

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Moulay Tahar-Saida
Department of Foreign Languages and Arts



The Theme of Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Philip Roth, the Human Stain
Dissertation Submitted in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master in English “Literature and Civilization”

By Meddah Abderrahmane El Hadj Moumene

Under the Supervision of Dr.Berrezoug Hanàa

Panel of Examiners:

President: Dr.Boukhelifa

Examiner: Dr.Routi

2019

Abstract

The socioeconomic position of Blacks in America cannot be fully contextualized without considering the marginalization of their racialized social identities as minorities who have historically combated subjugation and oppression with respect to income, employment, homeownership, education, and political representation. It is not difficult to understand why the historical reference to “passing” primarily has been associated with Blacks who were able to—and many who did—claim to be White to secure the social, educational, political, and economic benefits that were reserved for Whites. Therefore, the majority of passing narratives have focused on Black to White passing.

To my Parents, family and Friends ...

In memory of Meddah Abdelmoumen (23/02/1950-16/10/2016)

Aknowledgements

I would never have been able to finish my dissertation without the guidance of my supervisor. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr.Berrezoug Hanàa for her excellent guidance, caring, patience, and providing me with an excellent atmosphere for doing research. I would like to offer special thanks to Dr.Talbi Abdelkrim, Dr.Aimer Mustapha, Dr.Guembaza, and Dr.Routi for guiding my research in its preliminary phase by helping me to develop my background in literary criticism, poetry, drama, and methodology. Many thanks to Mme Guerroudj Naima of the Department of Foreign Languages for helping me. My research would not have been possible without their help. I would like to thank Mr. Meddah Maamar Yacine, who as good relatives was always willing to help me by providing me with the necessary books I needed from abroad. Finally, I would like to thank my classmates; they were always there cheering me up and stood by me through the good times and bad.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Abstract | I |
| Introduction | V |
| Chapter I: Race, skin color and outcomes | 1 |
| 1- Defining Race | 3 |
| 2- Post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow | 4 |
| 3- Racial Mixing before 1880 | 6 |
| 4- Segregation | 7 |
| 5- Intermediate skin tones in a racially segregated society | 8 |
| 6- Slavery | 9 |
| 7- Second-Class citizenship | 11 |
| 8- Non-citizen labor | 12 |
| 9- Hierarchies of Skin Hue and the Privilege of Lightness | 13 |
| 10- Passing for White | 15 |
| 11- Explanations for Race Differences in Victimization and offending | 16 |
| Chapter II: Racial passing in the Human Stain | 18 |
| 1- Ethnic Identity vs. National Identity | 20 |
| 2- Escaping Racism | 21 |
| 3- Escaping Family and History | 22 |
| 4- Masculinity and Gender Issues | 23 |
| 5- The “Self-Made Man” in The Human Stain | 25 |
| 6- Exposure and Condemnation to Racial Discrimination | 27 |
| 7- The “Spooks”-Incident and the Persecution of Coleman Silk | 29 |
| 8- Coleman and Two Women of Athena | 30 |
| 9- Coleman and Delphine Roux | 31 |
| 10- Coleman and Faunia Farley | 32 |
| 11- The Counterpunch | 33 |
| 12- Playing With Rituals | 36 |
| Chapter III: The Anatomy of Coleman Silk in the Human Stain | 39 |
| 1- The Anatomy of Coleman Silk’s Passing | 40 |
| 2- Coleman seen as Greek Tragedy | 41 |
| 3- Public and Private – The Society and the Individual | 42 |
| 4- Political Correctness and the “Persecuting Spirit” | 44 |
| 5- Nathan Zuckerman in The Human Stain | 46 |
| Conclusion | 53 |
| Bibliography | 57 |

Introduction

The aim of my thesis is to examine the novel *The Human Stain* by the American Jewish author Philip Roth. The focus of my thesis will be on the novel male protagonist, whose lives become intertwined with crucial moments of change in American cultural and political history.

I will look into how the protagonist forge his identity in the American society, how he as individual is thrown into the midst of a significant change in that society and how “public” and “private” are defined and how he intertwine in the realm of the novel. Aspects of Race, ethnicity and gender will also be examined, as all of these are powerfully present in the novel and have a significant meaning in terms of the focus of my study.

The three novels: *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist* and *The Human Stain* are often referred to as the “American Trilogy”. The novels were all published in a span of five years at the very end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

The idea behind the title “American Trilogy” and the very grouping of the three novels is that these novels are thematically linked, that each novel takes an important moment in American history and examines it through the protagonist, his life and his choices. Roth himself has claimed that “I think of it as a thematic trilogy, dealing with the historical moments in post-war American life that have had the greatest impact on my generation” (McGrath quoted in Abbott 2007, 438-9) . Elaine Safer in her book *Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth* refers to the trilogy as a “social history trilogy” and indicates that its every novel concentrates on an aspect of the American political scene after the Second World War (2006, 117).

My interest in the topic has arisen from my interest in American history and culture. This thesis is located in the field of American studies, with its literary theory largely in the tradition of structuralism and new historicism along with some other currents of postmodern literary theory.

Even though there is extensive scholarship on Philip Roth’s literary works, there is relatively little scholarly work done on his more recent production, which is of course natural considering that Roth has to this day been an active author continuously publishing new material. It could be argued that to an extent, the “American Trilogy” novels specifically as a trilogy have gone unnoticed by literary scholars. This argument is based on the fact that some scholars, along with Roth himself, recognize the novels as a trilogy, but it is difficult to find articles or other critical work that specifically treat them. However, the individual novel in the trilogy has been subject to considerable public as well as critical attention even immediately after the Trilogy was published in 1997, 1998 and 2001. Royal even goes to say that compared with Roth’s previous work, the novels received generous amounts of attention directly after they were published (2005, 187-8). Royal has counted that “in a mere span of See e.g. Royal 2005, Safer 2006 and Shechner 2007. seven years ... there have been no less than fifteen essays devoted to at least one of the novels in the American Trilogy” (204). It has to be pointed out that a considerable amount of the scholarship on Roth focuses on him as a Jewish author, and many of the issues tackled by the scholars go into somewhat personal

detail. A good example of this, concerning the “American Trilogy” novels, is Mark Shechner’s article, where he treats the novels as “Roth Problem Novels” that tell “more about the man than they do about the nation” (2007, 142). Even though Roth’s own ethnicity is important when looking at the issues of race and ethnicity in the novels, I attempt to avoid looking at the author in too much detail, as I see the novel *The Human Stain* in quite the opposite way as Shechner, as telling us something important about American history, society and culture as well as about the individual who is a member of that society and culture.

The main focus of my thesis is an analysis of the novel in which the protagonist destiny is connected with disappearing values and mores in the changing American society. While concentrating on the broader picture, I must recognize that the novel include many important issues that are minor considering the larger focus, but are nevertheless parts of it. I have to take those issues into account in my analysis as well as in my theoretical framework in order to compile a comprehensive thesis; I am especially interested in why and how the protagonists, who seem to in one moment in history have everything, can lose everything in the next.

To approach this determination, the following question is raised:

What I will aim to prove is that the protagonist in the novel is searching for autonomy, for freedom from the expectations and demands of the society, but are undone by the fact that the changing society requires the individual to adapt. One cannot survive, by carving out an ideal existence and assuming that the ideals of the society do not change.

I will further argue that structurally the novel is a tragedy, where the protagonist unique “American Dream” becomes outdated and unable to survive in the new cultural and political atmosphere. Bonnie Lyons, in her article “Philip Roth’s American Tragedies”, claims that the trilogy establishes Roth “as our most important author of American tragedies”. She makes this somewhat bold claim along with noting that she does not see the *Human Stain* structurally as tragedy, but nevertheless containing tragic hero and tragic versions of the reality of the American society. She also notes that while the protagonist become tragic hero through similar dynamics, having his fate tangled up with the fate of the America around them (2005, 125).

As illustrated by my decision to describe this novel as tragedy, I share Lyons’ vision to an extent. I do believe, however, that the *Human Stain* can be seen as tragedy also structurally, as the dynamics of the “fall from grace” is very powerfully present in the novel.

As I have presented above, the protagonist is an American Jewish men who in some way or another has made a place for himself in the American society which in the novel is, after all, primarily a white protestant society. Of course, in this racial profiling there is a twist: The protagonist Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain* is an African-American man who has passed as a Jew all his life. Considering the prominence of the Jewish community and Jewish identity in the novel, Roth’s identity and status as a Jewish American author has to be one aspect to consider when studying the issues of race and ethnicity in the novel.

Perhaps the most important of these other aspects is the role of the female characters in the *Human Stain*. Regarding this issues, I will analyze the most prominent female characters in the novel and study their influence in the live and destiny of the protagonist. I will argue that in the novel there are two important female characters that have a great impact in the life of the protagonist.

Furthermore, I will argue that these female characters mirror and exemplify the change in the society the main character is unable to adapt to. Like many other achievements in the life of the protagonist, his relationship with women seems to transform over the course of the novel. Once so fulfilling and convenient, the relationship turns in even poisonous, and eventually contributes to the tragic destiny of the protagonist.

In comparison to previous scholarship on Roth and his American Trilogy, my thesis will look into racial passing of the protagonist. Many scholars have looked at the novel and, on a rare occasion, in studying racial passing in the *Human Stain*, in Roth's writing. Bonnie Lyons has even offered the point of view about the novel as tragedy. I, however, will focus on the protagonist and aim to point out the similarities in how public and private, individual and collective, overlap in his life, and how it relates to different discursive practices in American society. In this sense, I hope to give a comprehensive picture of the novel, something that previous scholarship has not done to a similar extent.

Roth's writing has been studied from various theoretical angles, and there are several fields of theory in literary criticism that could be relevant in my study as well. Thus it is important to clarify my theoretical starting points and the issues I am going to focus on less or leave out completely. The theory I am going to be using in my thesis is mainly located in the field of structuralism and new historicism, but I will also take into account elements of Race, cultural, ethnic and masculinity studies.

In chapter I. I will introduce the basis of my theoretical framework, the Definition of Race in society, History of Race and Laws, Hierarchies of skin, Slavery and segregation, and the essential of Passing. In chapter II. Will be devoted to the study of the theme racial passing in Philip Roth novel *The Human Stain*. I will go deeper into the historical and political contexts of the novel. I will focus on minor, but nevertheless important aspects in the novel, gender and masculinity along with race and ethnicity. The final chapter will be about the significance of place and location in the novel, focusing on the Anatomy of the protagonist passing and analysis on the relationship between the individual's public and private sphere as well as between the society and the individual in terms that are relevant my study, and the continuity it represents is an important element in my analysis of the novel. In the concluding part, I shall try to give answers on what my research question was on.

My present dissertation has been influenced by many literature achievements, some of these are:

A Chosen Exile historicizes the practice of racial passing in the United States, by outlining, from the period of slavery to the early 1970s, how fair-skinned Blacks, whom the author designates as “racially ambiguous individuals”, managed to navigate the troubled waters of race undetected. In keeping with the findings of her predecessors, Hobbs confirms that the main reason that motivated racial passing was social advancement.

Passing for Black, White, and Jewish: Mixed Race identity in Rebecca Walker and Danzy Senna.

Can one really choose? Passing and self-identification at the turn of the Twenty-First Century, Jené Schoenfield.

While conducting this research, some difficulties were confronted .One of these difficulties is the availability of sources; especially, books .Also, the lack of time which affects the procedure of this research.

Chapter I: Race, Skin Color and outcomes.

“You never have to face that this Frankenstein of yours is you also, is us, is America. But how could you? That renders you impure. So let it remain just me and my tragedy. The toxic mix of my Blood.”

Lisa Jones, “Tragedy Becomes Her”

Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) is a fitting final part of the novelist's recent trilogy comprising *American Pastoral* (1997) and *I Married a Communist* (1998). In an interview marking the publication of *The Human Stain*, Roth states, "I think of as a thematic trilogy, dealing with the historical moments in postwar American life that have had the greatest impact on my generation". It dramatizes powerfully the interplay of secrecy and self

—
transformation that determines human identity. Identity in its varied performative guises had always been the focus of Roth's fiction. Telling a poignant tale of men and women driven by despair and angst in contemporary multicultural America, *The Human Stain* focuses on the constitution of identity and difference by negotiating the definition of self and the distortions in the perception of the other. In this second novel of the American trilogy, Zuckerman is more a passive agent than an active participant. No reimaginings or recreations forge the narrative. The book bears all the markings of Roth's later fiction: a provocative subject, a larger than life tragic protagonist, and an ethical subtext pertaining not only to a particular historical moment but to American culture.

The first novel of the trilogy, *American Pastoral*, is a story about a Jewish factory owner Swede Levov, who lives in the New Jersey countryside with his wife and daughter. Andrew Gordon states that by giving his novel the title *American Pastoral*, Philip Roth "intends this work to be not only a family chronicle but also a meditation on the pastoral, on utopian dreams, and on the nature of American identity, American history, and the American dream" (2011, 33)

Gordon refers specifically to the title of the novel, but he also captures something very relevant about the essence of the novel: it is a meditation about America, manifested through its protagonist.

Gordon goes on to say that the series of events that make Swede's and his family's lives crumble into pieces coincide with or "mirror" the events that take place in America at the same time (2011, 33) The national events and cultural shifts invade Swede's private spheres, they force themselves into his home and basically destroy everything he values, everything he has worked for and everything he has believed to be important, good and essentially American.

Both Gordon and Derek Parker Royal use the term "American dream" to describe what Swede is after (Gordon 2011, 33, Royal 2005, 187). The term is well embedded into everyday language, although further analysis of its definition and origins would probably reveal it to be more complicated than we usually think of it. In the way Gordon and Royal use the term, it seems to describe wealth, family, and not having to depend on anyone or anything but oneself both politically and financially. These issues come up many times in my study, and in this sense "American dream" works as a summary of what Swede wants to accomplish in his life.

In the novel, Swede Levov builds himself this American dream, which consists of continuing in his father's footsteps as an owner of the family company, living in a big stone house in the countryside and having a beautiful wife and a daughter. I will essentially argue that this dream crumbles in the 1970s America for it was created 20 years earlier in what was

essentially a different country and society. In this new age, the values and ideals Swede based his dream on are dramatically altered, if not vanished altogether and been replaced by new ones. At the very end of the novel it is stated that Swede and people like him were “pillars of a society that ... was going rapidly under” and that a “breach had been pounded in [Swede’s] fortification, even out here in secure Old Rimrock, and now that it was opened it would not be closed again. They’ll never recover. Everything is against them, everyone and everything that does not like their life. All the voices from without, condemning and rejecting their life!” (AP 423) “They” above refers not only to Swede, but to everyone who lived or had imagined living a life that was perfect by any standards they had ever known. What happens to Swede and this life in *American Pastoral* is evidence of those standards changing. Unyielding to the new dominating discourse, he experiences the punishment of the new society. Foucault describes the criminal, the punished, as being “detached from society”, being forced to leave it (1977, 110). The punishment for Swede is just this, being detached from the society that has unfolded in front of him.

The events in the second novel of the trilogy, *I Married a Communist*, take place a couple of decades earlier than those of *American Pastoral*. The historical context in this novel is the late 1940s and the 1950s, American society after the Second World War and FDR, and especially during the time of the Red Scare and McCarthyism. Joseph McCarthy, the senator from Wisconsin, was the instigator and face for the persecution of Communists and people affiliated with the Communist ideology that raged in the United States during the 1950s.

The war in Europe had ended and the United States was in a heated battle of power over Europe with the Soviet Union. This led to extreme caution against all leftist activity in the United States, since in some minds there was an imminent danger of a Communist coup even on American soil. A new government organization, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), was founded to investigate all the suspected Communist affiliations, and Senator McCarthy became the head of the committee. Of course, the opposition to leftist agenda had as much to do with domestic politics as it had with international politics. According to Haynes Johnson, the political situation in the United States in the 1940s was very much in favor of FDR’s Democrats, thanks to the success of their economic policies, especially New Deal. Johnson also notes that during the success of New Deal, the Democrats were able to lure many members of the left-wing Progressive Party into their ranks (2005, 60). This conflict between the two parties to the left of Republicans can be seen in *I Married a Communist*, where Ira Ringold and young Nathan Zuckerman support the Progressive candidate Henry Wallace for president after FDR. Nathan’s father, a Democrat, tries to dissuade his son from participating in the Wallace campaign by saying that any vote away from the Democratic candidate Harry Truman is a vote for the Republicans.

The political situation described above is the one the protagonist has to live in with his strong communist worldview. Towards the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, however, there developed a strong backlash against the liberalism associated with the New Deal politics (Johnson 2005, 60). This backlash was most strongly represented by the witch hunts of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and Senator McCarthy.

1-Defining Race

Racial science and eugenics, with beliefs that race captures biological and inherent traits both physical and moral. Whites were believed to have inherent intelligence, motivation and moral virtues. In contrast, blacks were thought to be simple minded, lazy and sexually aggressive and wanton (Gross, 2009). Much of this was based on Carl Lineaus's 1735 publication, *Systema Naturae*, which classified the races as the following:

Africanus: black, phlegmatic, relaxed; hair black, frizzled; skin silky; nose flat; lips tumid; women without shame, they lactate profusely; crafty, indolent, negligent; anoints himself with grease; governed by caprice.

Europeaeus: white, sanguine, muscular; hair long, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive; covers himself with close vestments; governed by laws (Smedley, 1993, p. 164).

