



Absurdity of the Color Line in George Schuyler's *Black No More*¹

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Introduction

A large part of American history involves the struggle of ethnic groups against the mainstream population in order to obtain equality and respect. In his satirical novel, *Black No More*, George Schuyler works out the theme of racial superiority and absurdity, taking as standpoint the human prejudices associated with the color of the skin as one of the prominent and common traits to distinguish between the races. He highlights some of the problems created by the color-line, and he specifically throws light upon the absurdity of racial considerations.²

This article explores the contradictions and paradoxes associated with racial preconceptions, namely the assumption of racial hierarchy through George Schuyler's *Black No More*. Our general purpose is to show that all individuals possess the same fundamental nature. The central hypothesis is that the identification of the individual by color or race is not but a myth, a fallacy. Thus, the articulation of this study is centered on the following question: How does George Schuyler reveal the absurdity that lies beneath the mask of racial superiority? In other words, how does Schuyler make use of the theme of absurdity associated with the color prejudice?

On the standpoint that the prevailing distinguishing characteristic between the races is the skin color, our investigation will take us to the analysis of the paradoxes and contradictions associated with this theoretical and social construction. In order to grasp these paradoxes and contradictions, the ultimate form of analysis in this study is the dialectic that enables us to uncover the illusion of black inferiority, as well as the illusion of white superiority. Thus, in the present article, the absurdity arising from the confrontation between Whites and Blacks is essentially structured according to the

¹ George Schuyler, *Black No More*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1971.

² "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea," W. E. B. Du Bois foretold about the racial issue.



following dialectical framework: (1) opposition between whiteness and blackness, (2) racial identity crisis, (3) resolution of the crisis.

I – Opposition Between Whiteness and Blackness

Schuyler's *Black No More* embodies an inherent conflict that gets things moving. It presents us with two opposing worlds, where racial discrimination brings opposition between Whites and Blacks. In other words, there is an opposition between whiteness and blackness, and the skin color is the basic racial aspect that people use to construct their identity. As a result of this confrontation or black/white dialectics, blacks tend to deny their blackness.

1 – Rejection of Blackness

Color distinction is a key matter in *Black No More*. The oppositions set up between Whites and Blacks are based on the complexion, the skin color that is presented as the obvious obstacle to the black's becoming the white man's equal. Thus the characters evolve in a polarized society, where there is a constant struggle between Blacks and the "superior" Whites. Actually, Blacks are culturally dominated by Whites and they feel rejected as second class citizens. In response, they tend to reject or deny their blackness. This attitude suggests their racial low self-esteem or inferiority complex.

The inferiority complex is revealed through a process of self-evaluation of black characters. To begin with, the black inferiority feeling is introduced in the novel through black men's rejection of women of dark complexion. Black men are only attracted by women with light complexion. Max Disher, the protagonist of the novel, and his friend Bunny Brown prefer yellow women. It is their common weakness, according to the narrator: "The two had in common a weakness rather prevalent among Aframerican bucks: they preferred yellow women," (p.19) or the ofay girls. Compared to dark-skinned women, those women were more difficult to conquer and to be kept: "It was so hard to hold them. They were so sought after that one almost required a million dollars to keep them out of the clutches of one's rivals" (p.19).

The novel opens with Max complaining about what according to him, is wrong with "yallah women". In fact, one of such girls has just deserted him despite all the financial efforts he made to retain her: "Stuck on her color, that's what was the matter



with her!” (p.17). Whatever their defects, “yallah women” are Max and Bunny’s predilection and they are absolutely more valued than women of dark complexion who are despicably addressed as “coal,” referring to their skin color.

Indeed, in their sexual adventures, women of brighter complexion are the ones both Max and Bunny rate most highly. They find them more attractive, and when Max sets his eyes on a white young girl in a night club, he is irresistibly drawn to her: “The fair beauty had hypnotized him. He felt that he would give anything for just one dance with her. Once around the floor with her slim waist in his arm would be like an eternity in heaven” (p.20). Max and Bunny consider it a feat to go steady with a “yaller”. They certainly have internalized negative attitudes about black women and also about themselves. Their attitudes suggest contempt and dissatisfaction with themselves.

