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The Post-Civil Rights Coming-of-Age Narrative in Contemporary African American

Literature

Abstract: For black youth in contemporary America, coming of age is fraught not only due to the struggles they already face as ethnic minorities, but the pressure that arises from living in a post-Civil Rights Movement era, where the advancements made during the mid-20th century are not always reflected in their daily reality. In this article, three contemporary novels involving teenage African-American protagonists (*Caucasia*, *The White Boy Shuffle*, and *The Hate U Give*) will be compared and examined, with a focus on the ways in which they explore the conflicts arising from living in a Post-Civil Rights era and how African-American teenagers react to the complications of racism and protest in different ways. In *Caucasia*, Birdie's biracial identity and the societies she lives in force her to constantly choose one race or the other, highlighting the focus on racial identification in the Post-Civil Rights generation. Gunnar Kaufman's experiences in *The White Boy Shuffle* illustrate the ways that both blackness and whiteness are performed and contrasted against one another, particularly through the novel's satirical tone and focus on popular culture. Angie Thomas' depiction of the gulf between lower-class black communities and upper-class white neighborhoods in *The Hate U Give* represent the issues that come with traversing both communities, resulting in a novel that argues for the enrichment of black communities and for social progress rather than worrying about mainstream white opinions on what they should do. While the novels all tackle different subjects in different fashions, they all emphasize the ways that the Civil Rights Movement impacted America and where we can go forward from here.

Keywords: African-American, coming-of-age, civil rights, contemporary literature, racial identity, protest