These explicitly racist beliefs led whites to believe that if they had been exposed to blacks, they would be able to infer a person's degree of blackness from his appearance and demeanor. The perceived accuracy of this arbitrary method is illustrated in the legal definition of being black, which was always based on the fraction of one's blood that was black. The exact threshold varied across states and over time. By the Jim Crow era, most states used the "one drop" rule, which meant that a person is black if she has only one drop of African blood (Packard, 2003, p. 98)

However, this "degree-of-blood rule did not in fact make it impossible for people to cross racial lines" (Gross, 2009, loc. 4123). In practice, for a person with physical features that are shared by Caucasians, race was often determined by how he presented himself. For example, an olive-skinned man who was well-dressed and well-spoken may pass for Italian or Portuguese, while he would be classified as black if he looked poor and spoke with a rural dialect. In describing the successful suit for white identity by a mixed race woman named Alexina Morrison, Gross (2009, p. 55) points out that "...Race was not obvious. Nor did the rule about 'negro' identity... decide the question. More persuasive to the [white] witnesses and jurors at the trial were stories about the hidden marks of race as interpreted by experts, and stories about Alexina's behaviour dancing at white balls, her mingling with white families, her love affairs with white men". Race was often determined by association. "... separation became the key to whiteness. People who had associated with whites must be whites themselves, just as people who had associated with blacks had to be black... In other words, race by association ... trumped any other sort of physical or documentary evidence" (Gross, 2009, loc. 1083, 1356)

2-Post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow

Slavery was fully abolished at the end of the Civil War (1861-1865). This was followed by the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), which introduced many laws to enhance the civil and political rights of the “colored” population.

The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) abolished slavery, The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) gave all citizens equal protection of the law. The Fifteenth Amendment (1870) prohibited the federal and state governments from denying a citizen the right to vote based on race, color or previous conditions of servitude. In the Southern states, federal troops were often employed to enforce these laws (Packard, 2003, p. 60-62). During this period, there was a large increase in political representation and education for the “colored” population. However, the move towards liberality soon ended. In 1877, to gain the support of Southern Democrats for their presidential candidate after Democrat Samuel Tilden won the popular vote, Republicans made an informal compromise with Southern states in exchange for the latter’s support of Rutherford Hayes’s presidency. The compromise included the removal of all federal troops from Southern states. Moreover, in 1878 Democrats won control of both houses. These two events, together with the North’s “growing fatigue” over race issues, effectively gave Southern states control over the enforcement of the laws protecting the black population and, ultimately, allowed the introduction of Jim Crow laws (Keyssar, 2000, loc. 2532).

Jim Crow laws were adapted from the earlier Black Codes, a set of laws restricting the rights of the Southern black population. The explicit intention of Jim Crow laws were to circumvent the Reconstruction Amendments and assert white supremacy over blacks. Immediately after the Compromise of 1877, Southern states began to disenfranchise the mostly poor and uneducated black population (Woodward, 2002, p. 83). These changes significantly reduced the number of black voters. For example, in Mississippi, less than 9,000 out of 147,000 voting age blacks were registered to vote. In Louisiana, the number of black registered voters decreased from approximately 130,000 in 1896 to 1,342 by 1904. In Georgia, only four percent of all black males were registered to vote (Keyssar, 2000, loc. 2695).

In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which gave equal treatment to all citizens in venues for the public (e.g., inns, public transportation, theaters), was unconstitutional because Congress was not given control over private persons or businesses. In the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that Louisiana’s provision of “separate but equal” service on trains to customers of different races was constitutional. These two decisions effectively allowed Southern states to introduce a multitude of laws and regulations that restricted the rights of the non-white population until the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

These restrictions included the complete segregation of whites and non-whites in all facilities (e.g., restaurants, schools, water fountains, buses), with the additional problem that facilities provided to non-whites were rarely equal in quality to those provided to whites. Many regions required that neighborhoods be segregated, where public services such as sewers and electricity ended at the boundaries of the white neighborhoods (Packard, 2003, p. 102-103). Miscegenation – i.e., inter-racial marriages – and sometimes even non-marital sexual relationships were also made illegal (Packard, 2003, p. 99).

Jim Crow laws, which substantially reduced the quality of life and opportunities for nonwhites, were enforced formally by state and local law enforcement, and informally by white citizens of organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. During 1920-25, the Ku Klux Klan was the largest organization in America, with a membership of three to six million (MacVeigh, 1999). Non-whites seen as violating white supremacy were often harassed, and sometimes murdered. Between 1882 and 1968, approximately 3,446 African Americans were lynched (Institute, 2010). Many more were harassed and abused for perceived infringements. Although Jim Crow is typically associated with the South, severe racial discrimination and the decline of opportunities during the post-Reconstruction era were also prevalent in other states. For example, the Ku Klux Klan was based in Indiana during the early 20th Century and had large memberships in Maine and Oregon (Packard, 2003, p. 127). California, which had introduced laws to restrict property ownership of Asians during the 19th Century, extended them to include other non-white races such as blacks (Packard, 2003, p. 100). Until the racial integration of the labor unions in 1930, job opportunities were much more limited for blacks (Brueggemann and Boswell, 1998).¹¹ When Woodrow Wilson became president, he segregated the the District of Columbia's federal agencies, which, at that time, had been integrated for fifty years (Packard, 2003, p. 123).

Segregation and general racism were also enforced informally in the North. In 1885, on a trip through the South, African American T. McCants Steward noted that he was better served by white waiters in former slave states than in some parts of New England (Woodward, 2002, p. 39). Many schools in Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey were completely segregated, even though it was de jure illegal. Between 1913 and 1948, 30 out of the then 48 states enforced anti-miscegenation laws (Vile, 2003). Blacks were shut out of most non-menial jobs (Sharfstein, 2011, p. 255). Sundstrom (1994) shows that the large differences in black and white occupational choices were driven in part by social norms that rejected blacks as supervisors over white workers

3-Racial Mixing before 1880

Racial discrimination, which began from 1619 when the first group of black slaves was sold to North America, has a long history in the US. Before President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, slavery was legal in America, and citizens' rights endowed by law were only given to European whites, but Indians, blacks and Asians were excluded. Until 1960s last century, European whites, especially WASPs, had enjoyed privileges in education, suffrage and jurisdiction, etc. Even non-Protestant Europeans, such as Jews, Irish, Poles and Italians were also discriminated against, and blacks were more seriously despised. Since the Civil Rights Act was declared in 1964, open racial discrimination has been prohibited, but hitherto concealed racialism has always existed. "Even when African Americans do everything right—get an education and work hard at well-paying jobs—they cannot achieve the wealth of their white peers in the workforce" (Cohen-Marks, 2011, p. 827). "The plight of African Americans is a touchstone for American ideals, revealing the disjunction between praxis and belief, values and reality" (Rankine, 2005, p. 109).

According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, a total of 305,326 African Slaves were ever brought to North America. Almost 70% were adult men. However, on the eve of the Civil War in 1860, there were a total of 4,427,294 individuals classified as black, over 3.9 million of whom were slaves .

To understand the magnitude of passing, it is important to note the large number of light skinned people of African extraction by 1880. There were many voluntary sexual associations and marriages between whites and free African workers on the frontier. There were also many involuntary sexual impositions of white men on African women. The prohibition of slave imports into the United States in 1807 further contributed to the decline of the number of completely African individuals in the United States. Racial mixing became legal during the Reconstruction era and continued in the late 19th Century, when it became nominally illegal under Jim Crow. "By the time that slavery ended, a majority of American Negroes bore in their genetic makeup some degree of white, which is to say European, ancestry"(Packard,2003,p.95).

There are several additional facts about racial mixing to keep in mind. First, while there was significant mixing of whites and blacks, there is also evidence that the mixed race population practiced complexion homogamy – i.e., light skinned individuals married light skinned individuals (Bodenhorn, 2002a). This may have allowed the caucasian features resulting from white-black mixing to persist in the post-Reconstruction "black" population. At the same time, two people with the same genetic make up can look very different. For example, in Brazil, there are two non-white racial categories. Geneticists find that there is no significant ancestral difference between light skinned and dark skinned categories (Bodenhorn,2014).

It is also interesting to note that those who had caucasian features were also likely to have strong incentives to pass because they had the most to lose from Jim Crow laws. Economic historians have noted that many of the most skilled and highly educated members of the population during Reconstruction were light skinned because they typically received better nutrition (Bodenhorn, 2002b). This is consistent with evidence from Bodenhorn (2002a) that amongst freed blacks during the late antebellum period, lighter skin was associated with more property ownership, and the observation that most of the notable African American leaders during the early twentieth century were light skinned (Bodenhorn, 2002b).

4-Segregation

African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century inhabited largely separate public realms due to the Caucasian majority's reluctance to interact with them in public places. In the South, where 89% of African Americans lived in 1910 (Bureau of the Census, 1913), segregation was set by "Jim Crow" laws pertaining to the separate treatment of African Americans. In the North, segregation was mostly de facto, but was nevertheless practiced extensively by private individuals and companies. Surveying legal cases of segregation throughout the U.S. between the abolition of slavery in 1865 and the reintroduction of Jim Crow laws in the South in 1881, Stephenson (1910) summarizes: "In the absence of legislative authority, many of the public conveyance companies had regulations of their own separating the races.

The 'Jim Crow' laws [. . .] did scarcely more than to legalize an existing and widespread custom." White American society took great efforts to exclude African Americans from public institutions such as schools, courts, and churches, as well as venues such as restaurants, hotels, and theaters (Stephenson, 1910; Margo, 1990) means of public transportation were regulated so that Blacks had to ride separate cars or occupy separate sections (Stephenson, 1910).

At the same time, disenfranchisement of African Americans excluded them from the political arena (Kousser, 1974; Naidu, 2012). Racial segregation was endemic in markets as well, whether the result of individual or collective action. In particular, labor markets were largely segregated. Maloney and Whatley (1995) and Foote, Whatley, and Wright (2003) describe how the Ford Motor Company exploited discrimination against African Americans by other companies, but channeled its own Black workers to more demanding and dangerous manufacturing jobs. Sundstrom (1994) and Fishback (1984) highlight that even though junior roles were not segregated in some occupations, Blacks were not allowed to supervise Whites. Labor unions were another source of discrimination, as most did not accept Blacks into their ranks.

African Americans faced discrimination in housing markets as well, even if they migrated from the South to the industrialized North. Cutler, Glaeser, and Vigdor (1999) find evidence that "...variation in the level of segregation in 1940 is due to collective action racism on the part of Whites rather than a desire among Blacks to live in Black areas." Whites' desire not to share their neighborhoods with Blacks was important in determining the patterns of

suburbanization and urban development that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, even after the Civil Rights acts of the 1960s (Boustan, 2010).

5-Intermediate skin tones in a racially segregated society

Whenever racial segregation emerged, the question of defining distinct racial categories had to arise (Stephenson, 1910). While approximately one-fifth of African Americans were classified as Mulatto in the 1910 census, the true proportion with some European ancestry may have been as high as three-quarters (Cummings and Hill, 1918).

Marriage between Blacks and Whites were very rare in the early twentieth century (Fryer, 2007), with much of the variation in the degree of European ancestry originating during the era of slavery (Williamson, 1980). Until 1915, some states still considered those with only small proportions of African ancestry to be White. However, by 1915 all states had converged on the “One Drop” rule, which treated individuals with any known African ancestry as a “Negro.” Thus, even people of African-American descent who looked “fully European” were considered Black if their ancestry was known.

The One Drop rule excluded African Americans from the White public sphere regardless of their skin tone. Nevertheless, economic differences between lighter- and darker-skinned African Americans date back at least to antebellum times, when Free Blacks were more likely to be light skinned, and among Free Blacks, those with light skin were more educated and richer (Bodenhorn and Ruebeck, 2007). While mixed-race individuals sometimes tried to set themselves apart culturally, this distinction faded during the first decades of the twentieth century. Some of the most prominent African-American leaders such as Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Walter Francis White were actually of mixed ancestry. Horace Mann Bond, another prominent figure of mixed race, noted the shift towards a binary treatment of skin-color and racial identity:

“Time was when there were blue-vein societies [social clubs admitting only light-skinned African Americans] [. . .] among Negroes in this country, but they seem largely to have disintegrated, owing to two happy chances of fortune: The first has been that those who were so much like the dominant group [. . .] have in great part folded their tents and crept quietly into the ranks of the whites. The other [. . .] has been the unyielding refusal of the dominant group to accept any of its hybrid progeny, if known as such [. . .]. [The One-Drop Rule] has done countless good for the Negro, as it has served to focus his energy and that of all his potential leaders upon the immediate task of racial survival.” (Bond, 1931)

The distinction between light- and dark-skinned African Americans in the U.S. Census dates back to 1850; Hochschild and Powell (2008) study why the Mulatto category was first introduced. All censuses from 1850 to 1920 (except 1910) asked enumerators to distinguish between people of full and mixed African ancestry, despite contemporary observers’ recognition that such ancestry-based classification was questionable and subjective (Cummings and Hill, 1918, p. 209). By 1910, census enumerators were instructed to classify African Americans according to their appearance, distinguishing “persons who are evidently full-blooded negroes” from those merely “having some proportion or perceptible trace of

negro blood” (Gauthier, 2002, p. 48). It appears that enumerators indeed applied an appearance-based (rather than a “blood-based”)

Genetically, skin color is determined mainly by the numerous genes that affect the production of melanin, which is the primary pigment giving human skin, hair, and eyes their color (Graf, Hodgson, and van Daal, 2005; Bonilla, Boxill, Donald, Williams, Sylvester, Parra, Dios, Norton, Shriver, and Kittles, 2005). Importantly, skin color genes are not completely dominant, so homozygous parents of different skin colors may have children with varying intermediate levels of skin color, and heterozygous parents may have children who are either lighter or darker than both parents

6-Slavery

Everyone knows that most people with African ancestors living in the United States today are the descendants of people who were the property of white Americans. Everyone knows this, but it is easy to lose sight of what this really means. Human beings were property: they were owned in the same sense as a horse can be owned. They could be whipped and branded and in other ways physically harmed with virtually no legal restrictions. The killing of a slave by a slave master was almost never punished. The rape of slaves was a common practice. Slave owners were free to split up families and to sell the children of slaves.

The fact that slave owners had absolute power over their slaves, of course, does not mean that all slave masters ruthlessly abused their slaves. Many slave owners accepted a paternalistic ideology in which slaves were regarded as children for whom they had moral responsibility, and certainly some slave owners tried to live up to that ideal. More importantly, slave owners were businesspeople for whom slaves were an important investment, and the value of that investment needed protection. Just as farmers have an incentive to be sure that their horses are well fed and not overworked to the point that their health and productivity is threatened, so slave owners had incentives to take care of their investments in the bodies of their slaves. Particularly after the international slave trade was banned at the beginning of the 19th century and thus the price of slaves increased, slave owners took measures to insure that the value of their investments did not deteriorate. As a result, by the time of the Civil War the calories consumed and material standard of living of American slaves was not very different, and perhaps even a little higher, than that of poor peasants and unskilled workers in many parts of Europe.

Some scholars have argued on the basis of these facts about improving standards of living of slaves in the 19th century that slavery was not as oppressive as often thought.⁴ This claim minimizes the impact on the lives of slaves of the condition of such radical and complete unfreedom and the deep symbolic degradation that slaves experienced. The nature of the social structure of slavery meant that significant physical brutality was ubiquitous in spite of the modestly improving standard of living of slaves and the ideology of paternalism. Because slavery was a lifetime condition, slaves had very little positive incentive to work hard. Since the prosperity of slave owners depended on the effort of their slaves, this meant that slave owners had to rely very heavily on negative incentives – force and the threat of force – to extract such effort. As a slave owner in Arkansas stated, “Now, I speak what I know, when I say it is like ‘casting pearls before swine’ to try to persuade a negro to work. He

must be made to work, and should always be given to understand that if he fails to perform his duty he will be punished for it.”⁵ Even slave owners who sincerely believed in their paternalistic responsibilities to care for their slaves justified this harsh treatment on the grounds that the childlike nature of their black slaves meant that force was the only thing that they understood. The pervasive domination and exploitation of slavery was accompanied by pervasive forms of resistance by slaves.

The most common form of resistance occurred in the mundane activities of the slave plantation: poor work, occasional sabotage, passivity. Runaway slaves were a chronic problem, and political conflict over how to deal with slaves who escaped to the North was one of the sources of tension that led to the Civil War. Occasionally there were violent slave revolts, and while rare, this fueled an underlying fear of blacks among whites in the South and contributed to the massively repressive and violent apparatus of the slave state. While slavery came to be restricted to the South in the course of the 19th century, it would be a mistake to see this form of racial oppression as exclusively affecting the South.

The economy of the North was deeply linked to Southern slavery in the Colonial period, particularly through the notorious “triangular trade” in which Slaves were purchased in Africa with European goods, then sold in the Caribbean and North America and the profits used to ship Tobacco, rum and cotton back to Europe. Some have argued that the direct and indirect profits from this trade was the single most important source of capital accumulation in the colonies, including in New England.⁶ At the time of the Constitutional Convention slaves were owned by northerners as well as southerners, and many of the founding fathers were slave owners. In the early years after the Revolution, slavery was still legal in a number of Northern States. In New York there were still 10,000 slaves in the 1820 census, and significant numbers of slaves were reported as late as the 1840 census in New Jersey. Right up to the Civil War, the Northern economy continued to be linked to slavery through textile manufacturing. Even after slavery was outlawed in the Northern States beginning in the late 18th century, the North collaborated with the South in allowing escaped Slaves to be captured and returned to the South, particularly after the Dred Scott decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. And while it was true that in the years leading up to the Civil War abolitionist sentiment grew steadily in the North, many people in the North were perfectly content to let slavery continue in the South.

Slavery ended with the Civil War almost a century and a half ago, but of course its impact did not disappear simply because this form of racialized class relations had been destroyed. Slavery contributed to a particularly pernicious and durable form of racist beliefs that continues to influence American culture today. Slavery posed a deep cultural problem for the United States after the American Revolution: How could a country founded on the principles of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” accommodate slavery? How was it possible to reconcile the devotion to liberty and democracy with the treatment of some people as the property of others? The solution to this deeply contradictory reality was the elaboration of racial ideologies of degradation and dehumanization of blacks as intellectually and morally inferior and thus not worthy of treatment as full persons.

The attribution of intellectual inferiority meant that blacks were seen as lacking intellectual capacities for rational action, and thus, as in the case of children, choices should be made on their behalf by responsible adults. The attribution of moral inferiority supported the view of blacks as inherently dangerous, ruled by passions, both aggressive and sexual, and thus incapable of exercising liberty. These beliefs constituted the core of the racist culture forged under slavery and although such beliefs were increasingly challenged in the last decades of the twentieth century and are no longer seen as respectable, they continue to influence race relations to the present.

