

the blacker the berry analysis

The Blacker the Berry Analysis: Unpacking Themes of Colorism and Identity

the blacker the berry analysis opens the door to a profound exploration of identity, colorism, and social acceptance within the African American community. This phrase, popularized by the title of Wallace Thurman's 1929 novel **The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life**, serves as a powerful metaphor that challenges readers to confront the prejudices tied to skin tone and the complexities of self-worth shaped by societal standards. In this article, we'll delve deeper into the novel's themes, character development, and historical context, shedding light on why this work remains crucial for understanding colorism and its lingering effects today.

Context and Background of The Blacker the Berry

Before diving into the thematic analysis, it's important to understand the backdrop against which **The Blacker the Berry** was written. Wallace Thurman was a significant figure of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement during the 1920s and 1930s that celebrated African American artistic expression while grappling with issues of race and identity. Thurman's novel confronts the painful realities of colorism—a bias within the Black community that favors lighter skin over darker tones—and its impact on individuals' lives.

The novel was groundbreaking in its candid portrayal of intra-racial discrimination, an often overlooked aspect of racial dynamics. At the time, many works focused on racism from white society, but Thurman boldly addressed how Black individuals also perpetuated harmful stereotypes and prejudices against each other based on skin complexion.

Exploring Themes in The Blacker the Berry Analysis

Colorism and Internalized Racism

A central theme in **The Blacker the Berry** is colorism—the preferential treatment of lighter-skinned individuals over those with darker skin within the same ethnic group. The protagonist, Emma Lou, is a dark-skinned African American woman who faces rejection, prejudice, and exclusion because of her complexion. Through Emma Lou's experiences, Thurman exposes the deep wounds inflicted by internalized racism and societal beauty standards.

Colorism manifests not only in personal relationships but also in social and professional settings, where lighter skin often correlates with better opportunities and acceptance. The novel forces readers to examine how these biases fragment communities and perpetuate

cycles of self-hate and discrimination.

Identity and Self-Acceptance

Emma Lou's journey is also one of self-discovery and the quest to embrace her identity fully. The blacker the berry analysis reveals that the novel is as much about external prejudice as it is about internalized self-doubt. Emma Lou's struggle to find love and acceptance mirrors the broader challenge many face when societal standards marginalize their authentic selves.

Her path toward self-acceptance is both painful and transformative, illustrating the resilience required to reject imposed notions of worthiness based on skin tone. Thurman's narrative encourages readers to question how identity is shaped and to recognize the importance of self-love in combating systemic and personal biases.

The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class

Another layer of the blacker the berry analysis involves examining how race, gender, and class intersect to complicate Emma Lou's experience. As a Black woman, she contends with sexism alongside colorism, which limits her autonomy and influences her relationships. The novel critiques not only the external racial oppression but also the patriarchal structures within the community.

Furthermore, class distinctions underscore the social hierarchy that influences Emma Lou's interactions. Her darker skin often associates her with lower social status, affecting her access to resources and acceptance. Thurman subtly critiques how these overlapping systems of oppression reinforce each other, making Emma Lou's struggle multidimensional.

Character Development and Symbolism

Emma Lou as a Symbol of Resistance

In the blacker the berry analysis, Emma Lou emerges as a symbol of resistance against colorism and societal expectations. Her character challenges the notion that beauty and worth are tied to light skin, asserting her dignity despite constant rejection. Emma Lou's resilience offers a powerful message about embracing one's identity in the face of adversity.

Her emotional depth and complexity make her relatable and humanize the often abstract discussions about race and colorism. Through Emma Lou, Thurman invites readers to empathize with the lived realities of those marginalized within their communities.

Supporting Characters and Their Roles

The supporting cast in **The Blacker the Berry** reflects various attitudes toward colorism and identity. Some characters embody the internalized prejudices that Emma Lou confronts, while others represent potential allies or mirrors of her struggles. This dynamic enriches the narrative, providing a nuanced examination of community and interpersonal relationships.

For instance, lighter-skinned characters often enjoy privileges denied to Emma Lou, highlighting the arbitrary nature of bias based on complexion. Meanwhile, some characters' cruelty underscores how damaging internalized racism can be, even among those who share the same racial background.

Relevance of *The Blacker the Berry* Today

Despite being written nearly a century ago, the themes explored in **The Blacker the Berry** remain highly relevant. The ongoing conversation about colorism in contemporary society shows that Thurman's insights continue to resonate. From media representation to dating preferences and professional opportunities, the preferences for lighter skin persist, affecting how people of color navigate the world.

