandal. It is not clear, at first, what Matthew will do because he has acted selfishly throughout the novel. In the end, though, Matthew does not have the baby killed, and he admits that he used to be black to Helen and Rev. and Mrs. Givens instead of letting them believe that Rev. Givens' nonwhite ancestry has reappeared in Helen's baby. This honest moment of truth helps the reader to sympathize with Matthew at the novel's end.

Dr. Junius Crookman

Dr. Crookman is a black biologist and doctor who used to be a medical student in Harlem and who then studied abroad in Germany, thanks to funding from Hank Johnson and Chuck Foster. When Crookman arrives back in the USA, he announces that he has



discovered a method of turning black people white and opens the first Black-No-More sanitarium. His company thrives until no more than a few thousand blacks remain in the country.

Dr. Crookman is a rather naive man who believes that eliminating blackness will not only solve the racial problems that plague the United States but help to advance the position of black Americans. In his mind, he sees no problem with changing the racial identity of a whole population of people, and he thinks that black people would be better off white. He does not see the irony that changing a whole population's identity is the same as saying that that population cannot advance on its own. He also does not see the irony that he collects black art by black artists and reads about black issues but wants to turn blacks white. He exists apart from the public, seen only inside the safety of his sanitariums, and he does not seem capable of understanding how his announcements to the public change the country so dramatically—and not in the ways that he expected.

Reverend Henry Givens

Rev. Givens, an ex-evangelist who used to be involved with the KKK, is Imperial Grand Wizard and founder of the Knights of Nordica. He believes in the supremacy of the white race and is actually one of the most sincere characters in the novel because he acts on his real, albeit bigoted, beliefs. Many other characters feel one way and act another, but even when Givens learns of his own nonwhite ancestry, he is heartbroken because he still believes in white supremacy and can no longer belong to the dominant side.

Givens is also an uneducated and ignorant man. He is easily impressed with Matthew's fake credentials, though he does not even know what an anthropologist does, and when he speaks on national radio for an hour, he manages to say only lies. When Givens is nominated as presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, the novel makes a subtle comment on the state of politics in the United States. A presidential candidate should, of course, be well spoken and in touch with his party's beliefs, but Givens can only speak in vague sentences, and many of his party's members do not even want him to run as their candidate in the first place. Givens, in the end, is controlled by Matthew, and he is happy with that as long as the Knights of Nordica and its money stay in his family.

Bunny Brown

Bunny, a short and plump black man, has been Max's friend since World War I when they both served in France. When the novel begins, he works as a teller in the Douglass Bank. He undergoes Crookman's treatment and reappears in Atlanta where Matthew gives him a job as his assistant. Bunny is always supportive of his friend and even has the Givens' house burned down to help out Matthew.



Helen Givens

Helen is the beautiful daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Givens. She is not a very intelligent girl, though she believes herself to be civilized. Really, she is superficial and shallow. She is also the girl who refuses to dance with Max at the Honky Tonk Club. Ironically, Matthew wins her hand as a white man, and the two marry. For much of the novel, Helen remains prejudiced against blacks, but at the end, she has a change of heart when she realizes that her own ancestry is multiracial and that her husband's race is less important than the family they create together.

Mrs. Givens

Mrs. Givens is Rev. Givens's wife. She is a hypocritical woman who uses the Lord's name in vain, smokes, is greedy, lies, and hates black people. She believes that she is a true Christian, though, and does not take well to the release of Buggerie's genealogical data.

Hank Johnson

Hank Johnson is a former "Numbers" banker who funded Crookman's studies in Germany and is now an important player in Black-No-More, particularly when it comes to shutting down legislature bills that would seek to shut down Crookman's company. Before being involved in gambling, he had been on a Carolina chain gang for two years, and he speaks with a much thicker accent than Chuck Foster.

Chuck Foster

Chuck Foster is a Harlem real estate realtor who funded Dr. Crookman's studies in Germany. There were early rumors about his deceptive business practices, and he has worked to rid his reputation of those bad associations. Unlike Hank Johnson, Foster does not like the new fame that Crookman's success has brought to his life.