7-Second-Class citizenship

Slavery was abolished after the Civil War, but this did not mean a complete dismantling of legally-enforced racial oppression. On paper, the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, guaranteed equal protection of the law and full rights to all citizens, and the 15th amendment passed two years later explicitly specified these rights applied to all people regardless of race or color. If these Amendments had been taken seriously and rigorously enforced, then racial oppression could not have taken the form of second-class citizenship.

Second class citizenship refers to a situation in which some categories of citizens have fewer rights than others. This can either take the form of an official, legally defined denial of some rights, or a less formal practical denial of rights. Laws which prohibit people who have been convicted of felonies from voting, for example, are an example of legally-defined second-class citizenship that is still common in the United States today. Police practices which target certain groups of people for stricter law enforcement or judicial practices which systematically impose stiffer sentences on particular categories of people would be examples of unofficial second class citizenship. Public policies which treat some categories of citizens as more worthy of respect than others can also be seen as creating a kind of second class citizenship. Margaret Somers has argued that the public disrespect of poor African-Americans reflected in the abandonment of the people left behind in New Orleans during the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005 is a striking example of their denial of full recognition as equal citizens.

Official second-class citizenship became the pivotal form of racial oppression in the United States, especially in the South, in the decades following the Civil War. The emancipation of slaves in the South posed a serious problem for large landowners who had previously relied almost entirely on slave labor for their incomes. Most slaves wanted to become small farmers, and there were moments in which the promise of “forty acres and mule” seemed to open the possibility of former slaves becoming a yeoman class of independent farmers. In order for this dream to have become a reality, however, widespread dispossession of large Southern landowners of their land would have been necessary, and in spite of the Civil War, the Federal Government was loathe to violate the rights of private property owners to this extent. As a result few ex-slaves were in a position to acquire land.

Large Southern landowners thus retained possession of the land, but they no longer owned the labor to work the land. In terms of the concept of class discussed in chapter 11, the landowners effectively hoarded the economic opportunities represented by land, but they no longer had complete control over a supply of labor to exploit. What was needed, then, was a new system to tie ex-slaves to the land and give planters effective control over their labor. In the decades following the Civil War Southern planters experimented with different arrangements, settling finally on a system called “sharecropping” by the last decade of the century. Sharecropping is a form of agriculture in which tenant farmers pay rent to landowners in the form of a certain percentage of the total crop grown on the land. The profitability of landowning depends on what that percentage is, and this in turn depends upon the bargaining power of the tenant farmers. It is of considerable advantage to landowners, therefore, to have a politically weak and economically vulnerable population available to be tenant farmers. This is what the denial of full political and legal rights to blacks in the South accomplished. This new form of racism, which came to be known as Jim Crow, played a central role in consolidating the new agrarian social order in the South by the end of the 19th Century.

The rules of racially-based second-class citizenship in the South had a number of key components. The most obvious, of course, were the laws which effectively denied blacks the right to vote. Typically these took the form of literacy tests which were much more strictly enforced against blacks than against whites, but at various times and places in the South other devices were used to accomplish this black disempowerment. Harsh vagrancy laws in the South were also used to prevent blacks from seeking better employment. While officially such laws did not have a racial character, their application was directed primarily against blacks and significantly impeded their movement. These kinds of directly repressive laws were reinforced by a wide range of segregationist laws which excluded African-Americans from white schools and universities, hotels and restaurants, and relegated blacks to segregated facilities in public transportation. And lurking in the background of all of these forms of legal segregation was widespread legal and extra-legal violence directed against blacks. The Ku Klux Klan was tacitly supported by the state and allowed to terrorize black communities. Lynchings were the most extreme form of such violence and were a common event in parts of the South from the 1880s through the first decades of the 20th century. But violence against blacks was not simply tolerated by state authorities in the South; it was also official state policy.

8-Non-citizen labor

The fourth form of racial oppression in American history revolves around the linkage between race and legal citizenship status. As everyone knows, the United States is a country of immigrants. Aside from Native Americans, everyone who lives in the United States is descended from people who came to North America from other continents sometime in the last few centuries. From the middle of the 19th century, some categories of these immigrants were denied legal access to citizenship status. The first instance of this was the importation of Chinese “coolie” labor on the railroads. Large numbers of poor Chinese were brought to the United States by labor recruiters as a source of cheap labor to work on building the railroads in the West and other large scale infrastructure projects. Anti-Chinese feelings were generated

by the repeated use of Chinese labor as a way of cutting wages of native-born white workers and breaking strikes. Eventually political mobilization against Chinese immigrants led to the Chinese Exclusion Act which blocked the further immigration of nearly all Chinese and made those Chinese already in the United States permanent aliens, prohibited from obtaining U.S. Citizenship. In 1924 other severe restrictions on immigration were enacted, especially focused on prohibiting legal immigration from Asia, Africa and Latin America. For a 40 year period, until immigration reform in the 1965, legal immigration to the United States was almost entirely white.

In the 20th century, the most important category of racialized noncitizen labor is Hispanic, especially from Mexico. In the period from the early 1940s until 1964, a formal “guest worker program” for Mexican labor existed, generally called the “Bracero program,” in which Mexican workers were brought to the US on contracts to work mainly in agriculture on a seasonal basis without the prospect of becoming citizens. Since the 1970s there has been an increasing flow of illegal immigrants (also called “undocumented workers”), again particularly from Latin America, who provide a cheap source of labor for American employers. The lack of full citizenship rights of these workers make them particularly vulnerable to very sharp forms of exploitation since they cannot join unions or defend themselves in court for various kinds of abuse – from mistreatment on the job and violations of safety conditions to not being paid their full wages.

Not all undocumented workers are racial minorities. There are Canadians and white Europeans also working in the U.S. without legal status. Nevertheless, the intersection of illegal status with race is especially salient, since an identifiable racial minority who is an illegal worker is likely to be much more vulnerable. Pressures on employers not to hire illegal immigrants and on the government to deport them contributes to more diffuse hostility towards the racial minorities associated with illegal immigration.

9-Hierarchies of Skin Hue and the Privilege of Lightness

Given the cumulative disadvantages associated with being Black, it is difficult to imagine why anyone who is White would seek to pass for Black. However, the distribution of socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage in American life for African Americans is conditioned not just on race, Black versus White, but on skin hue as well (Gyimah-Brempong & Price, 2006). For African Americans, skin hue is associated with a significant array of socioeconomic outcomes (Gyimah-Brempong & Price, 2006).

Hierarchies of skin hue that systematically privilege lightness over darkness persist in their effects, particularly for women of color (Hunter, 2002). The problem of colorism affects both dark- and light-skinned Blacks, though to be clear, the advantages of lighter skin outweigh the disadvantages both within and outside of the Black community (Hunter, 2002). In the hierarchy of skin hue, the brown paper bag is significant because its color is the historical marker that distinguishes “light skin” from “dark skin” and serves to center Blackness on a continuum stretching continuously from Black to White (Kerr, 2006/2007). The brown paper bag principle comes to life in Spike Lee’s iconic movie, “School Daze,” where members of the fictional “Gamma Rays,” a group of light-skinned women (derogatorily the Wannabees) with long straight hair, battle through word and songs

against a group of non-Greek dark-skinned women (deragatorily the JiggaBoos) over skin hue, hair length, and texture. The preference for lighter skin in the Black community is derived from concrete social advantages associated with lighter complexions in the wider society. Black people care because America makes skin shade matter. Million-dollar homes, summers in Martha's Vineyard, membership in The Links, Jack & Jill, Deltas, Boule, Guardsmen, AKAs, an obsession with the right schools, suitable family ties, social clubs, "good" hair and light skin complexion characterize the Black upper class (Graham, 1999). For upper and middle-class, light-skinned Blacks, skin tone represents a significant source of social capital. In some circles, light-skinned men and women are not regarded as legitimate members of the Black community (Hunter, 2002). Piper (1992) describes growing up in Harlem and being teased by darker skinned children, being called White, and being required by some Blacks to prove her Blackness by passing the Suffering Test—recounting her experiences of racism. However, the net material disadvantage plainly is greater for darker skinned Blacks whether female or male.

Dark-skinned Blacks lack the social and economic capital that light skin provides and, therefore, are disadvantaged in education, employment, and housing (Hunter, 2002). In addition, dark skin is generally not regarded as beautiful leading some Blacks to adapt their hair, and the rest of their body to an essentially Afrophobic culture, a culture that rejects full lips, dark skin, and so-called nappy or kinky hair (Gaskins, 1997; Hunter, 2002). However, today more African Americans are rejecting the notion that their physical features are ugly or bad, but choosing instead to celebrate them (Gaskins, 1997).

When a White person passes for Black, they typically will be seen as a lighter complexioned Black person—so that the penalties of crossing over into Blackness are not as severe. Also they might be able to locate near the top of the stratification structure in the Black community because of other resources they possess (e.g., college education, wealth, and social connections) while they only might be in the middle of the pack or lower among Whites. Relative position in each group is key with respect to social, economic, and political capital. Still, in general, Whites are reluctant to make this jump. So, the fundamental question becomes do you want to be near the top of the subaltern community or in the middle of the dominant community? In general, it appears that Whites overwhelmingly reject the first option.

10-Passing for White

The one-drop rule was in place, “passing” for white refers to when a person with African ancestry is identified as white. There were no reliable birth records for this period, particularly in the Southern states (Sharfstein, 2011, p.9).

Thus, passing required a person to have physical features that are commonly shared by Caucasians, to behave and dress like a white person and associate with white people. Thus, passing required a person to move to a white community, where the “passer” was not previously known by others as black since “.. Caucasian appearance was irrelevant if public knowledge existed of one’s black ancestry” (Packard, 2003, p. 96).¹⁹

The exceptionally high rates of internal U.S. migration and the large number of European immigrants from Mediterranean countries and white Americans with Spanish and French descent were likely to have made it easier for mixed race individuals to blend in with Caucasians. Jim Crow had severely eroded the economic opportunities and civil liberties of anyone of African extraction, even as the number of educated and skilled African Americans grew rapidly.

There are anecdotes of passing for all ages. Children sometimes passed from black to white because their parents passed or because parents sent light skinned children to live with white families to allow the children to pass. Some passed as young adults to attend school, obtain a job, or to marry a white person. Others passed when they were older simply because of the overwhelming discrimination they faced or to provide a better life for their children. Passing did not entirely depend on one’s outward appearance. There were many examples of individuals who had the choice of passing (i.e., they were typically assumed to be white), but asserted their non-white identity. A prominent example is Gregory Williams, who wrote an autobiography of his and his father’s experience with racial passing (Williams, 1996). Another example is Stephen Wall, who chose to live publicly with his black identity (until late in life) (Sharfstein, 2007).

Passing was not always permanent. Sometimes, individuals passed to obtain a job or attend school, and then later pass back. For example, historian Allyson Hobbs recounts the life of Harry Murphy who allowed a navy recruiter to identify him as white in the 1940s. He then attended Ole Miss in Mississippi as a white student, but later self-identified as black (Apel, 2014). Other times, circumstances would force one who has passed as white to pass back to being black. For example, Williams (1996) discusses how alcoholism, divorce and the loss of his business forced his father to move himself and his children back to his childhood home, where he returned to his black identity and told his children for the first time that they were not white. Another example is Stephen Wall, who “For the next ten years the family moved neighborhoods repeatedly from white to black to white again” (Sharfstein, 2007, p. 270).

11-Explanations for Race Differences in Victimization and offending

Scholars explain race-crime differentials from a variety of perspectives. Researchers who focus on the race-victimization connection emphasize “lifestyle” or “routine activities” situations as “facilitators” of crime and violence, and assert that the convergence of weak informal community controls, motivated offenders, and likely targets place certain types of individuals (including groups of minorities) at greater risk for victimization (96; 88). Explanations of racial disparities in offending have centered on biological, cultural (e.g., culture of poverty, deviant subcultures), inequality/deprivation, and structural explanations. Studies focusing on deprivation, for example, stress the importance of factors such as persistent racial inequality and concentrated poverty that cause frustration among youth leading to their delinquency and potential aggression

Research studies also focus on the very different communities in which blacks and whites live, and emphasize contextual factors that explain race-crime differences. Communities that are racially segregated and have high concentrations of poverty and unemployment (or marginal employment), population change and turnover, family disruption, and extreme social isolation (e.g., few kinship and intergenerational links, unsupervised teenage peer groups, minimal levels of organizational participation) experience higher levels of crime and violence. Massey demonstrates how rising black poverty and high levels of racial segregation have interacted to concentrate poverty geographically and to create the social conditions leading to the crime waves experienced in the U.S. over recent decades. Other researchers have documented how discriminatory housing policies and practices have reinforced racial segregation, thus increasing and concentrating disadvantage for blacks, but not whites Peterson and Krivo show how the adverse social conditions created by concentrated disadvantage resulting from segregation have a strong effect on black but not white homicides.

The plight of groups experiencing concentrated poverty has worsened over recent decades. The social and economic inequalities experienced by African Americans and other minorities create similar challenges in many areas at once, including barriers to economic opportunity and education. Because earnings for low-skilled men have been declining since the 1970s, and African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans are overrepresented at the bottom of the skill ladder, these factors may help explain their involvement in illegal activities. In 1989, the Committee on the Status of Black Americans of the National Academy of Sciences concluded that, “as long as great disparities in the socioeconomic status of blacks and whites remain, blacks’ relative deprivation will continue to involve them disproportionately in the criminal justice system as victims and offenders” (48:498).

Our investigation is anchored on the Racial Passing historical experience and current reality to properly frame the costs of being Black and to underscore why passing for White is so puzzling. While fetishizing Black culture is far from rare, fetishizing Black culture to the extent that an individual who otherwise would live as Black chooses to live as White. It typically is seen as an opportunistic attempt at appropriation for a windfall personal gains with the case of Philip Roth the Human Stain.

“The genealogy of the term passing in American history associates it with the discourse of racial difference and especially with the assumption of a fraudulent ‘white’ identity by an individual culturally and legally defined as ‘Negro’ or black by virtue of a percentage of African ancestry” (Ginsberg, 1996).

The consideration of racial difference leads to the question “Who is Black?” Historically, the answer has been that any person with any known African, Black ancestry is considered Black. This definition is reflected in the “one-drop rule,” meaning that a single drop of “black blood” makes a person Black (Davis, 1991). The term passing metaphorically implies that a person of Black or African descent who crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary trespassed to assume a new racial identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying their Black identity and accessing the privileges and status of their newly created White identity (Ginsberg, 1996). Those with the requisite physical appearance, emphasizing such “white” features as blonde hair, light skin, and blue or green eyes, to name a few, still needed to relocate to a new geographical area where his or her true identity—parentage, legal status, and the like—was unknown (Ginsberg, 1996).

While the cultural logic of passing suggests that passing is usually motivated by a desire to shed the identity of an oppressed minority group to gain access to the social and economic opportunities of the majority group, the rationale for passing may be more or less complex or ambiguous and motivated by other kinds of perceived rewards. Each historical era since the period of legal African enslavement determined not only how people of African descent lived but also what they lost.

In the *Human Stain: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*, Philip Roth details the costs and benefits of passing for White. During the antebellum period, it meant escaping the horrors of slavery back, breaking work, and the fear of being sold, beaten, raped, or even killed. The ability of racially ambiguous slaves to create a new “white” identity pass for White was a breach of legal and cultural boundaries (Ginsberg, 1996). Passing out of slavery was a move from a category of subordination and oppression to one of freedom and privilege, a movement that threatened the system of racial categories and hierarchies established by social custom and legitimated by the law (Ginsberg, 1996).

Chapter II: Racial Passing in the Human Stain.

“The rule may be colorblind, but people are not. The question remains, therefore, whether the law can truly exist apart from the color-conscious society in which it exists. As a skeleton devoid of flesh; or whether law is the embodiment of society, the reflection of a particular citizenry’s arranged complexity of relations.”

Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*.

The last two decades have seen a considerable increase of publications on the issue of racial passing in the United States. Some studies have examined racial passing through personal or family stories (O'Toole; Sharfstein; Williams). Others have sought to adopt a quantitative and synchronic approach to the phenomenon (Nix & Qian ; Mill & Stein) or to analyze how cases of racial passing were litigated in courts (Kennedy ; Gross). A number of edited volumes have recently focused on the cinematic and literary representations of racial passing in American popular culture, whereas some studies have been keen on expanding the notion by examining instances of ethnic or gender passing (Dawkins; Gayle; Ginsberg; Wald; Nerad)

The *Human Stain* historicizes the practice of racial passing in the United States, by outlining, from the period of slavery to the early 1970s, how fair-skinned Blacks, whom the author designates as “racially ambiguous individuals”, managed to navigate the troubled waters of race undetected. In keeping with the findings of his predecessors, Roth confirms that the main reason that motivated racial passing was social advancement.

Roth however differentiates himself from other scholars who have, according to him, paid far more attention to the benefits derived from passing as White instead of focusing on what he deems is a more fundamental and hitherto neglected aspect of the practice, namely, that by leaving their colored relatives or friends behind, passing translated into a loss of intraracial sociability and, to some extent, the loss of one's self. The *Human Stain* is underpinned by two intertwined objectives : a historical examination of the personal motivations behind racial passing and a simultaneous assessment of the consequences of rejecting one's “black racial identity”

The *Human Stain* is a novel about a New England college professor, Coleman Silk, who teaches the Classics in the fictional Athena College. The story begins after Coleman's death, when the Jewish novelist Zuckerman begins the investigations for his book. In the seemingly liberal academic community of Athena College, our protagonist, who has carefully constructed a unique life and identity for himself, becomes a victim of a modern-day witch-hunt when he accidentally uses the seemingly racist phrase “spooks” to describe two absent students who by chance happen to be African-American. Coleman Silk has grown up in a time when segregation was still common policy, and even though it was not enforced in the north, there was a clear divide in society between whites and other ethnic groups, most prominently African-Americans. The situation in the novel would not be as complicated were it not for the fact that Coleman Silk himself is originally African-American. That Coleman is being accused of verbally oppressing the same minority he is himself a part of, makes the moral landscape of the novel very interesting. The importance and weight of race and skin color to the novel is also visible in the very name of the novel. The “stain” that plagues every human being can be seen as something physical, moral, or both, but in the end it is crucial to realize that we all have one.