Thus, absurdity in the novel arises out of the polarity between blackness and whiteness, and more precisely out of Blacks’ inferiority complex. This inferiority complex developed by Blacks in the novel is opposed to Whites’ superiority complex. A striking instance of this superiority feeling or attitude toward Blacks is Helen’s reaction when Max tries to court her. Helen, out of her “superior stance” as a white woman, is deeply prejudiced against Blacks and turns down Max’s invitation to dance with her. She definitely told him in a frigid manner: “No, I never dance with niggers!” (p.23) It is no wonder this reply hurts Max and affects his self-esteem, for just before his attempt to seduce Helen, he was boasting his sexual capacities with his friend Bunny Brown.

Indeed, the white superiority feeling seems to have a psychological impact on Blacks. “Whiteness” is posited as the norm, the American physical trait that is most highly valued. White is held as the standard of beauty. It is out of this consideration that Blacks are urged to whiteness. In Blacks, we sense the feeling of inferiority that is embedded in Max and Bunny’s attitudes towards women. They prefer women of white or fair skin. Going steady with a woman of fair skin or a white woman is for them a great success, a feat that provides them pride and satisfaction. Having “white” partners allows them to prove that they are also “men” as they always feel frustrated by the white society. Yet, this quest of self-assertion entails a self-denial; an equation that is clearly suggested through Blacks’ rush for a racial metamorphosis.



There are two stages of racial metamorphosis in *Black No More*. The first stage consists in the urge to whiteness that is manifested in the use of skin “lightners” and hair “straightners”. In their attempt to reject anything that physically characterizes them, they feel it necessary to adjust to the white physical characteristics which society values. That is why they regularly spend time and money in trying to straighten their hair and bleach their skin color with some manufactured products.

Max Disher, Bunny Brown and a great deal of Blacks, including women in the novel, try to conceal their physical traits by using “beauty” products to become brown or less black so as to adjust to whites’ physical characteristics; as white stands as the ideal standard of beauty. Actually, they want to look different from the members of their racial group that is looked down by the American society. In fact, the historical background of the novel can shed light on the characters drawn by Schuyler. Published in 1931, the novel is a satire of the American society during a specific period of the black American cultural history known as the Harlem Renaissance³.

Thus, Blacks indulge in a process of self-denial and affirmation. This process consists in rejecting their physical traits and affirming or promoting whites’ values. In so doing, they deny their “nominal identity”, for a “self-affirmed identity”. There is a distinction between the “nominal” and the “self-affirmed” identities, according to Christopher A. Charles who argues that:

We are all nominated or defined by others and placed in a category based on physical characteristics. This is nominal identity. On the other hand, we all define and affirm ourselves within the categories that are of importance in our lives. This is self-affirmed identity. It should be noted that people may or may not choose to affirm themselves in their nominal identity category.⁴

In the course of the novel, this process of whitening or new identification with the “beauty” products can be considered as a partial solution to the race problem. The process reaches its peak when Dr Crookman, a Negro physician, discovered a medicine that could turn the black skin color into white. Then, almost all the Blacks rushed to his sanatoriums in order to turn white.

³ The Harlem Renaissance: a literary and cultural explosion of black talent that flourished during the 1920s. Those years witnessed black Americans’ attempts to integrate mainstream; that is the white culture.

⁴ Christopher A. D. Charles, “Skin Bleaching, Self-Hate and Black Identity in Jamaica”, in *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 6 Jul., 2003, p.713.



As George Schuyler writes in the Preface to his novel, “With America’s constant reiteration of the superiority of whiteness, the avid search on the part of the black masses for some key to chromatic perfection is easily understood (p.7). Dr Crookman’s medical discovery is a revolution, a perfect solution to the race matter, for he is convinced that:

If there were no Negroes, there could be no Negro problem. Without a Negro problem, Americans could concentrate their attention on something constructive. Through his efforts and the activities of Black-No-More, Incorporated, it would be possible to do what agitation, education and legislation had failed to do (pp.54-55).