Understanding this novel helps readers recognize the historical roots of colorism and challenges them to dismantle these prejudices in their own communities. It also encourages a broader appreciation of diverse beauty standards and the importance of inclusive narratives.

How to Use This Analysis in Modern Discussions

Incorporating the *blacker the berry* analysis into modern conversations about race can deepen understanding and foster empathy. Educators, activists, and readers can use the novel as a starting point for discussions on:

- How colorism affects mental health and self-esteem
- The role of media and culture in perpetuating beauty standards
- Strategies for promoting inclusivity and diversity within communities
- The importance of authentic representation in literature and art

By engaging with Thurman's work, individuals can better appreciate the complexities of identity formation and the need to challenge biases that divide rather than unite.

Tips for Readers Approaching *The Blacker the Berry*

If you're new to *The Blacker the Berry* or exploring it for academic or personal growth, consider the following tips:

1. **Contextualize the time period:** Understanding the Harlem Renaissance and the social climate of the 1920s enhances appreciation for the novel's bold themes.
2. **Focus on character emotions:** Emma Lou's internal struggles offer rich insights into the psychological impact of colorism.
3. **Reflect on parallels with today:** Notice how the novel's messages connect with current issues around race and beauty standards.
4. **Engage in discussions:** Share your interpretations with others to uncover diverse perspectives and deepen understanding.

Reading *The Blacker the Berry* with these approaches can transform it from a historical artifact into a living conversation about identity and social justice.

The *blacker the berry* analysis reveals a timeless narrative that challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths and embrace the beauty of complexity within Black identity. By examining the nuanced portrayal of colorism, self-acceptance, and intersectionality, Wallace Thurman's novel continues to inspire reflection and dialogue well into the modern era.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'The Blacker the Berry' analysis?

The central theme of 'The Blacker the Berry' analysis focuses on colorism and the struggles of dark-skinned individuals within the Black community, highlighting issues of identity, self-acceptance, and societal beauty standards.

How does 'The Blacker the Berry' address colorism in its analysis?

The analysis reveals that 'The Blacker the Berry' critiques the preference for lighter skin tones in both Black and wider society, exposing the psychological and emotional impact of colorism on dark-skinned people.

Who is the author of 'The Blacker the Berry' and how is their perspective reflected in the analysis?

Wallace Thurman is the author of 'The Blacker the Berry.' The analysis reflects Thurman's perspective by showcasing his exploration of racial identity and the internal conflicts faced by his protagonist due to societal prejudices against darker skin.

What literary devices are commonly discussed in analyses of 'The Blacker the Berry'?

Analyses often highlight the use of symbolism, imagery, and characterization in 'The Blacker the Berry' to emphasize themes of colorism, alienation, and the quest for self-acceptance.

How does the setting influence the narrative in 'The Blacker the Berry'?

The setting, often urban environments during the Harlem Renaissance, plays a critical role in the narrative by highlighting the cultural and social dynamics that intensify the protagonist's experiences with colorism and racial identity.

Why is 'The Blacker the Berry' still relevant in contemporary discussions about race and identity?

'The Blacker the Berry' remains relevant because it addresses enduring issues of colorism and racial discrimination, encouraging ongoing conversations about beauty standards, self-worth, and the complexities of Black identity in modern society.

Additional Resources

The Blacker the Berry Analysis: Exploring Themes of Identity, Colorism, and Social Critique

the blacker the berry analysis invites readers into a profound exploration of racial identity, colorism, and societal perceptions through the lens of Wallace Thurman's seminal 1929 novel. As a pivotal Harlem Renaissance work, the novel delves deep into the complexities faced by African Americans, particularly focusing on intra-racial discrimination and the psychological scars it inflicts. This analysis aims to unpack the layers of meaning embedded in the narrative, examine its cultural significance, and highlight the enduring relevance of its themes in contemporary discourse.

In-depth Analysis of The Blacker the Berry

Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* stands as a potent critique of colorism within the African American community, addressing a nuanced issue that often goes

underrepresented in broader discussions about race. The novel chronicles the life of Emma Lou Morgan, a dark-skinned African American woman who faces prejudice not only from white society but also from her own community because of her skin tone. This duality of discrimination forms the core of the narrative, providing a vehicle for Thurman to challenge prevailing beauty standards and social hierarchies grounded in color bias.

The title itself—“The Blacker the Berry”—is a proverbial assertion that suggests complexity and richness, yet the novel subverts this by illustrating how darker skin can become a source of marginalization. Through Emma Lou’s experiences, Thurman exposes the internalized racism that permeates African American social structures, where lighter skin often equates to privilege and acceptance. The novel’s frank portrayal of this phenomenon was groundbreaking for its time, inviting readers to confront uncomfortable truths about identity and societal values.