The protagonist Coleman Silk in *The Human Stain* is an African-American man who has passed as a Jew all his life. Considering the prominence of the Jewish community and Jewish identity in the novels, Roth's identity and status as a Jewish American author has to be one aspect to consider when studying the issues of race and ethnicity in this novel

The Human Stain is the third novel of the trilogy; It tackles yet another age in American history through its protagonist. The age in question is the last decade of the previous millennium, and the phenomenon that Roth specifically addresses is the discourse of political correctness. The novel is situated in the year 1998, which was the year when the American public screamed for President Bill Clinton's impeachment due to his sexual encounter with his assistant Monica Lewinsky. As the country is outraged with Clinton's behaviour, Coleman's transgression and racial slur becomes the object of the same kind of treatment in the small college and the surrounding community. Furthermore, the novel deals with the same discourse of public versus private that is present in the other two works as well (Roth's trilogy).

Gabrielle Seeley and Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky write that "The Human Stain explores the fundamental belief in self-creation and self-fulfillment as integral to the American promise of freedom, asking the profoundest of questions: Is there some element of identity an individual has no right to relinquish in order to attain individual freedom?" (2011, 93) In *The Human Stain*, the question of relinquishing one part of one's identity, in this case one's race, is more integral than in the other two novels. The construction of Coleman Silk's new identity and abandonment of the old one relies on the African-American Coleman "passing" as Jewish.

Noteworthy in this transformation is the fact that Coleman does not abandon race and ethnicity altogether, the protagonist's identity, achievements and eventually downfall all connect intimately to his decision to abandon one part of his identity and replace it with another.

1-Ethnic Identity vs. National Identity

Coleman Silk, the protagonist in *The Human Stain*, his way of building an identity takes on the more classical qualities of passing. As a black man with a light complexion, Coleman decides that passing as a Jew will become a part of his quest to escape the confines his African-American heritage has put him in. For Coleman, this escape is not merely escaping racism, but also escaping the expectations of his family and the way that has been prepared for him.

In the case of the protagonist, the element of race and racial transformation is an integral part of the formation of his identity, the process of passing can be seen as a movement from a racial identity towards an American identity, regardless of the race of the person or the race of the new identity the person assumes. As Mark Maslan writes about the protagonist of *The Human Stain*, “historical disjunction is typically American. By forsaking his African American past, Coleman embodies the national one” (2005, 366).

This movement from the ethnic identity towards national identity described by Maslan is a sign of every protagonist’s desire to be their own man, to be “autonomous” in the sense I referred to earlier in quoting Richard Rorty and his view of the individual’s autonomy. An interesting view on Coleman deciding to assume a Jewish identity is presented by David Tenenbaum, when he claims that the choice was motivated by hesitation to make a more drastic move and identify himself with the true majority, the whites. Tenenbaum sees Jews as a minority that is positioned between the blacks and the whites regarding the level of oppression and thus is somehow more accessible for Coleman Silk (2006, 44) The type of reasoning Tenenbaum offers here is fascinating especially because of the view it gives about the position of Jews as a minority. Looking at the protagonist in the novel, Coleman Silk is a black man in academia, in which in the late 20th century Jews already were in a relatively strong position. It seems as though the protagonist tries to move towards the centre, towards the American ideal where one’s race and ethnicity should not be issues.

This demonstrates the fact that ethnic identity and national identity in America and also in American literature still are not one and the same. In the novel, the protagonist believe in one way or another in an America in which race does matter. These beliefs are presented as something that the protagonists are trying to realize in part by transforming his own ethnicity. However, it is important to note here that in addition to race and ethnicity and his formation being a way to achieve some kind of ideal existence, race and ethnicity are also symbols in which one can see how the American society functions and changes itself over time.

2-Escaping racism

Coleman was surrounded by racist attitudes when he was growing up in New Jersey. Both his father and brother took the race question very seriously, but Coleman never expressed their kind of defiance against all the wrong-doings their family had to encounter. As a youngster, Coleman never saw in these cases the institutional racism that lies behind them. In high school Coleman sensed “an unevenness of endorsement compared to what they lavished on the smart white kids, but never to the degree that the unevenness was able to block his aims” (THS 103). Only the above-mentioned incident in Washington D.C. made him realise that he had lived a very sheltered life under the wings of his father and older brother.

By passing as white Coleman is able to escape the institutional racism that minorities encounter, even if he himself does not regard it as an essential problem. Whether this escape is Coleman’s primary motive or not, it will always be at least a “by-product” of his passing. In addition to escaping institutional racism, passing is a way to get rid of problems regarding one’s relationship with one’s own body and person. In Coleman’s case it seems that his blackness could also be a major hindrance for himself as well as the world around him. David Tenenbaum argues in his article that Coleman’s narcissism leads him to believe that “his cultural identity is the primary impediment to his personal achievement” (2006, 44). This might be a very important aspect regarding Coleman’s decision, since he never fully shared the black community’s view of themselves as being collectively and continuously oppressed. Coleman as an individual does not want to be judged by his ethnicity.

Therefore it is somewhat ironic that he is destroyed because of his careless and allegedly racist remark towards two black students who very strongly see their ethnicity as a factor and react very strongly to everything that might offend them and their race, because to them there is no difference between the personal and the racial. Both irritated and amused by this, Coleman makes ironic comments about his own situation. As the narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, quotes Silk’s words after his resignation “Thrown out of a Norfolk whorehouse for being black, thrown out of Athena College for being white” (THS 16). Interestingly enough, Coleman also feels very strongly about one of those two students – the one who filed the complaint about him – and describes her as weak, not talented enough and not belonging to the school. This is actually very much in line with what we learn of Coleman and his attitude to racial grouping:

The treatment one gets depends or should depend on the individual, not the group one is confined to. When we think of passing as escaping racial prejudice, we must take into account the fact that hiding one’s racial identity can actually reinforce the existing boundaries. Since race is proven to be an important social factor, Patrice Rankine’s words “Passing, although an individual choice, reifies the tragic reality of social order” (2005, 101) are very much true in modern American society. Crossing over strengthens the division between “blacks” and “whites”, and here we again arrive to the position of whiteness as a norm and others as “others”. Passing is a necessary course of action in order to escape the plight of racial prejudice and oppression, but its necessity is also what upholds the oppressive construction. In order to achieve the state of total individuality, Coleman is forced to escape

his blackness. This means that in being black, Coleman can never be an individual. Only privileged white people, who are of no race, have the luxury of individualism.

3-Escaping Family and History

In her book Philip Roth, Hermione Lee points out that Roth himself had to resist Jewish authority figures from the very beginning of his career. This has made these types of figures – such as Coleman Silk’s father, although he was black instead of Jewish – an essential part of Roth’s fiction (1982, 34). These authority figures are very powerfully presented in *The Human Stain*, where Coleman Silk has to battle his entire past and background in order to construct his new identity. Through his passing, Coleman Silk is resisting authority in both his family and on a larger scale in the entire black community.

The death of his father was a turning point in Coleman’s life. After this strong, almost majestic figure was suddenly out of his life, Coleman realized that “he would have to make it [his life story] up himself, and the prospect was terrifying” (THS 107). After this event, he decided to leave Howard University, which his father wanted him to attend and which he hated. This marks the beginning of Coleman Silk’s story as he builds it up for himself. I would argue that in addition to reasons concerning discrimination and institutional racism, Coleman is making up his life narrative to escape his father’s shadow and the entire Silk family history. In Coleman’s view, following family traditions and putting too much weight on what has gone on before is “idolatry” and “ancestor worship”, which can cripple an individual and hinder personal development (THS 144).

Coleman might also feel that his father’s attempts to better the social position of the family through excessive learning and correct use of English are inadequate, and he is in need of a greater, more thorough transformation if he ever wants to be free of prejudice. Coleman’s reasoning for his solution is presented in *The Human Stain* as follows:

“[Coleman] had chosen to take the future into his own hands rather than to leave it to an unenlightened society to determine his fate—a society in which, more than eighty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, bigots happened to play too large a role to suit him ... All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free” (120)

The university experience in the segregated south represents to Coleman the very opposite view of his racial identity and position than what he wants for himself. There the blacks are close-knit, bound together to face the world outside. “Howard University looked to me like just too many negroes in one place” (THS 134). If they stand up, they stand up not individually, but for the whole community. Individual experience and identity means nothing, the collectiveness and feeling of belonging are everything. To Coleman this is the same view he was exposed to at home by his father and brother, but now it manifests itself on a larger scale. Howard University and the entire concept of historically black colleges are to Coleman a representation of the suffocating racial solidarity, a continuum that begun already in his childhood home. Escaping from Howard and the south as the beginning of Coleman’s journey is escaping from the history of collective black suffering that had become overpowering in Coleman’s early life.

4-Masculinity and Gender Issues

Gender is an essential aspect in looking at the Human Stain for two major reasons. One is the fact that the protagonist is male, and his lives and fates are defined by his gender. The way he acts, the dreams and goals he has, and the pressures and expectations bestowed upon him by the society are what he is because of the gender of the protagonist.

He epitomizes one type of masculinity in his era, and all his experiences come his way in part because He is American man .Another important reason to look at gender issues in the novel is his portrayal of women, there are female characters that play a significant role in how the male protagonist lives turn out. In the case of The Human Stain He is again two female characters, a professor who is Coleman Silk's colleague Delphine Roux and Silk's lover Faunia Farley. Common to these female characters is, in a way, their negative involvement in the fates of the man in the novel. Moreover, although the women in the novel play active roles in the man's lives, they also seem to exist solely for that purpose.

As Debra Shostak sees as being typical of Roth's work, all the women in the novel are presented through the point of view of the male protagonist (2007, 112). The female characters are objects of either the man's desire or scorn, and in some cases both.

In some instances the portrayal of the women has been seen as evidence of misogyny from the part of Roth or Roth's revenge on particular women in his own personal life, most notably his ex-wife Claire Bloom, who has been seen by some reviewers as the basis of Eve Frame's character (Grant, 1998). This view is shared by many scholars, including Elaine Safer, who describes *I Married a Communist* as "clearly a retaliatory act", comparing a woman's betrayal to the betrayal of those who disclosed information about alleged communists to the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the McCarthy era.

I do not intend to look at the novel portrayal of women as the author's personal vendetta or as evidence of some aspect of the author's personality. However, I do recognize the negative aspects in the portrayal, and therefore it is important to further analyze the female characters. There is a clear dynamic in how the female characters influence the lives of the man. As I stated above, in the entire novel, there are characters that are important to the man, but their status in relation to the protagonist is slightly different. There are of course the women who are a part of the protagonist immediate families. Faunia Farley is "Coleman Silk's lover, teacher and femme fatale", as Mark Shechner puts it. (2007, 155) and Delphine (The Human Stain), come from the outside and have no blood relation or romantic involvement with the man, but end up being influential characters in the protagonist lives.

The key in analyzing the female characters lies in the fact that they are viewed through the eyes of the protagonist, as I stated above. In the novel there is constant dialogue between the protagonist and the women in his life. The protagonist is bound to these women, and aspects of the women's behavior become quite dominating in the relationships. The man's incapability to deal with the behavior of women could be attributed to a view of man as rational and women as irrational beings.

Catherine A. Lutz describes this outlook in her article "Engendered Emotion: Gender, Power and the Rhetoric of Emotional Control in American Discourse":

As both an analytic and an everyday concept in the West, emotion, like the female, has typically been viewed as something natural rather than cultural, irrational rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered, subjective rather than universal, physical rather than mental or intellectual, unintended and uncontrollable, and hence often dangerous. This network of associations sets emotion in disadvantaged contrast to more valued personal processes, particularly to cognition or rational thought, and the female in deficient relation to her male other. (1996, 151)

Lutz presents a collection of binary oppositions that are traditionally attached to men and women in the Western culture. These oppositions are interesting in terms of my study, since they provide a way to look at the relationship the female characters in the novel have to the male protagonist. In my analysis of the female characters many of the qualities that Lutz connects with emotion and with women are applicable to the women in the novel. They seem irrational, overly emotional, vindictive and insecure, with all these negative qualities complicating the lives of the man, the protagonist. However, the protagonist in the *Human Stain* does not clearly represent the opposite, since his actions slide down the road of irrationality as well. This requires one to examine whether the man is simply not as rational as Lutz suggests they should be, or is the man's irrationality another result of their incapability to deal with the unfamiliar.

5-The “Self-Made Man” in *The Human Stain*

The concept of the “self-made man” is part of American history and identity, an ideal that is so embedded in the nation’s collective ethos that it continues to dominate the cultural and political atmosphere of the country to this day. The concept is also crucial with *The Human Stain* and *Coleman Silk* taken it to a whole new level. In passing, Coleman truly invents and “makes” himself, the protagonist mostly build on something that already exists, although the idea of “making” oneself.

As Patrice Rankine suggests, Coleman Silk’s journey of passing and constructing a new identity is “an act of self-construction, a conscious decision to throw off history” (2005, 104). Coleman’s initial desire to break free from his father’s legacy or the attempt to escape the burden of his racial history, but also by the way in which Coleman executes his project of passing. He has to execute various well-planned and sometimes risky manoeuvres in order to create and maintain his unique existence, which give a picture of his passing as an actual construction, something that is put together using elements that have to fit together seamlessly and be kept together by careful maintenance.

Coleman enlists in the army as a white man, which in itself is a very risky move, and it creates one of the few occasions where his façade is in danger of collapsing. Serving in the navy, on a leave in Norfolk, he is thrown out of a brothel because when seeing his naked body, the prostitute identifies him as a black man. In addition to enlisting in the army, Coleman makes many other conscious moves to conceal his black heritage, such as marrying the Jewish Iris Gittelman, completely disowning his family and taking advantage of the fact that he was brought up in a Jewish neighbourhood and, for example, trained by a Jewish boxing coach, Doc Chizner. In the novel, Nathan Zuckerman states that in his youth, “Jews and their kids ... loomed larger than anyone in Coleman’s extracurricular life” (THS 88). This experience Coleman has of Jews and the Jewish community is of course a tremendous help in his project. It is the thing that keeps his construction from falling apart, as it makes him a plausible Jew outside of his physical appearance.

David Tenenbaum claims that Coleman’s decision to assume a Jewish identity was motivated by a desire to “hedge his renunciation of his minority status by aligning his cause with ... a quasi-oppressed racial group”.

Tenenbaum sees Jews as “quasi-oppressed”, which suggests that Coleman can “soften” his crossing over in passing as Jew rather than a privileged White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (2006, 44). On the other hand, the novel itself gives us the impression that Coleman’s decision to pass as a Jew was motivated by the practicality of that choice regarding his appearance and the Jewish influence he was subjected to in his youth. Either way, this reinforces the argument that there is definitely something deeply motivated and calculated in Coleman Silk’s identity construction.

The above-mentioned “practicality” can also be seen as Roth’s way of pointing out that there are links and similarities between the non-WASP groups in the United States. It is “easier” to belong to another minority. For Coleman Silk, passing as white is escaping racism and history (both personal and collective) and a way to live out his desire to truly be his own man. It has to be acknowledged that by assuming a Jewish identity Coleman automatically climbed many steps on the social ladder especially compared to the fate of his father, who as an educated black man had to work as a waiter in a train (THS 86), but for Coleman rising in society’s ranks is not by far the only motive. Patrice Rankine claims that for a long time passing was “a natural choice” for those blacks who were able to do it, since the racial hierarchy in the American society was so strong (2005, 102). Whether we see Coleman Silk’s passing this way, as a natural choice dictated by necessity, depends on the way we look at the treatment he got and the hardships he had to encounter in his New Jersey neighborhood. Do we see them as comparable to those black people experienced after the abolition of slavery or in the segregated south? Regardless of which motives we consider as primary and which we see as secondary, it does not change the intricate way Coleman Silk executes his passing. It is consciously planned and carried out in order to create a new, unique existence.

The process of Coleman’s passing can in a larger context be seen as a movement from a racial identity towards an American identity. According to Mark Maslan, quoted in chapter 2.4.2, through his passing Coleman forsakes his racial identity and embodies an American one. Whether Coleman himself sees his new identity as American, is debatable. Coleman is not as hung up in being a representative of some greater ideal of what “America” should be like. To him the new identity is even more personal, it is something completely new and not subject to any kind of classification, not by him and certainly not by anyone else. Coleman’s purification, his getting rid of his racial category, is the beginning of a new freedom from the burden of a past. Coleman’s view on this is presented in the novel as follows:

to vanish, as they used to say in the family, ‘till all trace of him was lost.’ ‘Lost himself to all his people’ was another way they put it. Ancestor worship – that’s how Coleman put it. Honoring the past was one thing – the idolatry that is ancestor worship was something else. The hell with that imprisonment. (THS 144)

By passing, Coleman Silk abandons his past and starts his life as a new person with a new identity that is wholly his own. This is expressed well by Maslan saying “It is passing, not the past, that defines his identity” (2005, 365-66). Through his choice Coleman becomes the “American individualist par excellence” (THS 311).

Here is the core of my claim about Coleman falling in line as representative of American men of his time. Even though Coleman does not find himself being American as in being a part of something that is “American”, he ends up epitomizing America nonetheless. In his extreme form of individualism, Coleman captures the essence of the American quest for sovereignty and takes it a big step further. Thinking about Coleman’s decision in terms of leaving or denying one racial group because another, better one has more to offer, it is useful to take into account Timothy Parrish’s words: “Sovereign of his own self, Coleman is not portrayed as denying his black identity, or its authenticity, so much as making a life choice that renders such questions irrelevant” (2004, 443).

Coleman is not crossing over to one group; he is denying the entire idea of groups, and on the larger scale the ideological dominance of prejudice and grouping based on ethnicity, which is present in the American society.