The chromatic change is supposed to bring forth a great deal of life opportunities so far denied to people of former black skin. Suppressing the color barrier between Blacks and Whites, it will open the gate of social, economic and political opportunities to Blacks. Some of these opportunities denied to Blacks on account of their skin color are stated by Max when he first heard about Dr Crookman’s chromatic solution to the American race problem. Indeed, he felt very excited and enthusiastic for the following reasons: “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!” (p.26) Seemingly, the chromatic solution can be posited for Blacks as a survival strategy.

As a matter of fact, the chromatic solution resembles a death trial for its patients who need it as the ultimate remedy to their “disease”, the race problem. The process of the metamorphosis is like a frightening process of initiation. Max, the first Black to go through that experience is here presented: “...he entered the door of the mysterious chamber. He quailed as he saw the formidable apparatus of sparkling nickel. It resembled a cross between a dentist’s chair and an electric chair” (p.34). The experience is more than frightening, yet the final objective is more important and worthwhile, for it leads to deliverance and freedom to Blacks who have been suffering racial ills.

When Max gets out of the room of the sanitarium, he has changed and is henceforth full of joy and good dreams:

White at last! Gone was the smooth brown complexion. Gone were the slightly full lips and Ethiopian nose. Gone was the nappy hair that he had straightened so meticulously ever since the kink-no more lotions first wrenched Aframericans from the tyranny and torture of the comb. There would be no more expenditure



for skin whiteners; no more discrimination; no more obstacles in his path. He was free! The world was his oyster and he had the open sesame of a pork-colored skin! (p.35)

The experience allows Max to enter a new world, the white privileged world. When Max became white, he also became invisible as well as visible. He could not be recognized by his former black acquaintances, so for them, he is invisible. “He saw many persons whom he knew but none of them recognized him. 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!” (p.36).

On the other hand, Max’s self-affirmed identity makes him visible in the white society. With Dr Crookman’s extraordinary remedy, there is no more physical barrier between him and the white world, a world where he could experience freedom, equality, respect, happiness, etc., all that was denied to him in his ex-world. Nevertheless, the ghost of his former existence still hunts him, as when he begrudged when the journalist of *The Scimitar* put his picture over the front of their journal. “He had undergone the tortures of Doc Crookman’s devilish machine in order to escape the consciousness of a dark skin and now he was being made conspicuous because he had once had a dark skin! Could one never escape the plagued race problem?” (p.39)

Almost half of the black population has turned white, and beyond the fact that this exodus to the white race testifies their inferiority complex, this solution becomes the means for Blacks to assert an identity equal to whites; and it is supposed to resolve the racial matter; the resolution of the conflict between Whites and Blacks, as it is supposed to bring uniqueness, sameness. Yet, paradoxically enough, Blacks still fall victims of new ordeals. In other words, the denial of their blackness gives rise to conflicts within themselves and also within the black community.

2 – Internal Contradictions: the Rise of Inner Conflicts

The conflicts here are more internal than interracial. On the one hand, the inner conflicts arise from a misfit; that is the maladjustment to the white ways. Max’s feeling after his metamorphosis is an illustration. Indeed, Max does not feel quite at home with the white world, especially anywhere, where Blacks are excluded:



Despite his happiness Max found it pretty dull. There was something lacking in these ofay places of amusement or else there was something present that one didn't find in the black-and-tan resorts in Harlem. The joy and abandon here was obviously forced. Patrons went to extremes to show each other they were having a wonderful time. It was so strained and quite unlike anything to which he had been accustomed. The Negroes, it seemed to him, were much gayer, enjoyed themselves more deeply and yet they were more restrained, actually more refined. (...) He felt a momentary pang of mingled disgust, disillusionment and nostalgia. But it was only momentary (p.40).

