
Mama's Baby, Black Maybe: Black Female Subjectivity and the Construction of Blackness in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills

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Abstract

In a salient narrative, Gloria Naylor critically examines Black subjectivity in her gritty and provocative novel *Linden Hills* (1985). Although the primary scope of the narrative is to illuminate the desperate means the African American community has employed to secure the middle class lifestyle associated with the "American Dream," Naylor infuses her narrative with a stinging critique of the seldom discussed underside of American racialization. Luther Nedeed's "pale," "white" son disrupts his plans to establish a prosperous Black suburban community. By inserting an unnamed albinic child into the fragile complexities of a middle class Black identity, Naylor probes the intersectional and paradoxical position Willa's black female body inhabits as the vehicle for Afrocentricity, patriarchy and Black ascendancy. Naylor's literary portrayal of this Willa Nedeed and her albinic son facilitate a theoretical departure from the prevailing (Afrocentric and Eurocentric) essentialist notions of race by interrogating the complicated racial identity, gender construction and communal affiliation of African American women. The both mother and child stand on the constitutive exterior of this Afrocentric community-in the ambiguous space which separates the Black self from the White other. And it is here on the periphery that Black albinism acts as a racial pharmakon where blackness and whiteness "are opposed...each relates back to the other, reverses itself and passes into the other" (Culler 143). By employing these two characters, Naylor fosters a rich examination of the efficacy of the role of Black women in community formation. This presentation elucidate the subversive racial proclivities of Black female subjectivity in relation to racial ambiguity of Black albinism.

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