Coleman seems to be an extremist advocate for what America originally was supposed to be all about: to him, all men truly are created equal. Coleman's extremism applied to the concept of equality seems to mean roughly the same than Rorty's concept of autonomy. Rorty considers this type of autonomy unachievable, and eventually we realize that also in Coleman's case it is exactly that. Nevertheless, Coleman believes that he could achieve that autonomy, that the type of world where one could be totally free of the barriers society creates is possible. The problem is that Coleman wants it to be possible only for him. Coleman has what Rorty describes a "demand that our autonomy be embodied in our institutions", and this demand should, according to Rorty, be limited to the private life of citizen in a liberal society (1989, 65). Through his adaptation of a truly new and unique identity, Coleman makes this bold demand of the society around him. It is the ultimate aim of Coleman's passing, as well as it is the very thing that will eventually cost him all his life achievements.

6-Exposure and Condemnation to Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination, which began from 1619 when the first group of black slaves was sold to North America, has a long history in the US. Before President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, slavery was legal in America, and citizens' rights endowed by law were only given to European whites, but Indians, blacks and Asians were excluded. Until 1960s last century, European whites, especially WASPs, had enjoyed privileges in education, suffrage and jurisdiction, etc. Even non-Protestant Europeans, such as Jews, Irish, Poles and Italians were also discriminated against, and blacks were more seriously despised. Since the Civil Rights Act was declared in 1964, open racial discrimination has been prohibited, but hitherto concealed racialism has always existed.

Even when African Americans do everything right—get an education and work hard at well-paying jobs—they cannot achieve the wealth of their white peers in the workforce" (Cohen-Marks, 2011, p. 827). "The plight of African Americans is a touchstone for American ideals, revealing the disjunction between praxis and belief, values and reality" (Rankine, 2005, p. 109).

In the novel *The Human Stain*, the hero Coleman Silk's dream was to pass to a white to live a happy life without being discriminated against. When he was 14 years old, Coleman was a boxing training assistant in Doctor Chizner's boxing training class, teaching white children basic skills. But the parents of the white kids were not willing to accept coaching from a black. In Orange High School, some teachers showed prejudice against black students. When a white athlete was injured seriously and needed blood donation, his family refused to accept Coleman's donation because he was a black. While he was a freshman at Howard University, a university for blacks, one Saturday he went off to visit the Washington Monument with his roommate. When they stopped at a store to buy a hot dog, he was refused and was called a nigger, which was the first time for him to be discriminated against bald-facedly.

During World War II, as an armyman, when he went to a whorehouse for whites in Norfolk, his black identity was found out and he was thrown out, his forehead knocked into the ground, blood shedding on his face, wrists almost fractured. At the age of 22, Coleman met 18-year-old Steena Palsson, a bright, vivacious, beautiful and sexy girl from Minnesota. Her father was an Icelander, and her mother was a Dane. Coleman and Steena were deeply attached to each other for two years. When he invited her to his home to see his family members, his black identity was uncovered. Though she deeply loved him, she couldn't bear his being a black and left him. These experiences made him strongly abominate racial discrimination, and the dream to free himself from racism sprouted in his mind. To make the dream to pass into a white come true, Coleman heartlessly broke away from his mother, had no choice but to conceal his black identity from his wife, and became a person living in illusion like a ghost. In the novel, Faunia Farley became Coleman's lover after his wife died. The thought that his ex-wife was making love to a Jew made Lester Farley, Faunia Farley's ex-husband, burst into a rage: "Jew bastard. There's something wrong with those Jew bastards. They don't look right. She goes down on him? Jesus Christ. Vomit, man....Who else has a wife sucks off an old Jew? Who else!" (Roth, 2005, pp. 70-71).

Shame and hatred out of racialism became important factors that made Lester Farley finally murder them with a plotted traffic accident. In *The Human Stain*, other cases of racial discrimination exposed by Philip Roth are as follows:

Dr. Charles Drew discovered how to prevent blood from clotting so it could be banked. However, when he was injured in a traffic accident, the hospital that was nearest would not take colored, so he bled to death; if a Jew wanted to pursue the profession of medicine, it was essential for him to have a perfect record not only in college but also going back to kindergarten; there were discriminatory quotas that were designed to keep Jews out of medical schools, especially the medical schools of Harvard and Yale; prejudice in academic institutions against colored students was far worse than it was against Jews (see Roth, 2005, pp. 86, 333).

7-The “Spooks”-Incident and the Persecution of Coleman Silk

Previously I examined Coleman Silk’s passing narrative and his abandonment of black history and heritage. With his new identity, Coleman makes a very impressive career in academia, and eventually becomes a respected dean of faculty in Athena College. Coleman Silk became an outcast in Athena and was forced to resign when he used the word “spooks” referring to two students who had enrolled to his class but never attended. As Coleman himself says:

“I was referring to their possibly ectoplasmic character. Isn’t that obvious? ... I had no idea what color these two students might be. I had known perhaps fifty years ago but had wholly forgotten that ‘spooks’ is an invidious term sometimes applied to blacks.” (THS 6)

Regardless of Coleman’s indifferent attitude to race, stemming from his own background, these students were African-American and they, as well as the whole community of Athena, took Coleman’s words as a racist insult because to them Coleman was a white Jewish academic who used an expression traditionally understood as racist at a time when the highest ideal and the most priced value in politics and in society is political correctness. Therefore it is clear that he must be crucified. After all, quoting Michael T. Gilmore, the novel “takes place during its own moment of McCarthyite excess, Kenneth Starr’s Chillingworth-like pursuit of President Clinton as a perjurious adulterer” (2003, 174). This quote not only places the novel in its own historical context, but also connects it with two other “witch-hunts” in American history. It relates the novel with McCarthyism and the persecution of communists, a context crucial to *I Married a Communist*. It also parallels the novel with one written more than a century earlier, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

The result of the incident is ultimately a series of unfortunate events. Through the pressure applied on Coleman, he is forced to retire and his wearing battle for fair treatment has resulted in his wife’s illness and eventual death. Roth compares the nature of the process throughout the novel to the Clinton-Lewinsky-scandal, and Elaine Safer and Michael Gilmore both parallel the resulting persecution to *The Scarlet Letter* and Hester Prynne’s experiences in the hands of the puritan crowds (2006, 122). Motives are different at different times, but the treatment of Coleman Silk in the academic community of Athena was nothing less than a witch-hunt. He was never hung on a scaffold for all Athena to see, but was cast out of the community much like Hester.

8-Coleman and Two Women of Athena

The *Human Stain* also includes female characters that are worthy of attention in this study. These female characters are instrumental in the development of the story and in the fate of the protagonist.

Delphine Roux is a young faculty member who much like the young Coleman struggles with her French background trying to find her American identity. Roux is “a crusader for political correctness” (Safer 2006c, 120) and the most fierce accuser of Coleman during his trial. Safer also describes Roux as a farcical character (119), and in the cases where her drive to promote political correctness clashes with the nature of her own actions she certainly has elements of farce. Faunia Farley is a university janitor, with whom Coleman is having a sexual relationship. Coleman and Faunia are also connected through an effort to transform their identities and in that way find and secure their places in society.

9-Coleman and Delphine Roux

Coleman Silk hired Delphine Roux, a Yale graduate, when he was the dean faculty at Athena College. As new to the country as to the university, Delphine did not know how she should act around the intimidating and strict authority figure. Her insecurity later became the driving force behind her personal vendetta towards Coleman. She is an example of what Gottfried calls “social control” or “behavioural modification” by the American managerial state (2002,71).

Roux comes from an upper-class French background, and through her education in the liberal environments of *École Normale Supérieure* and Yale University has developed a sort of rebellion against her heritage. She feels the expectations and heritage of her aristocratic French family as a burden, as they have “respect not for the individual (down with the individual) but for the tradition of the family” (THS 275).

This resembles the way Coleman feels about his black ancestry and the way his family embraced it. Considering the similarities in the two characters’ backgrounds, it is somewhat ironic that Roux finds encouragement and purpose in taking a stand against Coleman as his most fierce prosecutor and an advocate for political correctness, whereas Coleman is the real American individualist who stands alone against the accusers.

To further point out the farcical element in Delphine Roux’s character, mentioning the incident where Roux intends to send a personal ad to the *New York Review of Books*, but instead the e-mail finds its way to every computer in the Department of Languages and Literature. What is more, the ad describes a man who shares all his qualities with Coleman Silk. Ashamed and panicking, Delphine decides to make up a story of Coleman breaking into her computer and sending the message.

In the novel Delphine is portrayed as a young Yale graduate who is intimidated by Coleman. She saw the “spooks”-incident as a way to get rid of that threatening authority figure, and now she is seeking a relationship with a man who is just like him. Furthermore, Delphine is puzzled with how she could include in her ad the idea “whites only need apply” (THS 262). Imagine how the community of Athena would react if they found out that the woman who would rid the college of the old racist Jew, could be guilty of such discrimination. The hypocrisy embedded in the witch-hunt discourse and dating back to as far as Hawthorne is painfully evident here. The fact that Delphine herself is guilty of racial discrimination could put the justification of her actions towards Coleman under heavy scrutiny, but Delphine is guilty only in her thoughts, and that is the crucial difference. No one in the Athena community will ever catch Delphine in the act of racial discrimination, and that gives her the right to act as Coleman’s accuser. After all, if a transgression is not public, there is no way for the society to hand out a punishment. As a post-structuralist literary theorist, Delphine Roux should be well aware of the contradiction in her actions.

The contradictive behaviour is visible not only in the transgression she made regarding the personal ad, but also of her treatment of Coleman’s case. Refusing to see the possibility that Coleman used the term “spooks” in a sense that had nothing to do with the students’ race, Delphine assumes that there is only one way to interpret the word, that there is only one possible relation between the word ‘spooks’ and reality. Moreover, as a poststructuralist, Delphine should not be so quick to accept the label of being “politically correct”. Richard Feldstein and Teresa Brennan claim, albeit their view is directly related to the discourse of left and right in American politics, that by accepting the label of “political correctness” poststructuralist academics among others “oblige right-wing critics by assuming their assigned narrative role in a binary network of fantasy” (1997, 185).

This view is very credible, since Paul Gottfried, whom I have quoted above, represents this right-wing criticism in the factual world, whereas Coleman and Delphine act out this situation in fiction. Coleman accuses Delphine of destroying his career in the name of political correctness, and Delphine does nothing to claim that this is not the case, by having her forsake Her assumed intellectual position in this matter, Roth makes Delphine Roux become both morally and intellectually suspect

10-Coleman and Faunia Farley

Coleman's relationship with the school janitor Faunia Farley is one of the major developments in the novel, as the power relations in the relationship have a major effect on how Coleman is ultimately viewed in the Athena community. Faunia Farley is a 34-year-old woman, who probably has had more misfortune in her life than an average person would be able to handle. She has had an abusive stepfather, a violent marriage and she has lost her two children in a fire. Faunia's past has led to her using some escape strategies, much like Coleman.

In the case of Faunia, the most important one is denying that she can read. For Faunia, faking her illiteracy is a means of denying her prestigious upper-class background and dropping the burden, but for all the others it is a disability, which to them implies that her relationship with Coleman is based on abuse and control. The sexual relationship between these two characters has an effect on how the society around Coleman reacts to his person. In addition to being a racist, he is seen as misogynistic and abusive. This "knowledge" gives more power for the faculty in its battle to deprive Coleman of his position.

David Tenenbaum claims that Coleman seeks refuge in Faunia, since she feels the same kind of shame towards her background as he feels towards his determination and drive to abandon his race (2006, 36). After we learn that Faunia can in fact read, and she systematically resists all the occasions where Coleman is trying to teach her or act in any way as an authority figure, we realise that this view of the relationship is perhaps more accurate. They are equals, two people who find solace in the arms of another human being who shares the burden of secular existence. They both have made their personalities and identities, but in doing so, they have also deprived themselves of the chance of finding true companionship from anywhere else than each other. However, regarding the ultimate fates of these two characters, the way they feel about and understand each other has little importance. What matters is what the community outside the couple perceives and how they interpret it. Society has prejudices against them both, for Faunia especially as illiterate divorcee and a potential "fallen woman", but it is still possible for it to be concerned about Faunia's fate in the hands of bad people like Coleman Silk. In the eyes of the society, Faunia is yet another victim that unfortunately could not be rescued.

This way, Faunia is better suited to face the expectations of a society. She is protected by its rules, whereas Coleman Silk is not. This is not entirely because of gender and Faunia's position as a victim, but also because Faunia's constructed identity and transformation is better suited to withstand scrutiny. Faunia is merely hiding something, keeping her literacy and bad experiences away from public view, while Coleman relies on actively creating and developing his identity. By doing this, Coleman has lost the protection he would have received from the society had he remained in his original social position. Now, in the face of adversity, he must cling to his invented identity, actively defending himself.

11-The Counterpunch

The sport of boxing, at its most fundamental—in the ring, in the fight—is often described, and certainly narrated in *The Human Stain*, as a space that is color, creed, and race blind. This is a space where society’s doctrines, prejudices, and pre-designated identities are replaced by one simple doctrine of competition, after the naturalist model described by Boddy where “authenticity [is] evident in sweat, bruises and blood” (371)—and both form and content evoke this here. It is a space where Silky learns what, certainly, could be described as hubris, but can perhaps more humanely be conceived as “integrity,” according to Miller’s aforementioned model of tragedy. Silky, with his irrepressible but playful spirit of self-determination, gravitates towards this space where “if you were good and you were between thirteen and eighteen, you got matched up” (*THS* 89) against another fighter, the only determining quality to the match here being weight. It is one environment, however finite, however contingent, where the distinctively American ideal of selfdetermination in a eritocracy can be realized. For, as Joyce Carol Oates observes,

“[t]he suggestion is of a world-model in which we are humanly responsible not only for our acts but for those performed against us. As in the theatre or the church, settings are erased by way, ideally, of transcendent action” (Oates 13).

Oates builds towards this aphorism via a discourse expounding the manner in which: Because a boxing match is a story without words, this doesn’t mean that it has no text or no language, that it is somehow “brute,” “primitive,” “inarticulate,” only that the text is improvised in action; the language a dialogue between the boxers of the most refined sort “one might say, as much neurological as psychological: a dialogue of split-second reflexes”. (11)

Lacan’s conception of language is of a flat system, where words (signifiers) are not inherently connected with the things they refer to (the signified). Repression then occurs where harmful signifiers are repressed, repressive signifier chains amassing in their absence. Oates describes boxing as more a depth model of language, “as much neurological as psychological,” where its neurological vocabulary of bobs, slips, weaves, and punches leaves no space for repression, no signifier-signified gap. Faced with a father imprisoned in a repressive fortress of words, this alternative language of the “most refined sort” is of obvious appeal to Silky. It offers him escape into another mode of discrete linguistic (relative self-) determinism: That’s why he liked shadowboxing and hitting the heavy bag: for the secrecy in it.

That’s why he liked track too, but this was even better. Some guys just banged away at the heavy bag. Not Coleman. Coleman *thought*, and the same way that he thought in school or in a race: rule everything else out, let nothing else in, and immerse yourself in the thing, the subject, the competition, the exam— whatever’s to be mastered become that thing. (*THS* 100)

Immersion in an alternative language system after a model that precludes such repression as inherent within conventional language can clearly be a space in which one can find relief from these other repressive pressures. And it also, arguably, offers a model for success, whereby Coleman’s imperative is to “let nothing else in, and immerse yourself in the

thing [. . .] become that thing,” which may be transferable. He can then return to the symbolic order with a roadmap for success despite repressive forces.

We can certainly conclude that Coleman’s boxing offers him a therapeutic escapism, and perhaps also that it is somewhere he learns something of the transformative value in the immersive pursuit of one idea, irrespective of countervailing forces or repressions. But, as throughout this novel, the protagonist is forced to confront, evaluate, and articulate this private thing that he values most (the sanctity of the ring, the sanctity of his own ethnic identity) when it is made public, challenged by an antagonist.

The *Human Stain* explores these dualities, but perhaps also suggests a mode of existence beyond them, which need not only be resolved in death. In keeping with Oates’ expression of boxing as the most refined form of a language, Coleman’s commitment to his boxing is challenged by “The father who never lost his temper. The father who had another way of beating you down. With words. With speech. With what he called ‘the language of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens.’ With the English language that no-one could take away from you” (THS 92).

Of course, this must be read in the bitterly ironic context within the broader plot of the novel, where Professor Silk’s language has been precisely taken away from and turned against him in the (willful) misinterpretation of his utterance of the word “spooks” as a racist epithet—whereby he now “is the college racist” (THS 83).

Moreover, there is a barely repressed rage inherent in the father’s fortress of words: “But if he couldn’t in the dining hall, at least at home he was able to speak with all his deliberateness and precision and directness and could wither you with words” (THS 93). This return to Latinate- and-qualifier-profuse prose is then juxtaposed with an Anglo-Saxon stream-of-consciousness poetics of play and abandon: And here at the very start of Sunday dinner, he ran out of the house and for nearly an hour he did his roadwork, up central avenue and over the Orange line [. . .] running and throwing punches, sprinting, then just running, then just sprinting, then shadowboxing all the way back to Brick Church Station, and finally sprinting the stretch, sprinting to the house, going back inside to where the family was eating their dessert and where he knew to sit back down at his place, far calmer than when he had bolted, and to wait for his father to resume where he had left off. (THS 92)

The percussive repetition of the action verb “sprinting,” the abandon to “just” physical expression, is expressed through a breezy assonance in the description of Silky’s sublimating physicality—in Oates’s aforementioned words—of the “most refined sort.” As he bursts from the repressive nuclear core of the family, this physically expressive, playful mode of boxing training is elevated to something of at least comparable psychological value to what one can do with words, perhaps even something greater, in keeping with Oates’s notion of transcendent action. It cannot be coincidental that it is from this world of color-blind transcendent action that the prospect of slipping the punch of his racial identity first emerges.

When Doc Chizner, with his color-blind pragmatism, expresses to Silky the possibility of attaining a boxing scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh, he is at his most attractive, to both the young boxer and, certainly, to at least this reader: “Now, it wasn’t that on the way up

Doc told him to tell the Pitt Coach that he was white. He just told Coleman not to mention that he was colored” (*THS* 98).