It didn't take him long to realize that the white world is not but a faked and superficial world, a world of pretences, of artificiality, and pure convention. He is then seized with nostalgia of his original life. On account of his white color, which is a mask, Max is obliged to keep distance from the black world. Conversely, Max feels at home among black folks. He is irresistibly attracted by the black world, even though his new skin color requires that he keep distant from it: "...Their jests, scraps of conversation and lusty laughter all seemed like heavenly music. Momentarily he felt a disposition to stay among them, to share again their troubles which they seemed always to bear with a lightness that was yet not indifference" (p.46). So from time to time, he would furtively go to the black vicinity to experience the authentic life, the authentic world:

Often when the desire for the happy-go-lucky, jovial good-fellowship of the Negroes came upon him strongly, he would go down to Auburn Avenue and stroll around the vicinity, looking at the dark folk and listening to their conversation and banter. But no one down there wanted him around. He was a white man and thus suspect. (...) There was nothing left for him except the hard, materialistic, grasping, inbred society of the whites (p.63).

Thus, the chromatic solution that apparently sets Blacks free also brings estrangement and isolation to them. Blacks' external adjustment to the white characteristics brings them social opportunities, yet they suffer from a sort of internal maladjustment. So, passing across the color line through the metamorphosis of the skin complexion is a mere illusion. Actually, it does not bring freedom to Blacks. It rather suspends them in a strange and intermediary world.

Beside this internal conflict that occurs within the individual, there are other sources of conflict that hold from the problems initiated by the change within the "former black community". One of these contradictions is related to the activities of Blacks who were leaders of black institutions and of organizations specialized in the



struggle for Blacks' civil rights. For those people, the Negro problem has so far been a source of business, and the chromatic solution constitutes a menace:

Meanwhile, Negro society was in turmoil and chaos. The colored folk, in straining every nerve to get the Black-No-More treatment, had forgotten all loyalties, affiliations and responsibilities. No longer did they flock to the churches on Sundays or pay dues in their numerous fraternal organizations. They had stop giving anything to the Anti-Lynching campaign. Santop Licorice, head of the once-flourishing Back-To-Africa Society, was daily raising his stentorian voice in denunciation of the race for deserting his organization (Pp.85-86).

Another instance in the same perspective is the case of Mrs Blandish, the Vice-President of the American Race Pride League, yet, a promoter of hair straightening and skin lightening. Her commercial activities become irrelevant, for all the Blacks are now becoming white. When the new "white" Max introduced himself to her, she could not but frown upon his new identity: "Contrasting emotions played over her face, for Mrs. Blandish was known in the business world as Mme. Sisseretta Blandish, the beauty specialist, who owned the swellest hair straightening parlor in Harlem" (p.47). She even voiced her disappointment: "Well, I suppose you're going downtown to live, now. I always said niggers didn't really have any race pride" (p.47).

Therefore, to a large extent, Dr Crookman's hypothesis: "If there were no Negroes, there could be no Negro problem," (P.54) proves to be a naïve thought. If originally, his discovery is meant to save the black race, one can mention that his activities are also harmful and not welcomed by all the Blacks. For those people, the cure seems to be more pernicious than the disease. Instead of being a remedy, the chromatic solution brought about internal contradictions centered on personal and materialist interests, thus revealing human's absurd condition or nature. This absurdity is also epidemic in Whites' reactionary attitudes to the chromatic solution to the race problem.

II – The Racial Identity Crisis: an Epidemic of Paradoxes

"The black race," the narrator reports from one of the newspaper editorials, "from one end of the country to the other has in two short weeks gone completely crazy over the prospect of getting white. Day by day we see the color line which we have so laboriously established being rapidly destroyed" (p.50). And this fact got people of former white skin infuriated. For them, the solution to the race problem becomes a



serious threat to the white race. This reactionary attitude can easily be understood if we consider the following statement by Winthrop D. Jordan about what he calls the white man's mental "pathology": "For Europeans in general," he argues, "the Negro's blackness afforded a certain happiness. No one was lighter than they, a fact that when joined to a feeling of cultural superiority could produce the most extraordinary thoughts in the minds of Europeans."⁵

What is at stake is identity, and the disappearance of the color line paradoxically entails an identity crisis in the prevailing racist society:

The entire nation became alarmed. Hundreds of thousands of people, North and South, flocked into the Knights of Nordica. The real white people were panic-stricken, especially in Dixie. There was no way, apparently, of telling a real Caucasian from an imitation one. Every stranger was viewed with suspicion, which had a very salutary effect on the standard of sex morality in the United States (p.118).