Santop Licorice

Santop Licorice is the head of the Back-to-Africa Society which is no longer flourishing thanks to Black-No-More. He has never been to Africa himself, though his Society's mission is to get black Americans to move to Africa. He is frequently in trouble for fraud, dislikes Dr. Beard, and works for the Knights of Nordica when he runs out money.

Dr. Shakespeare Agamemnon Beard

Dr. Beard is the founder of the National Social Equality League. He lives a secluded life and is out of touch with the black Americans whom his organization supposedly seeks



to help. He speaks in passive and abstract language, and his sentences are full of references to ancient history and literature. Interestingly, Schuyler uses Dr. Beard to portray W.E.B. Du Bois.

Dr. Napoleon Wellington Jackson

Dr. Jackson is Dr. Beard's secretary whose primary job is to write long, angry letters that demand more than can ever be accomplished and to give speeches to primarily older white women who donate money to the League. Beard makes him chairman of the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity.

Walter Williams

Walter Williams is a research expert on the South and a member of the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity. He is a heavy-set white man who calls himself black because his grandfather was biracial. After nearly all the blacks undergo Black-No-More's treatment, he decides to call himself white. Eventually, he works for the Republican Party.

Dr. Joseph Bonds

Dr. Joseph Bonds is in charge of the Negro Data League which collects data to prove that more money is needed to collect data and is a member of the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity. He ends up as a white waiter in Atlanta and, after burning the Givens' home down with Licorice, goes to work for the Republican Party.

Mrs. Blandish/Madame Sisseretta Blandish/Mrs. Sari Blandine

Mrs. Blandish is Max's landlady in Harlem. She looks down on Max for becoming white, and her hair-straightening shop, where she is known as Madame Sisseretta Blandish, goes out of business because of Black-No-More. Eventually, as Mrs. Sari Blandine, she patents Blandine's Egyptienne Stain when looking darker becomes socially-preferred and fashionable.

Walter Brybe

Walter Brybe is the United States Attorney General under President Goosie, and he rejects the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity's call to shut down Black-No-More.



Gorman Gay

Gorman Gay is the National Chairman of the Republican National Committee and a friend of Attorney General Brybe.

Mr. Arthur Snobbcraft

Mr. Snobbcraft is president of the Anglo-Saxon Association of America. He believes in white racial purity and Anglo-Saxon supremacy, and he is hesitant to join forces with the Knights of Nordica because of its poor members. He also commissions Dr. Buggerie to gather genealogical data behind Matthew's back.

Dr. Samuel Buggerie

Dr. Buggerie is the statistician who conducts a nationwide investigation of family trees for the Anglo-Saxon Association of America. He is also the author of several well-known books that only a handful of people have ever read.

President Harold Goosie

President Goosie is the Republican President of the United States when the book begins and is reelected in 1936 after the Republican leak of Buggerie's genealogical data.

Senator Rufus Kretin

Senator Kretin is a Democratic senator from Georgia who approaches Rev. Givens and Matthew to see if they can stop the growing Republican vote in the South.

Sandol

Sandol is the black Senegalese man whom Crookman turns white. He is exhibited as evidence of Crookman's success at the initial press conference at the Phyllis Wheatley Hotel.

Mr. Blickdoff

Mr. Blickdoff is a co-owner of the Paradise Mill in South Carolina who pays off Matthew to prevent a worker strike.



Mr. Hortzenboff

Mr. Hortzenboff is a co-owner of the Paradise Mill in South Carolina who pays off Matthew to prevent a worker strike.

Swanson

Swanson is the chairman of the strike movement in Paradise, South Carolina. Matthew has secret operatives spread rumors that Swanson used to be black which drives him out of town.

Dr. Broker

Dr. Broker is the physician who delivers Helen's baby.

Madeline Scranton

Madeline Scranton is a black woman from Georgia who sends a telegram announcing the election results to Bunny in Mexico.

Frazier

Frazier is Snobbcraft's employee and aviator who is killed when the plane crashes in Happy Hill, Mississippi.

Rev. Alex McPhule

Rev. McPhule starts a new church called True Faith Christ Lovers' Church in Happy Hill, Mississippi, and leads a revival there on the day that Snobbcraft's plane crashes.

Minnie

Minnie is Max's ex-girlfriend. He believes that she broke up with him because he is black.