As he expounds this situation to Coleman, his persuasiveness remains rooted foremost in its hard-boiled directness, but, within this pragmatism, it also expresses a simple championing of personal over racial identity, framed within the language of a discrete transaction: “‘If nothing comes up,’ Doc said, ‘you don’t bring it up. You’re neither one thing nor the other. You’re Silky Silk. That’s enough. That’s the deal.’ Doc’s favorite expression: that’s the deal. Something else Coleman’s father would not allow him to repeat in the house” (*THS* 98).

There is a dark foreshadowing of the Oedipal betrayal Coleman enacts in turning away from his family and racial identity upon his father’s death in that last line—that his father cannot accommodate such “‘deals,” such pragmatism. And Coleman’s is a tragic role; Roth is not championing his rampant individualism, his playful irreverence, uncritically. But this critique lurks quietly in such discrete foreshadowing’s here. We see how Silky has discovered an arena for his engagement with the language of violent physicality, however contingent, that is meritocratic and allows a sublimating, creative performativity in his engagement with it something that his father appears to be in dire need of in his own engagement with language. Silky’s father is precisely trapped by the big other of the Lacanian symbolic order, whose circulating structures determine him as a subject. But Silky avoids this discourse as he avoids emotional antagonism. Instead he does battle with himself on the road and then returns to the dinner table with that antagonism exploded, or at least “slipped,” as his racial identity will be later; he finds another way, beyond death, or even any other less dramatic Oedipal or symbolic conflict.

To be sure, there is a far simpler explanation of Silky’s action here: he is experiencing stress relief, escapism. But it is also valid to recognize Roth’s elevation of this physical language. This is a trope throughout the novel, and another extrapolation upon its central polemic regarding the prescriptive and aggressively reductive way language is used by racists and the excessively politically correct alike. The notion that, just as there is no one single (politically) correct model of language as a communicative and performative medium, and that society and individual psychologies are perhaps best served by a profusion of contexts and modes of linguistic expression, likewise verbal language is not the only valid medium of communication or expression of self. Just as Oates argues of the physical language of boxing that it can “celebrate the physicality of men even as it dramatizes the limitations, sometimes tragic, more often poignant, of the physical” (9), likewise we, like Silky, can admire the poignant nobility of his father’s wielding of verbal weapons, even in the midst of the But ifs and at leasts that curtail his privileging of this language mode. We can simultaneously recognize the value and limitations of various languages, verbal and physical. But we, like Silky, can only acquire this dialectical vision—as opposed to simply an antagonistic reaction to such discourses—by being multilingual, by not permanently immersing ourselves in the discourse of any one language mode, and by slipping the punches that would otherwise enmesh us in only the one fight.

Dialectical vision must be elicited by playful engagement in a proliferation of language modes, symbolic orders, rituals. Definitions and identities, including personal identity, must be resistant to reductive characterizations, such as those of race or gender. Like Silky, we must remind ourselves that there are other fights, other (symbolic) orders—such as the violent meritocracy of the ring.

12-Playing With Rituals

In his opening polemic, the novel's narrator rails against the manner in which, further to the Clinton Lewinsky affair: In the Congress, in the press, and on the networks, the righteous grandstanding creeps, crazy to blame, deplore, and punish, were everywhere out moralizing to beat the band: all of them in a calculated frenzy with what Hawthorne [. . .] identified in the incipient country of long ago as “the persecuting spirit”; all of them eager to enact the astringent rituals of purification. (THS 3)

This is precisely the “fairy tale purity” that Coleman resists, and his repulsion from it is correlated to the attraction and understanding that he and Faunia share. But how, beyond the savage ascetic wisdom, the hermetic crow's cage of a willfully illiterate existence such as Faunia's, is one to avoid falling prey to these “astringent rituals of purification,” with which Roth purposefully frames the narrative, and which enmesh Delphine Roux? Oates relates the ideal of the “transcendent action” of boxing intimately to the manner in which boxing “as in the theatre or church” is a performative spectacle, often improvisational, yet also deeply ritualistic. As in religious experience, as in theater, as in the sexual act, there is a release of tension from its immediate object here, call it what you will: sublimation, transference; catharsis, escapism; (divine) revelation, opiate of the masses.

The ongoing consideration of the first of these models, the psychoanalytic, is certainly worthwhile with regards to Silky's enactment of ritualistic violence. The progressive character of Silky is irresistibly drawn to the aforementioned universe where “the persecuting spirit” is ubiquitous, be it at the hands of the racists, the politically correct puritans, or indeed the quietly, acceptably, brutalized father who “beat you down” and “withered you with words,” yet to whom you simultaneously owed so much love and respect. Silky counters his humane, humanist mother's objection to this ritualistic, violent—yet, within these parameters, fundamentally meritocratic—world by showing how such clinical meritocracy actually protects a skilled practitioner like himself, for whereas “[i]n the street this guy could have beat me silly. But in the ring? With rules? With gloves? No, no—he couldn't land a punch” (THS 90). This intimacy with violence in a finite and more meritocratic space must be attractive to those beset by the seemingly infinite violence and injustices of the world. Silky learns to escape into a meritocratic and progressive world of violence, a space where violence can be expressed positively; he learns that the repressed violence implicit in his father's tortured dignity, or in random, frenzied outbursts of street violence, are not the only way; that violence is not only the privileged ritual of the fascists, but can be wielded positively, in a playful and performative exercise of individual potency and integrity. He can find a world of his own in the boxing ring, where violence need not be repressed, where it can be expressed and understood. Oates claims that:

[T]hough springing from life, boxing is not a metaphor for life but a unique, closed, self-referential world, obliquely akin to those severe religions in which the individual is both “free” and “determined”—in one sense possessed of a will tantamount to God’s, in another totally helpless. The Puritan sensibility would have understood a mouth filling with blood, an eye popped out of its socket—fit punishment for an instant’s negligence. (13)

I would adjoin to this Silky’s further defense that “You don’t get mad, you just concentrate. It’s a sport. You warm up before a fight. You shadowbox. You get yourself ready for whatever is going to come at you” (THS 95). In the deconstruction of its ritualistic components that the discipline offers the true student of the sweet science who Silky is, the practice of violence becomes divorced from any horizon of meaning, fascist or otherwise; it becomes just another mode of language use, which he can master and use to either negative or positive effect, “possessed of a will tantamount to God’s.” It is worth emphasizing again that Oates asserts that boxing is not simply a function of the symbolic order, “not a metaphor,” but something more akin to a language of its own. With regard to the aforementioned unjust, violent world, and the contrary reading of Roth’s work as irretrievably bleak with regard to the unknowability of other (human) subjects, this dialectical, multilingual vision also teaches that finite conditions can be created, in the combative world of the boxing ring, or indeed that of professional academia in which the pugilistic “Dean Silk” dominates for much of his career.

Finite conditions can, indeed, be created, in infinite other arenas, and certainly through that other physical language of sex, even if contrary to or beyond strict propriety in accordance with the “puritan sensibility,” or the symbolic order. Meritocracies can be found—however finitely, however contingently—where we are “totally helpless” against their rules of cause and effect. The American dream of meritocracy need not always be a nightmare, but it must be recognized to be precisely a dream: an ephemeral ideal in engagement with which the dreamer must play, or, to mix metaphors and pun in a manner appropriate to the novel, must role with the punches.

The dream of self-determination cannot endure within a static, stratified reality—the dreamer must actively seek out fresh, finite spaces and language modes within which to realize meritocracy. And, if not nearly a panacea for an unjust and violent world, perhaps Silky learns something similar from his playful engagement in boxing to what playful and intellectually agile readers can learn from their critical engagement in a great novel such as *The Human Stain*: they can liberate logic from one context and analogously apply it elsewhere, in a manner perhaps not just cerebrally liberating but also emotionally so, and such that they can at least come closer to knowing themselves and other subjects, however ultimately contingent, partial and finite that knowledge must always be. Not only can they therapeutically pursue a chain of signifiers to the site of ultimate repression, but they can liberate this therapeutic, immersive practice, and analogously, empathically apply it elsewhere. This is the same renewed optimism, however tentative, however conditional, that Lacan found in Freud’s talking cure, because reading as dialectically artful a text as *The Human Stain* is a perpetual conversation.

By following the personal trajectories of those who passed and by crafting a collective history of racial passing, Roth sheds light on a phenomenon which has hitherto never been analyzed with such scope and depth. One of the greatest achievements of *The Human Stain* is to historicize the phenomenon of racial passing by showing how the practice evolved through time. By situating stories of passing in their historical context, Roth examines the specific geographic, social, economic, and political variables, which fostered the practice as well as the stakes it raised. *The Human Stain* examines the tension between the performative and constitutive aspect of race. It also stresses how subjectivity can be influenced and constructed by one's social perception. Roth successfully demonstrates how challenging one's ascribed racial status was a subversive act which proved to be dangerous as it equated to usurping a racial identity one was not legally entitled to. Roth provides a perfect illustration of the vulnerability of the passers by shedding light on the unknown phenomenon of racial outing.

Despite these minor criticisms, *The Human Stain* is on the whole a convincing study that provides important insights into the evolution of racial identity politics in the United States. In so doing, Roth addresses the relatively neglected issue of changing patterns of group identity in the African-American population, a group which has often been perceived as racially monolithic. One of the great merits of this monograph is to place the phenomenon of racial passing in the general history of the United States and to inscribe it in the conversation on race that has fundamentally structured the country's power relations. For all these reasons, Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* is a landmark contribution to the scholarship on racial passing in the United States that will prove of invaluable benefit to both scholars and to the general public.

Chapter III : The Anatomy of Coleman Silk in the Human Stain

“The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible “

Michelle cliff, claiming an identity the taught me to despise.

In the novel *The Human Stain*, the hero Coleman Silk's dream was to pass to a white to live a happy life without being discriminated against. When he was 14 years old, Coleman was a boxing training assistant in Doctor Chizner's boxing training class, teaching white children basic skills. But the parents of the white kids were not willing to accept coaching from a black. In Orange High School, some teachers showed prejudice against black students. When a white athlete was injured seriously and needed blood donation, his family refused to accept Coleman's donation because he was a black.

While he was a freshman at Howard University, a university for blacks, one Saturday he went off to visit the Washington Monument with his roommate. When they stopped at a store to buy a hot dog, he was refused and was called a nigger, which was the first time for him to be discriminated against bald-facedly. During World War II, as an armyman, when he went to a warehouse for whites in Norfolk, his black identity was found out and he was thrown out, his forehead knocked into the ground, blood shedding on his face, wrists almost fractured. At the age of 22, Coleman met 18-year-old Steena Palsson, a bright, vivacious, beautiful and sexy girl from Minnesota. Her father was an Icelander, and her mother was a Dane. Coleman and Steena were deeply attached to each other for two years. When he invited her to his home to see his family members, his black identity was uncovered. Though she deeply loved him, she couldn't bear his being a black and left him. These experiences made him strongly abominate racial discrimination, and the dream to free himself from racism sprouted in his mind. To make the dream to pass into a white come true, Coleman heartlessly broke away from his mother, had no choice but to conceal his black identity from his wife, and became a person living in illusion like a ghost.

In his works, Philip Roth objectively discloses the culture of free love and criticizes its negative effects. In the novel *The Human Stain*, President Bill Clinton's sexual scandal with a White House employee Monica Lewinsky was frequently referred to in town talks and became the social and political background of the novel. It is well-known that the sexual scandal ruined Clinton's political life. Similarly free love caused misfortune to many individuals and families. In the novel, when Faunia was five years old, her father found her beautiful mother has adultery and divorced her. At the age of 14, her stepfather attempted to rape her, but her mother took sides with her stepfather and took her to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist too sided with her stepfather, for he took money from her stepfather. Her mother had an affair with the psychiatrist afterwards. The mother's sexual indulgence and the loss of sense of security obliged her to leave her home, which led to her tragic life.

1-The Anatomy of Coleman Silk's Passing

Patrice Rankine states in her essay "Passing as Tragedy: Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, the Oedipus Myth, and the Self-Made Man" (2005, 102) that race is an important foundation for social categorizing in the United States. According to which racial group they belong to, some people are underprivileged in relation to others. The tradition of a passing story in America began already in the times of slavery, when some slaves were able to pass as whites and thus improve their social position. Of course, the most crucial step in improving one's social position at the time was gaining one's freedom. Often the attempt to pass was the only way an African-American could hope to avoid slavery. In Rankine's words, traditionally passing is "the individual's potential escape from what at times amounts to a deterministic, social blight" (101).

Coleman Silk is no exception in that sense, since he grew up as a black child in a mainly white Jewish neighbourhood and experienced forms of racism already at a young age. To point out a few examples, in *The Human Stain* there is a mention of Coleman's childhood where one of his schoolmates had an accident but the friend's family refused to take Coleman's blood because he was black. In another incident, Coleman is refused service at Woolworth's in Washington D.C. while he attends the all-black Howard University in the segregated south. Elaine Safer states that "Coleman Silk passes as white so as to be free" (2006, 119).¹⁹ Safer's description offers a fascinating starting point in studying the process of passing in the novel. The question of "being free" carries a lot of weight since there are multiple ways to look at Coleman's actions and their motives in the novel. There is definitely more to it than just the aspirations to better one's financial and social position, which we find in a traditional passing narrative. In the following I will look at Coleman Silk's process of passing in the modern-day American society, and more importantly I will consider why he chooses such ultimate means to achieve his goals

2-Coleman seen as Greek Tragedy

The earlier Norfolk incident momentarily weakens his resolve, leading him to characterize himself as a prodigal son:

“This was what came of failing to fulfill his father’s ideals, of flouting his father’s commands, of deserting his dead father altogether. If only he’d done as his father had, as Walter had, everything would be happening another way. But first he had broken the law by lying to get into the navy, and now, out looking for a white woman to fuck, he had plunged into the worst possible disaster.” (182)

Roth states, “He is repowered and free to be whatever he wants, free to pursue the hugest aim Free now not only of his father but of all that his father had ever had to endure. The obstructions. The wound and the pain and the posturing and the shame – all the inward gonies of failure and defeat” (109).

When Coleman enlisted in the Navy during World War II, he simply declared himself to be Caucasian and maintained the deception to his death. Having grown up in a largely Jewish neighborhood, passing for a non-religious Jew was the easy part. He abandons his parents and siblings for the white world. When Coleman at twenty-six makes the decision to pass as white his mother tells him “You’re white as snow and you think like a slave”(139). Painful as this separation is Coleman muses on the bizarre and black humour side of the situation. Overcoming disadvantaged origins, he becomes a successful college professor, scholar and dean at prestigious Athena College. But Colman’s success is at the price of a betrayal of self and family. Coleman’s sexual conquest of women both before and after Iris, dramatizes tellingly the centrality of the project of secrecy and self-invention to his identity. Even while enrolled at New York University, he has an affair with a white girl named Steena Palsson. Having decided to invite Steena for Sunday dinner with his family at East Orange, Coleman is gripped by a compulsive need to justify his act of passing. “He would get her,” so muses Coleman, “to see that far from there being anything wrong with his decision to identify himself as white, it was the most natural thing for someone with his outlook and temperament and skin color to have done” (120).

To his dismay, Steena breaks her relationship with him, unable to overcome her racial prejudice. Meeting her again a few years later, Coleman, by then already married and settled in New York, is gripped by a reverie:

“That is, he walked away understanding nothing, knowing he could understand nothing, though with the illusion that he would have metaphysically understood something of enormous importance about this stubborn determination of his to become his own man if...if only such things were understandable. “(125-26)

After his prospects with Steena fail, Coleman seeks Ellie Magee, a black girl, though his enthusiasm for her wanes soon. Only when he meets Iris he is convinced that he has found the woman who would “give(s) him back his life on the scale he wants to live it” (136). To Iris’s queries about his family, he blatantly lies that his parents are dead and that he has no siblings. Thus Coleman, is searching for the “singularity” that has “been his inmost ego driven ambition” (131).

He then married a non-religious Jewish woman and fathered four children. All four looked convincingly Jewish and Coleman's relief is explicit: "The family was now complete. They'd done it – he'd made it. With not a sign of his secret on any of his kids, it was as though he had been delivered from his secret" (177).

He almost confesses his secret to his wife Iris, resolving to present his wife with the greatest gift he possessed. He would tell the mother of his four children who their father really was. But he is saved from making the confession by watching Iris reaction to the crisis of a friend whose husband had secretly fathered another family. Iris description of the betrayal elicits one of Coleman's many analogies to Greek tragedy. Iris dies never knowing that her husband was black.

3-Public and Private – The Society and the Individual

Considering the statement I made about the novel protagonist as "self-made man" who has tried and succeeded in building his own ideal life, the concept of autonomy seems crucial to my analysis. The American philosopher Richard Rorty defines autonomy as follows:

"Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation, and which few actually do. The desire to be autonomous is not relevant to the liberal's desire to avoid cruelty and pain ... "(1989, 65)

Rorty's definition of how autonomy demonstrates itself in human beings and how autonomy should be understood as a means for an individual to somehow escape the confines society imposes on its members is interesting and also very accurate in terms of the novel I am focusing on. The protagonist in the novel express the kind of desire for, and also capability of being autonomous in the sense Rorty describes. The protagonist is capable of the "self-creation" Rorty introduces, but in the end He is still not able to totally escape the values and beliefs of the society. This becomes apparent in what is one of my central arguments in this thesis; that the protagonist is essentially destroyed in his aspirations towards autonomy by the fact that the beliefs and values change in a contingent society.

Rorty connects autonomy with the central idea of classic liberalism, the desire of human beings to avoid the cruelty and pain imposed by the state. Furthermore, Rorty claims that Foucault shared this thought, even though Foucault denied being politically or ideologically a classic liberal. (65) This connection between the desire for autonomy and the classical liberal desire to be free from the state's oppression is relevant here because we can claim that the American novels' protagonist lives in is a society that is very much based on the values of classic liberalism. The ideas of personal freedom, respect for private property and free market capitalism as a reigning economic model are all something classic liberals were advocating and are deeply embedded in American social and political thought. However, even considering the high value placed on freedom in a liberal society, Rorty claims that individual "autonomy" is still something else. In his search of autonomy, the protagonist in the novel is taking these ideas of freedom further and at the same time outside the confines of what is seen as appropriate in his society.