Thus, Dr Crookman's activities create a general disorder or confusion, an identity crisis among white people. The problem is one can no longer tell a true White from a whitened Black. Every stranger is regarded with suspicion, as a mechanic told one of his fellow: "It's gittin' so yuh can't tell who's who." (p.81). Suspicion reaches its high peak, and it became a major social handicap:

Rumors continued to fill the air. People were always asking each other embarrassing questions about birth and blood. Fights became more frequent. Large numbers of the workers, being of southern birth, were unable to disprove charges of possessing Negro ancestry, and so were forced to leave the vicinity (p.130).

The discriminatory social policy based on the skin color is now difficult to implement. Without this social restrictive policy, the white population became vulnerable. In fact, as the white population increased, there was a sort of overpopulation that led to social, economic and political difficulties. These difficulties led in turn to social unrest. Consequently, the original white population felt like protecting and preserving the white race from the invasion.

Dr Crookman's activities are considered as a serious threat to the white race. Therefore, on the ground of safeguarding their racial identity and pride, steps or

⁵ Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden. Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978, P. 109.



dispositions were taken to protect and preserve the “purity” of the privileged race: the great Caucasian world. This is the concern of Reverend Henry Givens, the Imperial Grand Wizard of The Knights of Nordica, an organization which is close – in its objective – to the Ku Klux Klan. Its major aim is to reinforce the color line and maintain Blacks in their position of inferior people, and social outcasts. In addition, the organization fights for the racial integrity of the Caucasian race. Upon the first meeting of that association, Reverend Givens made the following prayer: “...for the success, O God, of this thy work, to protect the sisters and wives and daughters of these, thy people, from the filthy pollution of an alien race” (p.76).

Meanwhile, in spite of the ongoing general suspicion, the whitened Negroes can now cross the social frontiers, and assume their new identity. They can experience equality with Whites, as there is no more difference or barrier between people who were former antagonists. For Max, the protagonist of the novel who has got the necessary passport of the white world, it is the expedient moment to fulfil his dreams. Wrapped in his new color, Max can infiltrate the white world. With his new position, he starts an adventure, tricking, fooling white people. As Michael Peplow argues, “His career is one long “secret mocking laugh” at the white establishment that never suspects Max is a black man in a white skin”⁶

Max, “the black man in a white skin” succeeds in tricking the ignorant Reverend Givens who appointed him as the Grant Exalted Giraw, the vice leader of The Knights of Nordica, the racist organization fighting for the preservation of the white supremacy. During a meeting of that association, he delivered a message stating exactly the white man’s mind upon the race matter: “That a white skin was a sure indication of the possession of superior intellectual and moral qualities; that all Negroes were inferior to them; that God had intended for the United States to be a white man’s country and that with His help they could keep it so...”(p.78) Here, Max uses the white prejudice against Blacks to con his former oppressors into getting their confidence.

In addition to the Knights of Nordica, another organization has been created: the Anglo-Saxon Association: “a group of rich highbrows who can trace their ancestry back almost two hundred years” (p.152). It is a genealogical study to trace tainted blood. That

⁶ Michael W. Peplow, *George S. Schuyler*, Boston, Twayne’s United States States Authors Series, 1980, P.69.



association plans to distinguish between white people: who is a true white and who is not? Mr. Arthur Snobbcraft, president of that association devotes his life to fighting for two things: “white racial integrity and Anglo-Saxon supremacy” (pp.153-154). The ultimate scheme of that organization is “to get a genealogical law passed disfranchising all people of Negro or unknown ancestry” (p.154), by examining birth and marriage records through the United States’ population; it is the purification of the white race.