Boogie

Boogie is a friend of Max and Bunny. Max stops by his place the first night after he becomes white.

Old Bob

Old Bob is the doorkeeper at Boogie's place. He tells Max to go away when he knocks the first night after he becomes white.



Objects/Places

The Honky Tonk Club

The Honky Tonk Club is the Harlem club where Max and Bunny spend their New Years Eve as black men.

Crookman Sanitarium

A Crookman Sanitarium is where doctors administer the treatment that turns a person white. The first Crookman Sanitarium opens in Harlem, and after that, they open all over the country.

Black-No-More, Incorporated

Black-No-More, Incorporated is the name of Crookman's business. He runs it with Hank Johnson and Chuck Foster.

The Scimitar

The Scimitar is the New York newspaper that first publishes Max's story and photograph.

The Knights of Nordica

The Knights of Nordica is a white supremacist militant organization founded and run by Rev. Givens. Its members are made up of mostly poor white Southerners.

National Social Equality League

The National Social Equality League, run by Dr. Beard, is a militant organization designed to protect and promote the rights of black Americans. Really, though, its leaders use its funds to live wealthy lives.

Back-to-Africa Society

The Back-to-Africa Society, run by Santop Licorice, is designed to convince black Americans to move to Africa, but really, Licorice uses its funds for personal use and to pay for fraud lawsuits filed against him.



Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity

The Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity is formed by Dr. Beard in response to Black-No-More's success and is designed to bring together all the black leaders who normally refuse to meet.

Paradise, South Carolina

Paradise is the town where mill workers are planning a strike until Matthew plants secretive operatives among the workers and distracts them with issues of racial superiority.

The Anglo-Saxon Association of America

The Anglo-Saxon Association of America is a white supremacist organization headquartered in Richmond, Virginia. The Association claims that it can trace its members ancestry back almost two hundred years, and its leaders and members believe that Anglo-Saxons should maintain leadership in America. Mr. Snobbcraft is president of the Association.

Happy Hill, Mississippi

Happy Hill, Mississippi, is the town nearest to where Snobbcraft and Buggerie's plane goes down and the location of Rev. McPhule's revival.

True Faith Christ Lovers' Church

True Faith Christ Lovers' Church is the church started by Rev. McPhule. It holds the Election Day revival which Snobbcraft and Buggerie come across.



Themes

Racism

In a novel explicitly about race and America's race problem, racism is an important and central theme here. There are two key racist organizations in the book, the Knights of Nordica and the Anglo-Saxon Association of America, and both are white supremacist groups that believe that black people are not equal to white people and that black and white people should not marry because such marriages result in biracial children who make the white race less pure. It is the ultimate irony that Dr. Buggerie's genealogical data reveals that so many of the leaders and members of these organizations have nonwhite ancestries themselves. According to their own racist logic, they can no longer consider themselves superior to anyone.

Throughout the novel, racism is also a tool that is used to keep poor white Southerners distracted. Businesses actually pay Matthew to keep lower class laborers focused on the issue of race so that the workers do not strike or form unions. This allows the businesses to keep cheap labor and, in effect, keeps the workers poor and hopeless. In Paradise, South Carolina, for example, Matthew's secret operatives turn the mill workers against each other by suggesting that certain workers used to be black. The workers lose the desire to strike and go back to their poverty-stricken lives. When racism is used as a tool to control people, it actually furthers the spread of racism, making it that much harder to end. This is ironic considering that Matthew hates racism but actually helps it to continue to thrive.

The theme of racism also relates to Dr. Crookman's company, Black-No-More, and to his whitening treatment itself. Dr. Crookman's idea that eliminating blackness will solve the racial problems that plague the United States suggests that equality should be achieved through homogenization, or making everyone the same. Of course, Crookman does not offer a treatment that would make whites black, and so his treatment plays into the dominant and racist idea that being white is naturally better than being black. Even his Harlem sanitarium's vertical sign implies this: at the bottom of the sign is a black face, and an arrow leads to the top where there is a white face. To become white is to move up. Of course, this novel is a satire, and so Crookman's ideas are meant to make the reader realize the racial imbalance of society.