As I have stated above, a crucial theme in my analysis of the novel is the individual's life being part of larger historical and societal developments and an individual's identity being subject to an identity of a larger body, specifically American national identity.

According to Robert Chodat, Roth "has incessantly explored—even in his most metafictional and postmodern work ... not just the introspective, 'private' individual, and not just the historical environments of 'public' events, but the ways in which these domains merge and diverge, overlap and break apart" (2005, 717)

Chodat goes on to say that these very issues are under Roth's scrutiny in the American Novel, and his statement perhaps best describes the argument I am making about the novel. In my view, the *Human Stain* does exactly what Chodat promises; it examines the private individual in the historical environment of public events. Moreover, this dichotomy of public and private can be studied very closely with the dichotomy of society and individual. The relationship between the society or community and the individual examined in the novel becomes clear in the following statement by Chodat: "Roth implies a particular conception of what it means to be a person, to have a particular identity, and to express or enact this identity as a member of a modern civic community." (690)

This is the same type of relationship I previously referred to when presenting Rorty's views on how the individual's self-image is defined by the beliefs and values that are considered "good" or "valuable" in the time, place and culture one happens to exist in. In *The Human Stain*, Catherine Morley states that "what undoes Coleman [the protagonist] is the fact that he is 'out of time', a figure who belongs more to a vanishing past than to a present mired in political correctness" (2011, 81). This description of what essentially is responsible for "undoing" Coleman Silk is in my view applicable to the entire novel. What is required of a man as a successful member of a community varies according to time and place, and in some cases, such as in the one with our protagonist, this change can be hard and even impossible to adapt to.

4-Political Correctness and the “Persecuting Spirit”

Elaine Safer writes that “Athena College becomes a microcosm for the political correctness fever and what Roth terms ‘calculated frenzy’ that seized the nation in 1998” (2006c, 118).

1998 was the year when the American public screamed for President Bill Clinton’s impeachment due to his sexual encounter with his assistant Monica Lewinsky. Safer further claims that in *The Human Stain*, the judgemental attitudes of Silk’s colleagues in Athena are connected with the moral righteousness of the American public and the Republican congress at that time (2006, 117). The intolerance of the “liberal” community adds an ironic and tragicomic element to the novel. Silk, which during his life has made tremendous efforts to escape the possibility of becoming persecuted because of his race, is now the object of lynchmob attitudes in the name of political correctness.

Political correctness as an ideal epitomizes the tendency of treating people as part of a social group. This is important to note as it directly connects the novel with Richard Rorty’s ideas about a person’s self-image reflecting the values and norms of the community of which they are members. Following also Rorty’s ideas about individual’s autonomy, one could say that an individual’s desire to free oneself from the confines of political correctness can be understood as an effort to achieve autonomy. The fact that Coleman Silk is able to transform his entire person, starting from his ethnicity, but is not able to escape the norm of political correctness, speaks volumes of the power of the community against the individual. The fact that this effort is doomed to fail and that it has consequences that could be characterized as a punishment, also connect political correctness to Foucault’s idea of a dominating discourse in a society. The discourse of political correctness dictates the appropriate punishment for Coleman’s actions. The use of a racial slur by a person in a position of power against one in a subordinate position is an act that results in a punishment that has to be public in order to make it clear to everyone that the act will not be tolerated and also make sure that the punished will not be able to repeat the act. Coleman’s punishment meets both criteria, as he becomes the object of scorn in the entire community and he is forced to resign his position of power.

The way we commonly understand the term “political correctness” is as a way of keeping oneself from insulting a certain group or entity in one’s speech and action. An American political theorist and critic of the political correctness ideal, Paul Gottfried, states in *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt : Toward a Secular Theocracy* the following:

“American administrative democracy ... has moved into socializing ‘citizens’ through publicly controlled education and wars against discrimination. Such reconstructionist initiatives have been taken in response to what the state, the media, and ‘victim’ groups designate as a crisis, a surging outburst of prejudice that supposedly must be contained and whose representatives need to be reeducated.” (2002, 1)

According to Gottfried's thinking, the state as an authority has the power to control people's attitudes towards certain ideas, which results in collective thinking and actions. At the time of the "spooks"-incident, in the late 20th century, one important element in this collective ethos was political correctness. Coleman Silk belongs to the dominant group of white males, and the two students he directs his comment to are members of the oppressed group of African American females. Following Gottfried's thinking, the students belong to a "victim" group, and Coleman is a representative of the prejudice they have to face. Therefore, Coleman needs to feel the consequences of such attitude. This mentality of teaching a lesson has its roots already in Hawthorne's "persecuting spirit" (Safer 2006c, 2) and is voiced by the narrator Nathan Zuckerman as "America's oldest communal passion, historically perhaps its most treacherous and subversive pleasure: the ecstasy of sanctimony" (THS 2).

There are characters in the novel that either embrace the ideal of political correctness or reject it through their own actions. These patterns of behaviour can expand to measures beyond sanity. This is ultimately why Coleman Silk is treated the way he is. As Patrice Rankine puts it: "Silk's heroic individualism ultimately fails because he is part of a society that at times is disorderly. He cannot escape the madness of others ... Society negates the self-made man" (2005, 108).

This raises another important aspect concerning the discourse of power between the society and the individual: The sheer force with which the society's norms overpower the individual is not the only reason for the ultimate failure of the individual's quest for autonomy. One factor in this struggle is also the individual's inability to predict the ways the society works. In many ways Coleman Silk, fall victim to the latter more than to the former.

The novel seems to suggest that the self-made man cannot be a part of a society, although he is something that the American society has been thought to idolize. It could be that in Coleman Silk's case, his breaking of racial boundaries causes an even bigger problem than for example merely climbing the social ladder within a racial group, and race is the issue that comes to haunt him. In a society that is very conscious of race and its importance in the contemporary political environment, leading Coleman's life is simply impossible. At one point even Coleman, the individualist, tries to find a way out by blaming his treatment on anti-Semitism. He claims that he was "Thrown out of Athena ... for being a white Jew of the sort those ignorant bastards call the enemy" (THS 16). By "ignorant bastards" Silk refers to blacks, who according to Coleman think the Jews are "the major source of black suffering on this planet" (THS 16).

Timothy Parrish views this strategy of blaming one's treatment on another ethnic group's prejudice as impossible because until that day ethnicity has not stopped Coleman from becoming who he is (2004, 435). Blaming anti-Semitism for his treatment can be judged as both ironic in itself and hypocritical of Coleman, as it is an effort to play by society's rules after many years of ignoring them. The irony and hypocrisy lie in the fact that the group Coleman lays the blame on is the same that he originally came from and abandoned. Coleman has lived and experienced the prejudice aimed at blacks in America, but he is still capable of blaming them for reacting to it. In addition, Coleman's view of himself as qualified to make

this type of accusation is questionable, since he for so long has denied any allegiance to an ethnic group. Jewishness for him has been little more than an image, a mask that has protected him from unpleasant questions about his background and allowed him to function as a member of a society that is so keen on racial profiling. When Coleman at the moment of his own demise deems appropriate to use this make-believe ethnicity as a shield against the punishment bestowed upon him, it is difficult to determine whether it is justified or not. On one hand it can be seen as Coleman yet again hiding behind the mask of Jewishness, using his ethnicity in the way he has done throughout his entire life and career. On the other hand, if Coleman's reaction is read as true outrage about his situation and his allegation towards blacks as sincere, the claim of hypocrisy is justified.

5-Nathan Zuckerman in *The Human Stain*

Nathan could be described as a writer tempted by the kind of voluntary withdrawal Roth refers to in "Writing American Fiction." Zuckerman's self-imposed monasticism an isolation not unlike that symbolically embodied at the end of the novel in Les Farley, a "solitary man on a bucket. . . atop an arcadian mountain in America" (361)—is an attempt at "solid work," an "[a]bnegation of society, abstention from distraction, a self-imposed separation from every last professional yearning and social delusion and cultural poison and alluring intimacy, a rigorous reclusion such as that practiced by religious devouts who immure themselves in caves or cells or isolated forest huts" (43).

Yet Zuckerman cannot maintain this social disengagement, admitting that such a separation "is maintained on stuff more obdurate than I am made of" (43). This is where Coleman Silk comes in. Silk disrupts Zuckerman's austere existence by exploding onto the scene, "banging on the door and asking to be let in" soon after the death of his wife, Iris (10). As Zuckerman recounts the episode, Silk "roamed round and round my workroom, speaking loudly and in a rush, even menacingly shaking a fist in the air when erroneously, he believed emphasis was needed" (11). Coleman's lumbering into the novelist's workroom becomes a metaphorical intrusion into the writerly text-space. Coleman demands to become a focus of narrative, a wish that the writer ultimately grants through his re-creation of his life.

Narrating these events approximately two years after Silk's death, Zuckerman pinpoints an incident that seems to have nurtured his fascination with his subject: an innocent dance. One Saturday evening, after a casual game of cards, Coleman and Nathan hear Frank Sinatra's rendition of "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" coming from the radio. Coleman, a lover of big band music, is in a particularly jovial mood that evening and, moved by the music, asks his companion to dance. Zuckerman (who, at the telling of this narrative, knows about the professor's past) describes his unlikely dance partner as having once been "not only a studious boy but a charming and seductive boy as well. Excited. Mischievous. Bits demonic even, a snub-nosed, goat-footed Pan" (25). Coleman's appeal as a dancing partner, and as a "mischievous" subject for fiction, awakens something in Nathan. Yet beyond the overly easy homoerotic implications that could be read here, the narrator's feelings have a broader and farther reaching significance:

There was nothing overtly carnal in [the dance], but because Coleman was wearing only his denim shorts and my hand rested easily on his warm back as if it were the back of a dog or a horse, it wasn't entirely a mocking act. There was a semi-serious sincerity in his guiding me about on the stone floor, not to mention a thoughtless delight in just being alive, accidentally and clownishly and for no reason alive.

The effect this dance has on the novel's narrator should not be underestimated. As Nathan makes clear early on, he has chosen a life of artistic seclusion, an existence that includes the "encircling silence as your chosen source of advantage and your only intimate" (44). The way Zuckerman describes the Sinatra-serenaded dance suggests a reevaluation of his own disengaged life:

This was how Coleman became my friend and how I came out from under the stalwartness of living alone in my secluded house and dealing with the cancer blows. Coleman Silk danced me right back into life. First Athena College, then me—here was a man who made things happens. Indeed, the dance that sealed our friendship was also what made his disaster my subject. And made his disguise my subject. And made the proper presentation of his secret my problem to solve. That was how I ceased being able to live apart from the turbulence and intensity that I had fled. I did no more than find a friend, and all the world's malice came rushing in. (45) Zuckerman finds himself bewitched (and bothered and bewildered) by this "goat-footed Pan," so much so that recounting his story assumes almost salvific importance. The impromptu dance, then, becomes a central metaphor in the novel, one directly linked to the narrative act: just as Coleman guides the unsuspecting Nathan across the stone floor of his cabin, Zuckerman the author maneuvers Silk onto the "dance floor" of his text and in doing so touches the very fleshiness, the "warm back," of his being. Coleman playfully dances Nathan "right back into life," and in telling Silk's story, Zuckerman writes the life back into his deceased subject. But this is not all. What leads to Coleman's mirthfulness and what so fascinates Nathan is their topic of conversation before and after the dance. When they hear Sinatra on the radio, Silk is reading Zuckerman a recently rediscovered letter from his former lover Steena Palsson. After they dance, Silk reveals that he is having an affair with Faunia Farley, his *Voluptas*, as he calls her, and securing his sexual prowess with Viagra. Because of this, Zuckerman experiences an episode of what could popularly be called male bonding, a rarity in Roth's fiction:

I thought, He's found somebody he can talk with . . . and then I thought, So have I. The moment a man starts to tell you about sex, he's telling you something about the two of you. . . Most men never find such a friend. It's not common. But when it does happen, when two men find themselves in agreement about this essential part of being a man, unafraid of being judged, shamed, envied, or outdone, confident of not having the confidence betrayed, their human connection can be very strong and an unexpected intimacy results.

The juxtaposition of Nathan's impotence and Coleman's Viagra fueled affair is profoundly significant. After learning of his friend's sexual exploits, the narrator begins to question his own hermitlike existence and briefly loses his mental equilibrium. No longer certain that he can ever completely discount sex from his life, he wonders: "How can one say, 'No, this isn't a part of life,' since it always is? The contaminant of sex, the redeeming

corruption that de-idealizes the species and keeps us everlastingly mindful of the matter we are” (37). Nathan’s intimacy with Coleman draws him out of his idealized and sterile reclusiveness and back into the reality of life’s entanglements. For a writer without physical potency, this return may have its inevitable drawbacks the unresolved tensions, the frustrated longings, the unfulfilled moments of desire but as Zuckerman goes on to suggest, it allows the novelist to reenter the realm of the truly human.

As in most of Roth’s novels, desire becomes a revitalizing force; here it not only serves its expected erotic purpose but, more notably, functions as a narrative stimulant. It should come as no surprise to Roth’s readers that references to sex abound in the novel. There is Coleman’s Viagra, his youthful adventures in Greenwich Village, Nathan’s impotence, Steena Palsson’s sensual “poem,” Faunia’s seductive dance, Delphine’s thwarted longings, Zeus’s mythological horniness, President Clinton’s indiscretions, and, one of the title’s many connotations, the stain on Monica’s infamous dress. All of these taken together suggest a vibrancy of being, an unabashed celebration of life, and the kind of fantastic tribute that Zuckerman brings to his assessment of the morally beleaguered president: “I myself dreamed of a mammoth banner, draped Dadaistically like a Christo wrapping from one end of the White House to the other and bearing the legend a human being lives here” (3).

Yet just as prominent as the references to sex are the many allusions to its conjoined opposite, death. If, as David Kepesh reminds his interlocutor in *The Dying Animal* (2001), “Sex isn’t just friction and shallow fun [but] also the revenge on death” (69), then one can see death as the ultimate ontological payback—Thanatos overtaking Eros. Because of the life-affirming references to sex, its counterpart death necessarily becomes a dominant theme in the novel and one that goes a long way in explaining the narrator’s fascination with Coleman Silk. Zuckerman is preoccupied with mortality throughout the American trilogy, and not only because he is a cancer survivor. Each of Roth’s subjects in the three novels—Swede Levov, Ira Ringold, and Coleman Silk—becomes distinctive only through his demise. What gives significance to each life, at least in Zuckerman’s eyes, is its departure from the public stage that it helped to animate, especially in *The Human Stain*, where Silk’s vibrancy is most profoundly felt in its absence. As the narrator explicitly states, the novel’s very genesis occurs at a graveside: “And that is how this all began: by my standing alone in a darkening graveyard and entering into professional competition with death” (338). Although Coleman may “dance” Nathan back into life, he does so, ironically enough, by fostering within the writer a keen awareness of the narrative implications surrounding death.

Coleman Silk’s life nonetheless anticipates the darker implications of desire, specially for its narrator, Nathan Zuckerman. In this light, one could read Coleman’s impromptu fox-trot with Nathan as an unintentional dance of death. The novel contains numerous connotations of demise and barrenness, including not only the references to Zuckerman’s prostate cancer but also passages devoted to Silk’s funeral, his metaphorically dead African American past, the death of Faunia’s children, Les Farley’s social “impotence,” Iris Silk’s stroke, Faunia’s invalid father, Silk’s dying relationship with his children, the horrific suicide scene that Faunia helps clean up, and the allusions to Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*. But perhaps the most notable intimations of death and sterility occur in three extended and significantly placed passages: the scene where Silk takes Zuckerman to meet

Faunia at the dairy farm; the concert at Tanglewood at which Zuckerman last sees Silk alive; and the icefishing encounter between the narrator and Les Farley.

Immediately after Coleman dances the narrator “right back into life,” he invites his friend to accompany him to Organic Livestock, the dairy farm where Faunia lives and works. It is Silk’s habit to visit the farm while his Voluptas is milking her cows: he likes to stand just outside the stall and watch her silently perform her duties. Roth here constructs a bucolic domain another one of his imagined pastorals inhabited solely by females, cows and workers all. The farm exudes “an opulent, earthy oneness with female abundance” in which he feels entirely at home (48). What is most striking about this scene is its reference to fecundity. Not only do the cows excel at milk production, but their output is pure and free from the “stains” of pasteurization and homogenization. With adjectival verve, Zuckerman all but romanticizes the “creamy-colored cows with the free-swinging, girder like hips and the barrel-wide paunches and the disproportionately cartoonish milk-swollen udders” (47). In the center of all this abundance stands Faunia Farley, who appears to the observant narrator as if in a portrait, “cows framing her figure” (48). Nathan frames her again, figuratively, through highly evocative language reminiscent of Henry James’s introductions of his heroines (49–50). These associations of feminine or maternal wholesomeness give emphasis to Coleman’s newfound vivacity and what it might represent to the aging novelist.