About this objective, Max, who wears the white mask, and is now a member of the privileged white race, makes the following ironic comment when addressing his friend Bunny: “You see they believe in white supremacy the same as our outfit but they claim that the Anglo-Saxons are the cream of the white race and should maintain the leadership in American social, economic and political life” (pp.152-153). As Max observes, Whites are self-contradictory; and their racial assumptions are purely superficial, and their purposes futile. Thus, the color of the skin as a fundamental distinguishing element in the identity of Blacks and Whites becomes questionable.

III – Resolution of the Crisis: Toward Darkness

The resolution of the conflict supposes the disappearance of the color phobia, or the color prejudice. In *Black No More*, this resolution comes true through the exploration of self-knowledge and identity, or the realization of the same and singular identity between Blacks and Whites. Blacks as well as whites come to that conclusion.

Bunny, one of the whitened Negro, talking to his friend Max about his experience with women either white or black, reveals the following: “Since I’ve been white I’ve found out they’re all the same, white or black. Kipling was right. They’ll fight to get you, fight to keep you and fight you when they catch you playin’ around. But th’ kinda woman that won’t fight for a man ain’t worth havin’” (p.175). This realization somewhat parallels the outcome of the research led by Dr. Samuel Buggerie.

The primary ground for the investigation was based, according to the statistician, “on the theory that the data gathered would prove that around twenty million people, mostly of the lower classes were of Negro ancestry, recent and remote, while half that number would be of uncertain or unknown ancestry” (p.177). The final results revealed



by the investigation to determine the racial purity of white people, are strikingly contrary to the hypothesis above. Dr. Burggerie accounts for them to Snobbcraft:

Well, these statistics we've gathered prove that most of our social leaders, especially of Anglo-Saxon lineage, are descendants of colonial stock that came here in bondage. They associated with slaves, in many cases worked and slept with them. They intermixed with the blacks and the women were sexually exploited by their masters" (p.178).

The discoveries are hypothetical, self compromising. They are testimony to the fact that Americans are a melting pot people. Indeed, the American citizens are composed of a people of varying backgrounds, and consequently, their identity cannot be defined in terms of skin color. In other words, the color line is elusive, there is no such barrier setting differences between white and black Americans. Actually, both races are blended, mingled throughout their common American experience. This truth suggests that the white supremacist belief is a fallacy, and it brings liberation to the minds of former antagonists.

It is out of this realization that Max accepts to reveal his true identity. He reveals his Negro identity to his parents-in-law and to Helen, his wife, who was terrified and appalled for having given birth to a black baby. "You're not responsible for the color of our baby, my dear. I'm the guilty one," Max admitted (p.192). And it is only after this acceptance that he gains relief: "a great load lifting from his soul" (p.192).

Henceforth, the social mask based on a hypothetical racial superiority, as well as the inferiority complex fall, and some of them [blacks and whites] agree to acknowledge and enjoy the same identity. With this self consciousness about their common identity, the crises tend to disappear. Helen for instance feels relieved, for she is now persuaded of the homogenous humanity that binds her to her husband:

Helen felt a wave of relief go over her. There was no feeling of revulsion at the thought that her husband was a Negro. There once would have been but that was seemingly centuries ago when she had been unaware of her remoter Negro ancestry. She felt proud of her Matthew [Max]. She loved him more than ever. They had money and a beautiful, baby. What more did they need? To hell with the world! To hell with society! Compared to what she possessed, thought Helen, all talk of race and color was damned foolishness. She would probably have been surprised to learn that countless Americans at that moment were thinking the same thing (pp.192-193).



Thus, from the inherent dialectical tensions, a new consciousness has emerged among both Blacks and Whites. Dr. Buggerie and Snobbcraft will not live long to share this idea of the sameness of humanity. Considered as niggers, they will be lynched by the evangelist Reverend McPhule and his adepts in Happy Hill. One can say that they met the fate that they bestowed on Blacks. They have been killed by their own absurd social fabric, the conventions they have been living on. So, they have been caught by their destiny, the destiny of their fellow human beings that they used to decide so far. Racism is finally turned against itself.