Finally, at the end of the novel, there is a shift in society, and those with too-white skin began to experience discrimination. This marks a new form of racism and also suggests the inevitable presence of racism in the United States. The novel suggests that if there were no more black people, a new group would assume the inferior status to a dominant group. According to this logic, there is nothing set about who is deemed inferior or superior, but it does suggest that racism is an abiding feature of society.



Hypocrisy

Nearly every group that is brought up in the novel displays some form of hypocritical behavior, in which a group pretends to have some principle or belief that is not actually practiced. Because of that, the novel suggests that hypocrisy is one of the main problems in the United States, particularly when it comes to problems of race. The white supremacist groups that preach their superiority over blacks are perhaps most obviously hypocritical because, it turns out, they themselves have nonwhite ancestry. Dr. Buggerie's genealogical data reveals that the vast majority of people in the country have multiracial family trees, and so the whole idea of pitting black against white is hypocritical because the average American falls in the middle of that racial division.

The novel does not stop with its criticism of obviously racist organizations. The black militant groups and interest groups that are designed to advance equality and to guarantee the rights of black Americans are also marred by hypocrisy. Officials at the National Social Equality League become excited when they hear about a lynching, Dr. Beard is unfamiliar with the suffering of most black Americans, Dr. Joseph Bond's Negro Data League collects data just to prove it needs to collect more data, and Santop Licorice tries to convince black Americans to move to Africa when he himself has never even been. So too these leaders claim to work for the same cause, but most of them will not associate with another, and Licorice goes so far as to attack other organizations as if they were in competition with his own. While these leaders and organizations could be working together in solidarity, they spend most of their time using donated money for personal use and thus accomplish little. In a satire, of course, this is meant to remind the reader how much they could accomplish if they actually worked together for a good and decent cause.

The Ignorance of the Public

Through its use of satire, the novel points out again and again how ignorant the majority of people are when it comes to telling truth from lies and when it comes to thinking for oneself. When Matthew is preparing to give his first speech in front of the members of the Knights of Nordica, for example, he realizes that they are not so different from the people he has seen at black church gatherings. This comforts him, but it is ironic that the one similarity Matthew sees between whites and blacks is their stupidity and their willingness to believe whatever they are told. In a novel about a society divided by race, it is not a compliment that the one uniting factor is ignorance.

Elsewhere in the novel, Rev. Givens gives an hour-long speech on national radio and manages to exclusively tell lies. It would seem that this would elicit complaints from listeners, but instead, the radio station receives positive publicity and support, indicating that people even enjoy complete nonsense. Rev. Givens was specifically speaking about why Black-No-More should be closed, and because his radio broadcast achieved so much attention, President Goosie establishes a commission to look into the Black-No-More matter. The commission investigates and publishes a report, and only nine



people in the United States read it. What was such an important and politicized issue for so many people is, just two months later, unimportant or at least not worth reading about. This indicates the fickleness of the public and also that perhaps the issue was never that important to people. Rather, it was a popular stance to take.

There are many more instances of the general public's ignorance throughout the novel, and satire and irony are particularly effective tools for revealing those moments subtly and often hilariously because they allow the reader to understand what the characters do not. For example, Dr. Buggerie's book, called *The Fluctuation of the Sizes of Left Feet among the Assyrians during the Ninth Century before Christ*, is apparently well-known, but of all the reviews that it received, only one reviewer actually read the book. It appears, then, that the public simply reads the title, thinks that the book sounds smart, and decides that it is without actually reading the book. Really, even the title reveals that the author uses many words when fewer would do just as well, and he is also writing about feet sizes, hardly an exciting or pressing topic. Again and again, the novel points out how quickly people can be swept up in a popular and even foolish opinion when they do not stop to think for themselves.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in the novel is third person omniscient, though the narrator often sticks with one particular character's point of view for the course of a chapter, allowing the point of view occasionally to feel like third person limited. For example, in the first chapter, the reader is privy to Max's point of view. The reader sees Max watch the beautiful girl come into the Honky Tonk Club but the reader does not know how the girl, Helen, views Max other than by what she says to him. In chapter three, however the reader is able to learn the private thoughts of Dr. Crookman, Chuck Foster, and Hank Johnson, and so the omniscient quality of the narration is more apparent there.