Along with this life-sustaining abundance, however, lies a more sober reality, one that undermines the episode’s very richness. Soon after commenting on the productiveness of the dairy cows employing such words as “sensual,” “voluptuous,” “blissfully,” “pleasured,” “opulent,” and “abundance”—Zuckerman notes that these bovines reproduce by means of artificial insemination, a sterile procedure that nonetheless, according to Faunia, “could prove to be an emotional process for everyone involved” (48). It seems plausible that this information has an emotional effect on Zuckerman, who might find in the dairy cows animals who create without sex—a metaphorical kinship. Indeed, the narrator uses this event to speculate on his own subject position, and he does so against a backdrop of mortality. He refers to this episode with dramatic rhetoric, calling it a “theatrical performance” with two principal actors and he himself merely playing the part of a walk-on or extra. This episode obsesses Zuckerman, for he tells us that in the following nights, “I could not sleep because I couldn’t stop being up there on the stage with the two leading actors and the chorus of cows, observing this scene, flawlessly performed by the entire ensemble, of an enamored old man watching at work the cleaning woman—farmhand who is secretly his paramour” (51). What so preoccupies him somehow involves death, for he notes that observing the two clandestine lovers “was something, I suppose, like watching Aschenbach feverishly watching Tadzio” (51) and concludes his speculations by emphasizing the deaths of Coleman and Faunia just four months after this scene. Zuckerman’s uneasy commingling of Eros and Thanatos reaches a crescendo here:

The sensory fullness, the copiousness, the abundant superabundant detail of life, which is the rhapsody. And Coleman and Faunia, who are now dead, deep in the flow of the unexpected, day by day, minute by minute, themselves details in that superabundance. Nothing lasts, and yet nothing passes, either. And nothing passes just because nothing lasts.

Throughout this moving passage, Zuckerman qualifies the pastoral significance of his visit to Organic Livestock, and along with it its erotic implications, by introducing the reality of the transitory moment.

Another important “death scene” appears at the very end of the novel when Zuckerman meets Les Farley for the first and only time. Up until this point, the novelist has never had any direct contact with the Vietnam War veteran (although it is easy to miss this fact, given the several detailed passages on Les’s wartime experiences and post-traumatic stress disorder). Indeed, that is what makes this encounter so striking. From the beginning Nathan has been an active participant in the narrative that he creates—and at several points in the novel his story intrudes into, and almost replaces, Coleman’s—but this is the only time when he steps into a scene and appears off balance. The reason behind this change is that Les Farley is the character in the novel most closely associated with death. After two tours of duty in Vietnam—during the second, a return to action he volunteered for, he went “ape-shit” and spewed “death and destruction” via “door gunning” (65)—Les is “deadened” to existence, threatens to kill Coleman and Faunia, and purportedly causes their automotive deaths. But perhaps Les’s most notable associations with death occur during the final ice-fishing scene. When Nathan comes upon Les’s pickup, he is on his way to visit Silk’s sister and brother, Ernestine and Walter, and contemplating the passing of the former college dean. “Coleman, Coleman, Coleman,” the narrator repeats, “you who are now no one now run my existence” (344). With these prefacing, almost incantatory, thoughts about death, he finds Les, a solitary figure ice fishing on a frozen lake. Zuckerman is taken by the “pristine” site, “the icy white of the lake encircling a tiny spot that was a man, the only human marker in all of nature, like the X of an illiterate’s signature on a sheet of paper” (361).

The signifying “X” here could also represent the nullification of existence, for in the midst of this immaculate setting rests the terrifying potential of Les’s auger. The tool unnerves Nathan, becoming the central point of the narrator’s focus during his conversation with the lone fisherman: “The auger out on the ice. The candor of the auger. There could be no more solid embodiment of our hatred than the merciless steel look of that auger out in the middle of nowhere” (352). As Les relates the dynamics of ice fishing to the novelist, describing how utterly dark it is for the fish underneath the ice, Nathan notes a “chilling resonance” in his voice “that made everything about Coleman’s accident clear” (358). Zuckerman senses danger and knows that he should leave, but as with his fascination with Coleman’s suffering—“Once you’re in its grip, it’s as though it will have to kill you for you to be free of it” (12)—an absorption in the here and now keeps him put. The narrator explains: “The thought of who he was drew me on. The fact of him drew me on. This was not speculation. This was not meditation. This was not that way of thinking that is fiction writing. This was the thing itself” (349–50). Confronted with the enigmatic “thing itself,” Zuckerman realizes that he is out of his element and, in an effort to recover a sense of equilibrium, draws attention to his art. When Les asks Nathan for the name of one of his books, he replies: “The Human Stain. . . . It’s not out yet. It’s not finished yet” (356). Such is indeed the case, for his effort to make sense of the story of Coleman and Faunia and Les—and of himself within the context of that narrative—is a work in progress. This metafictional moment, in which both Zuckerman and Roth refer to texts they are in the

process of creating, can be read as a writer's awareness of the role of art in addressing issues of mortality; in the face of the void, this awareness becomes a textual exercise in delineating the very limits of subjective representation.

In many ways, Coleman Silk is himself a signifying mark, one of American ethnic subjectivity. As an African American male passing as a Jew, he obscures his past for the purposes of self-pliability. His success in deceiving everyone around him is a testament to the constructed, as opposed to the determined, nature of identity. Zuckerman finds Silk an enigma, is unable to read him, and at times can only approach him through questions. The narrator asks at one point, "Was he merely being another American and, in the great frontier tradition, accepting the democratic invitation to throw your origins overboard if to do so contributes to the pursuit of happiness? Or was it more than that? Or was it less?" (334). In one way Zuckerman sees Silk as another Jay Gatsby, changing himself for the sake of the green dock lights that dot the American landscape. Yet his uncertainty in deciphering the former college dean—was it more? was it less?—suggests that something else is at stake here. Coleman Silk is not only an American concerned with matters of self-definition, but an ethnic American attempting to control the means of his own signification. His power, recalling his old boxing skills as a counterpuncher, lies in his ability to embrace the opposite, what the narrator calls "being counter confessional" (100). Zuckerman (and Roth) presents Silk's struggle as one of competing communities trying to impose their "readings" on the individual subject. He considers Coleman "the greatest of the great pioneers of the I" and expresses his predicament in heroic terms.

The tragedy of Coleman Silk is that he fails to nurture any shared sense of ethnic experience. And in the process of creating his own identity, he denies that of his actual family. When Zuckerman reveals the ethnic history of Silk, we learn that his family's roots are not only African but also Native American, Scandinavian, Dutch, and English. Coleman abjures this heredity and reinvents himself, much like Faunia's favorite crow, Prince. The bird "didn't want anybody to know his background" (240) and instead "invented his own language" (243).

As Roth reveals in his story of Coleman Silk, self-definition can be a double-edged sword, engendering not only the possibility of being but perhaps communal alienation as well. It requires the kind of negotiations that Werner Sollors theorizes in *Beyond Ethnicity*, those between relations of consent and relations of descent (6). Re-creating the self can be a high-stakes game, as Silk learns: "freedom is dangerous. Freedom is very dangerous. And nothing is on your own terms for long" (THS 145).

Perhaps this is why Zuckerman is both fascinated with Coleman's situation and inclined to speculate on death. Silk, in many ways, "kills" his past in order to pave the way for his future; along with the negation of identity comes the possibility of subject re-creation. This is where the many references in *The Human Stain* to fictional creation become significant. Through the narrative voice of Nathan Zuckerman, Roth establishes a metaphorical link between the constructed nature of identity and the constructed nature of the text as it relates to subjective representation. In *American Pastoral*, Zuckerman reimagines his protagonist in order to better understand and more effectively construct his own Jewish American subject position. Much the same could be said of the narrator's re-creation of Silk. In mapping out Silk's ethnic character, or the absence thereof, Zuckerman demonstrates the viabilities as well as the limitations involved in composing (ethnic) identity. Nathan's account of Coleman Silk—its gaps, its speculations, its many fabricated passages—is just as much of a constructed fiction as Silk's invention of himself, as the narrator realizes at the end of the novel when he recognizes why Coleman could never finish the "Spooks" manuscript. "Of course you could not write the book," Zuckerman says to a now-deceased Silk. "You'd written the book—the book was your life. Writing personally is exposing and concealing at the same time, but with you it could only be concealment and so it would never work. Your book was your life" (344–45).

Coleman's unfinished text of the self gets to the heart of Philip Roth's (postmodern) project of signifying American identity, ethnic or otherwise. It proposes that the very act of narrative is in many ways an incomplete and "slant" means of getting at ourselves. Perhaps another implication of the novel's title is that the representation of identity is always already in an unfinished state, marked by the stain of subjectivity.

Conclusion

Coleman Silk is an exceptional man, living in a crypto mythological environment. He was one of Athena's earliest Jewish teachers, and the first Jewish dean of this East Coast WASP college. Remember that Athena, daughter of Zeus, was the goddess of wisdom, which, given the narrow-mindedness prevailing on the campus, is most ironic. The Homeric victories of this dean over the conservatism surrounding should have guaranteed him an illustrious fate beyond even death: "officially glorified forever" (6). Already his childhood revealed him in a singularity combining prodigious intelligence and sensuality: "Long before becoming Athena's pariah-he had not only been a studious boy but charming and seductive boy as well. A bit demonic even, a snub-nosed, goat-footed Pan "(25). The fear aroused at Athena by this iron-fisted dean is mythologically legitimized, for Pan taught men the art of war, and knew how to sow in his enemies an irrational fear, called "panic". The representation of this god of sexual power in a half-man, half-goat form is perfectly in keeping with Coleman's portrait as a fauna creature, at ease in the natural element, but totally unsuitable in the social context. Contemporary.

Family mythology, on the other hand, gives it noble origins, in a region presented as the cradle of modern America. According to his mother, Coleman Silk's family tree would even include "John Fenwick, an English baronet's son, a cavalry officer in Cromwell's Commonwealth army, and a member of the Society of Friends who died in New Jersey. Cesarea (the province lying between the Hudson and the Delaware) became New Jersey "(142). The shadow of Caesar soars over his destiny that every child of the family is given a middle name, taken from Julius Caesar Shakespeare. Coleman is actually called Coleman "Brutus" and is enlightened by the Shakespearean text at the burial of his father: "This had been purposed by the mighty gods! "(108). This awareness is part of a context heavily imbued with mythical elements, which it would be futile to attempt to draw an exhaustive list. Let us simply note that his brief but victorious boxing career began in a sports hall named "The Knights of Pythias" (91), which he called a youth mistress "Voluptas" (daughter of Psyche and Cupid [23]), and that Delphine Roux, her French enemy, is herself an exceptional woman who, like him, finds herself powerful but alone against all, "all but isolated in America ..., estranged" (272), sentenced voluntarily in exile, "all because she'd gone eagerly in search of an existence of her own" (272). She wears in her name that of the city of Delphi, and on her finger a ring representing "Danaë receiving Zeus as a shower of gold" (186). The last mistress of the fauna Coleman is called ... Faunia, whom Coleman nicknamed "Helen of Troy" (232), and the narrator refers to the couple composed by Professor Silk and Faunia (who presents himself as illiterate) as the equivalent of the one formed by Pygmalion and Galatea (208). With great humor, Coleman himself parallels the question of contemporary libido, medically assisted, with the concupiscence and unbridled fertility of the supreme deity :

"I'm taking Viagra [...]. Thanks to Viagra I've come to understand Zeus's amorous transformations. That's what they should have called Viagra. They should have called it Zeus " (32).

Another one, Les Farley, the jealous husband probably responsible for the death of the two lovers, composes a nemesis worthy of Coleman, because it is a veteran of the Vietnam war, a formidable fighter and also a dreaded marginal. "He is a trained killer thanks to the government of the United States" (69): programmed to accomplish the high works of society, his murder involved both personal revenge and commissioned execution.

In contrast to Oedipus', Coleman Silk's crime is not the murder of the father, who dies before Coleman resolves to pretend to be a white man and, thus, to deny his family: "He was murdering her. You do not have to murder your father. The world will do that for you. There are plenty of strengths to get your father. The world will take care of him, as he had indeed taken care of Mr. Silk. Who there is to be murdered, and that's what he saw doing to her ..."(138). His ambition is not social in nature. It responds to an aspiration of strictly individual order: "All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white-just on his own and free. He meant to insult him by his choice, nor was he trying to imitate anyone who did not take heed, nor was he staging some sort of protest against his race or hers "(120). Her mother herself adopts tragedian accents when she reveals that such an ambition even preceded childhood:

"You were seriously disinclined even to take the breast. [...] Even that might delay your escape ». Her words become prophetic and strictly imperial: « You think like a prisoner. You do, Coleman Brutus. You're white as snow and you think like a slave "(139).

In the polite universe of Athena, Coleman's sacrifice is, of course, symbolic, and his exile is dictated above all by his immense pride. The former dean perceives quite the relativity of the scandal, and the archaic motivations of the academic cabal of which he was victim: God knows nobody was meant to die. ... Or to resign either. ... Why should Coleman Silk resign? Nobody was going to fire him. Nobody would dare to fire him. ... Their intention was to hold my feet over the flames just a little while long... Who would have remembered any of it? The incident-the incident! -Provided them with a 'organizing issue' of the fate that was needed at a racially delayed place like Athena. (17) The irony of Coleman's fate is truly tragic, because the professor of classical literature is perfectly familiar with the primordial mechanism of reciprocal violence, staged in the tragedies he teaches: He knew from the wrath of Achilles, the rage of Philoctetes, the fulminations of Medea, the madness of Ajax, the despair of Electra, and the suffering of Prometheus the many horrors the name of justice, retribution is exacted and a cycle of retaliation begins (63). This tragic environment persists in late-century America. There is a zany echo when the former dean on campus surprises the salacious and erudite conversation of three men, probably young Athena teachers newly recruited, whose faces he cannot distinguish, and who comment on the president's sexual practices. The United States. This Grave and University Trade Cafe is a parody of an ancient chorus, bringing all political, existential and literary considerations to sodomy, and conferring on Clinton and Coleman the stature of the magnificent stranger, victim of himself and the intrigues of his contemporaries: "[...] Linda Tripp, this Iago, this undercover Iago that Starr had been working in the White House" (151). Their defense of Clinton - and therefore, indirectly, Coleman - is not devoid of criticism, but these do not fall under the denunciation of archaic social practices. On the contrary, the approach of sexuality advocated by these young men, with the stated aim of cutting social disorder, is at least just as retrograde:

"Had he fucked her in the ass, the nation could have been spared this terrible trauma." [...] "Is not that what the Mafia does? You give somebody something they can not talk about. Then you've got them. " "You are involved in mutual transgression, and you have a mutual corruption. Safe." "So his problem is that he's insufficiently corrupt." (149) The conclusion of their Machiavellian and provocative discourse turns out to be paradoxical, since it consecrates the persecution of the governor by the negation of the accusations against him. This blatant absurdity devalues not only the principle they claim to support, but also the archaic rules prevailing in 1998, of which it constitutes a grotesque echo that turns Clinton and Coleman into scapegoats. From then on, the social functioning of America can not be considered outside the "structuring principle" of the scapegoat. In this archaic scheme, the libido becomes the instrument of destiny of the president and the dean, which adds to their divine dimension: "All [...] Zeus ever wants to do is fuck-goddess, mortals, heifers, she- bears-and-only in his own form, even more excitingly, as his own manifest as beast. To hugely mount a woman to a bull. To enter her bizarrely as a flailing white swan "(242). The allusion to the white swan is all the more remarkable as it comes as Faunia engages in a real game of seduction with Prince, a raven rejected by his own and collected by the Aubudon Society.

The tragic fate of Coleman Silk is related to his alien status, both chosen and suffered. The crypto mythological context of contemporary America gives it an exemplary character: seeking to renounce the tyranny of the past, the hero relives the experience of the ancestors: "To become a new being. To bifurcate. The drama that underlies America's story, the high drama that is upping and leaving-and the energy and cruelty that rapturous drive demands." (342) The renunciation of the past thus falls under the erotic type of compulsion (" that rapturous drive "), and is necessarily carried out at the cost of a disintegration of the ego (implicit in " bifurcate "). Anchored in Americanism, this process would reintegrate Coleman into the community that rejects him and, in so doing, must necessarily recognize him or endogenize him. The irony is that the hero is finally integrated into a society by virtue of principles of emancipation that she was careful not to apply to his slaves, whose hero remains the descendant.

Black and Jewish, but neither Jewish nor truly black, Coleman Silk became Jewbird, eternal stranger, and to crown it, he is dispossessed of the very status of oppressed. For the reader, this certainty rests on the recognition of archaic principles governing tragic representation. Now, the narrator warns us against such certainty, as if his text operated according to a logic independent of a meaning to which he would like to keep us at a distance, as irremediably strangers to this one :

"The human desire for a beginning, a middle, and an end [...] is realized nowhere so thoroughly as in the plays that Coleman taught at Athena College. But outside the classical tragedy of the fifth century B.C., the expectation of completion, let alone of a just and perfect consummation, is a foolish illusion for an adult to hold "(314-5).

This barely veiled allusion to the book that contains it presents Zuckerman's Human Stain as a mirror of a reality he perceives as contingent. The author-narrator claims to emancipate himself from a classical literary tradition, but the realism he calls submits real

individuals to an equally arbitrary artistic inspiration. This is why, notwithstanding his metatextual statements of faith, Zuckerman is also destined to become a stranger to his own text - to die in his text, in the logic of Barthes - because, once completed, it will strangely continue to follow a structural logic challenged by its author.

In this story, everyone has a secret. Everyone is trying to be something they are not, or something they were not. Coleman Silk is the prime example. Roth asks the reader to consider whether Silk is simply a headstrong individual to con the system or just another American following the American Dream. The essence of the American Dream is the ability and opportunity to change, to become something new, something and someone of your own choosing, though not without a price.

The Human Stain is finally a story about the American Dream in a contrary context, a societal phenomenon of great promise and great cost. Only a writer of Roth's calibre could have transformed the crazed old Jewish professor in chapter one into the brilliant black son of a balanced intellectual family in East Orange in chapter two with such technical smoothness.

Racism is only one example of the overall problem of evil. Roth tells that evil originates in the human quest for purity. When people commit themselves to become pure, more notable or sincere than the other person through political correctness, racism, anti-Semitism, religious fanaticism or even restrictive sexual morality, they sow the seeds of evil. Roth is a terrific stylist. His language is complex, expansive and literate. The social fact that The Human Stain shows up is the way black Americans were made the silent exception to the claim that all men are created equal.

The Human Stain reveals how the personal tragedy of the protagonist is intertwined with dominant American historical events and social movements. As Nathan Zuckerman, Roth's fictional kindred spirit, relates the story, the struggle of blacks for equality, the Vietnam War, the impeachment of William Jefferson Clinton, the feminist movement and the zeal for political correctness on college campuses are collectively tied into the tragedy of Coleman Silk.

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