Furthermore, towards the end of the novel, another point of absurdity is disclosed. This absurdity holds from what Dr. Crookman, who published a monograph declared:

In practically every instance the new Caucasians were from two to three shades lighter than the old Caucasians, and that approximately one-sixth of the population were in the first group. The old Caucasians had never been really white but rather were a pale pink shading down to a sand color and a red (p.219).

As a result of this revelation, the population is again seized with confusion. The people became apprehensive about their skin colour: "If it were true that extreme whiteness was evidence of the possession of Negro blood, of having once been a member of a pariah class, then surely it were well not to be so white!" (p.219) Suspicion here lies on people's color shade. The people, "whiter than white" were prejudiced and discriminated against. So, they started to darken their skins using natural ways or some manufactured products:

Those of the upper class began to look around for ways to get darker. It became the fashion for them to spend hours at the seashore basking naked in the sunshine and then to dash back, heavily bronzed, to their homes, and, preening themselves in their dusky skins, lord it over their paler, and thus less fortunate, associates. Beauty shops began to sell face powders named *poudre negre*, *poudre le Egyptienne* and *l'Afrique* (p.221).

Eventually, "A white face became startlingly rare. America was definitely, enthusiastically mulatto-minded" (p.222). The "authentic" color is no more authentic. Consequently, one can assert that the American color is the white color blended with the black color. The mixture of both colors is brown or gray. There is no more "true" color, as there is no rigid frontier between Blacks and Whites that can be determined by the



skin color. So, it is absolutely absurd, paradoxical for Blacks to deny their color. On the other hand, it is also absurd for Whites to hold any superiority feeling, or any negative prejudice against Blacks on account of their skin color. Color does not count. What is important is the human nature which is common to all Blacks and Whites. All individuals possess the same fundamental human nature.

At the beginning of the novel, “black” people are rushing toward whiteness. This urge toward whiteness is contrasted with what happens toward the end, when “white” people rush toward blackness. This absurd movement makes the skin color appear as a social, or political, or economic instrument used as a pretext and a justification to dominate other people. Actually, there is no intrinsic difference between Whites and Blacks. And for George Schuyler, whose satirical novel is directed against Blacks as well as Whites, “It is sheer nonsense to talk about “racial differences”...between the American black man and the American white man...”⁷This assertion can find justification in the following formulations by Christopher A. D. Charles:

There are persons who are black, and they recognize this fact. However, blackness has less salience in the construction of their identities. In other words, they have a nominal black identity. This does not necessarily mean that they are anti-black or, for that matter pro-white. They have been nominated or defined by others and placed in a category because of their physical characteristics. However, they have incorporated the values, norms, and symbols of other groups that transcend their physical characteristics or nominal category. Their self-affirmed identity is with the group or groups whose values, norms, and symbols they have incorporated.⁸

Conclusion

George Schuyler used to call himself an “Aframerican,” as he would call all the Americans of African origin. He rejected the term “black American” or any other term used to address the Blacks of America. For him the color of the skin is certainly not a basic trait to characterize or set a difference between the people. Indeed, for Schuyler, any human considerations or distinctions based on racial differences are very likely to be irrational, unreasonable. This idea is well illustrated through *Black No More*.

⁷ An extract of Schuyler’s “The Negro-Art Hokum”, cited by Charles R. Larson, in the Introduction to *Black No More*, P.11.

⁸ Christopher A. D. Charles, Op. Cit., P.724.



Our investigation has exposed the absurd or paradoxical assumptions about race. Actually, we can assert that racial supremacy assumption is not but the manipulation of group identity as a means to political, economic and social powers. Our study suggests that race is an ideological construct. In this same perspective, race can be defined as a socially constructed phenomenon.

Beyond some superficial physiological elements related to the racial distinctions and categories, any other human distinctions creating a social hierarchy based on these characteristics are absurd and unreasonable, according to the author of *Black No More*. It is certainly to assert the equalitarian assumption of human sameness, and to bring that point home, to ignite this truth to the conscience of Blacks and Whites that Schuyler wrote that satirical novel.

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