The narrator is a reliable narrator in the sense that he is an observer of the scene and exists outside the consciousness of any one character. The narrator here is commanding, providing helpful physical details so that the reader knows where each chapter is located and also when each chapter is occurring, since the novel takes place over many years. The narrator's voice is complicated by the fact that this novel is a satire, though. The reader has to read the text differently than a more straightforwardly serious novel, looking for irony or wit or critique in the characters' names, in book titles, in dialogue, and in actions. This does require work on the part of the reader, but it also comes with a sense of reward. In a satire, the reader is able understand what the characters do not but not by being directly told; rather, the author allows the reader to come to those understandings by recognizing discrepancies and humorous moments as part of a larger social and cultural critique.

Setting

The novel is set in the United States in the 1930s. The novel begins in 1933, though it was published in 1931. At the time it was written, then, the novel was actually set in the future and served as a satirical prediction of what might happen if a technology like Crookman's was developed.

Chapter one begins in Harlem, which is located in New York City. Here, Harlem is a primarily black neighborhood that white Americans like Helen might visit for New Years Eve, but only briefly and only at night. In the novel, neighborhoods are segregated by race because that was what was expected at the time. After Crookman's sanitarium opens, more and more black Americans leave Harlem, and eventually, when Bunnie comes back to look for Santop Licorice, the only blacks left in Harlem are those there to visit the sanitarium and become white.

The novel is also set in Atlanta, Georgia, where Max goes to become Matthew after he receives Crookman's treatment. While New York was a very racially segregated town, there seems to be even more racial tension in the South. For example, both white



supremacist groups in the novel are headquartered in the South. In general, though, each chapter moves us in time and place. Other locations include Los Angeles; the National Social Equality League's inner offices; Paradise, South Carolina, where the mill workers threaten a strike; and in Happy Hill, Mississippi, where Mr. Snobbcraft and Dr. Buggerie are lynched.

Language and Meaning

In general, the language of the novel is quite clear, and there is no literal confusion as to what is happening. The narration is written in a straightforward expository style, though its dialogue does attempt to mimic the accents or speech habits of different characters, which helps to differentiate and describe those characters. Hank Johnson, for example, is quoted as saying, "Just talkin' to th' man this mornin'" (pp. 30). Because the last letters of certain words are left off, the reader can sound out the dialogue and better hear how Hank sounds. Chuck Foster, on the other hand, speaks more clearly, and so his dialogue is spelled out according to Standard English.

It is important to remember that the novel was published in 1931, and so sometimes the language can sound dated or perhaps a term will need to be looked up. The novel also contains words that are and were considered offensive, like "nigger," but that might help to accurately portray instances of racism. There are also words in the novel that were perhaps acceptable at the time, like "Negro," that are no longer acceptable. All of this requires that the reader read carefully and thoughtfully and keep the novel's historical quality in mind.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirteen unnamed chapters, which are usually ten to twelve pages in length, though chapters five and thirteen are significantly longer. The novel's plot follows many different characters and groups, including Max/Matthew, Mrs. Blandish, Dr. Beard and the Committee for the Preservation of Negro Racial Integrity, Dr. Crookman and his associates, the Givens, Mr. Snobbcraft and Dr. Buggerie, and Rev. McPhule, and so the main characters followed switch by chapter. This helps to keep the characters' stories straight and also to keep the reader's interest because each new chapter changes location and subject matter. So too, when a chapter that follows Max, for example, ends and the next chapter picks up with Dr. Crookman, the reader still feels the tension of Max's story, and that creates an enjoyable suspense. Despite the many characters the novel contains, the storylines always interact with one another, and the sense of how connected these various people and groups are is very clear at the novel's end.

The novel moves linearly through these various characters' lives and spans multiple years, from 1933 through 1936. The last four pages of the novel jump ahead to the year 1940. That the novel covers multiple years requires significant jumps in time to take place, and sometimes the narrator skips whole months. This is not distracting because

the narrator also keeps the reader grounded as to where in time the story is taking place.



Quotes

"No wonder she had turned him down. Up here trying to get a thrill in the Black Belt but a thrill from observation instead of contact."

Chap. 1, pp. 8

"Why not be the first Negro to try it out? Sure, it was a chance, but think of getting white in three days! No more jim crow. No more insults. As a white man he could go anywhere, be anything he wanted to be, do most anything he wanted to do, be a free man at last...and probably be able to meet the girl from Atlanta. What a vision!"

Chap. 1, pp. 10

"It thrilled him to feel that he was now indistinguishable from nine-tenths of the people of the United States; one of the great majority. Ah, it was good not to be a Negro any longer!"

Chap. 2, pp. 19

"The Negroes, it seemed to him, were much gayer, enjoyed themselves more deeply and yet they were more restrained, actually more refined. Even their dancing was different. They followed the rhythm accurately, effortlessly and with easy grace; these lumbering couples, out of step half the time and working as strenuously as stevedores emptying the bowels of a freighter, were noisy, awkward, inelegant."

Chap. 2, pp. 22-23

"He saw in his great discovery the solution to the most annoying problem in American life. Obviously, he reasoned, if there were no Negroes, there could be no Negro problem. Without a Negro problem, Americans could concentrate their attention on something constructive."

Chap. 3, pp. 35

"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 the Negroes, except that they were uniformly less courteous and less interesting."

Chap. 4, pp. 43

"They began to envision the time when they would no longer be able for the sake of the Negro race to suffer the hardships of lunching on canvasback duck at the Urban Club surrounded by the white dilettante, endure the perils of first-class Transatlantic passage to stage Save-Dear-Africa Conferences or undergo the excruciating torture of rolling back and forth across the United States in drawing-rooms to hear each lecture on the Negro problem."

Chap. 5, pp. 64

"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 downtrodden black workers with whose lives he was totally and thankfully unfamiliar."

Chap. 5, pp. 65

"Matthew, in 14-point, one-syllable word editorials painted terrifying pictures of the menace confronting white supremacy and the utter necessity of crushing it. Very cleverly he linked up the Pope, the Yellow Peril, the Alien Invasion and Foreign Entanglements with Black-No-More as devices of the Devil. He wrote with such blunt sincerity that sometimes he almost persuaded himself that it was all true."

Chap. 6, pp. 79

"There were no rumors of strikes. The working people were far more interested in what they considered, or were told was, the larger issue of race. It did not matter that they had to send their children into the mills to augment the family wage; that they were always sickly and that their death rate was high. What mattered such little things when the very foundation of civilization, white supremacy, was threatened?"

Chap. 7, pp. 100

"Bunny, I've learned something on this job, and that is that hatred and prejudice always go over big."

Chap. 8, pp. 106

"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."

Chap. 12, pp. 154

"But Givens was greatly depressed, much more so than the others. He had really believed all that he had preached about white supremacy, race purity and the menace of the alien, the Catholic, the Modernist and the Jew. He had always been sincere in his prejudices."

Chap. 12, pp. 156

"Sage old fellows frequently remarked between expectorations of tobacco juice that the only Negro problem in Happy Hill was the difficulty of getting hold of a sufficient number of the Sons or Daughters or Ham to lighten the dullness of the place."

Chap. 13, pp. 165

"What was the world coming to, if the blacks were whiter than the whites?"

Chap. 13, pp. 177

"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."

Chap. 13, pp. 180



Topics for Discussion

Discuss how satire functions in the novel. What are the different ways that the author uses satire? How does satire allow the author to comment on racial problems, and what does satire require of a reader?

Compare and contrast the National Social Equality League and the Knights of Nordica. What are the principle beliefs of the two groups, and do the groups' actions reflect those beliefs? What are the groups' members like? What are the groups' leaders like? Do you find any similarities between them?

Discuss Matthew as a protagonist and an antihero. Is he a worthy main character, and why do you think Schuyler chose him as the main character?

Predict what might happen to Matthew and Bunny after they escape from the United States to Mexico. Based on their previous actions, what will they do, and will they be happy? How will Madeline Scranton fit into this?

Discuss Black-No-More's treatment. Why do people in the novel choose to become white? What is gained for those who undergo the treatment and what is lost? What are the broader implications of changing the racial identity of a whole population of people?

The end of the novel jumps ahead four years to a time when people with particularly pale skin are facing discrimination. Why does Schuyler choose to end on this note, and how does this ending influence the rest of the novel?

Is this novel still relevant to twenty-first century American readers? What similarities are there between society today and the 1930s society about which Schuyler is writing?