Exploring Colorism and Its Psychological Impact

Central to the blacker the berry analysis is the exploration of colorism, a form of prejudice or discrimination in which people are treated differently based on the shade of their skin within their own ethnic group. Emma Lou’s journey highlights how colorism affects self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Despite her talents and virtues, she is frequently judged and ostracized for her dark complexion, leading to a persistent struggle for self-acceptance.

Thurman’s narrative shows that colorism is more than just a social inconvenience; it is a deeply ingrained systemic issue that influences economic opportunities, romantic prospects, and social mobility. This internal division within the African American community serves as a microcosm of broader societal prejudices, where color hierarchy mimics the racial hierarchy imposed by white supremacy.

The Harlem Renaissance Context and Literary Significance

To fully appreciate the themes embedded in *The Blacker the Berry*, it is essential to consider its historical and cultural context. Published during the Harlem Renaissance, a period of prolific African American artistic and intellectual output, the novel contributes to the era’s dialogue on racial identity and empowerment. Unlike many contemporaneous works that celebrated Black culture and pride, Thurman’s novel adopts a more critical and introspective approach.

The blacker the berry analysis reveals Thurman’s willingness to confront intra-racial issues head-on, pushing the Harlem Renaissance’s narrative beyond external racism to examine internalized oppression. This approach was both innovative and controversial, as it challenged readers to reflect on the community’s complicity in perpetuating discrimination. Literary critics have noted that Thurman uses a blend of realism and symbolism, employing Emma Lou’s personal struggles as a metaphor for the larger societal conflict.

Thematic Elements and Character Development

The novel's thematic depth is further accentuated through its nuanced character development. Emma Lou embodies resilience and vulnerability, navigating a world rife with prejudice while striving to maintain her dignity. Her interactions with other characters—ranging from family members to romantic interests—serve to illustrate the pervasive impact of colorism.

Identity and Self-Acceptance

Emma Lou's journey towards self-acceptance is a central pillar of the narrative. Initially, she internalizes society's negative perceptions, leading to feelings of shame and alienation. However, as the story progresses, she begins to embrace her identity, challenging the colorist attitudes around her. This evolution underscores a broader message about the importance of self-love and the rejection of imposed standards.

Social Critique and Intersectionality

Beyond colorism, *The Blacker the Berry* also addresses intersecting issues such as gender discrimination and class struggles. Emma Lou's experiences as a woman compound the challenges she faces, highlighting how race, gender, and socioeconomic status intertwine to shape individual realities. Thurman's critique is comprehensive, exposing the multifaceted nature of oppression in early 20th-century America.

Relevance and Legacy in Modern Discourse

Decades after its publication, *The Blacker the Berry* remains a vital text for understanding the complexities of racial identity and colorism. Contemporary discussions around these topics often reference Thurman's work due to its pioneering exploration of color-based discrimination within the Black community.

Comparisons with Contemporary Works

Modern literature and media continue to grapple with themes similar to those in *The Blacker the Berry*. Works such as Toni Morrison's "*The Bluest Eye*" and films like "*Dark Girls*" echo Thurman's exploration of colorism and its psychological toll. These comparisons highlight the persistent nature of colorism and the need for ongoing dialogue and education.

Pros and Cons of Thurman's Approach

- **Pros:** Thurman's candid and unflinching portrayal of colorism brings visibility to an often-overlooked issue. His literary style blends realism with symbolic undertones, enriching the narrative's impact.
- **Cons:** Some critics argue that the novel's focus on intra-racial conflict may have overshadowed the broader struggle against systemic racism. Additionally, certain characterizations could be viewed as reinforcing stereotypes.

Despite these criticisms, the novel's contribution to African American literature and cultural critique is undeniable, offering a foundation for further exploration of identity politics.

Conclusion: The Enduring Power of *The Blacker the Berry*

The blacker the berry analysis reveals a richly layered narrative that continues to resonate with readers today. Wallace Thurman's work challenges both historical and contemporary audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about colorism and identity within the Black community. By weaving a compelling story that is both personal and political, *The Blacker the Berry* remains a crucial text in the study of race, literature, and social justice. Its legacy prompts ongoing reflection on how society defines beauty, worth, and belonging—issues as relevant now as they were nearly a century ago.

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the blacker the berry analysis: *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance: A-J* Cary D. Wintz, Paul Finkelman, 2004 From the music of Louis Armstrong to the portraits by Beauford Delaney, the writings of Langston Hughes to the debut of the musical *Show Boat*, the Harlem Renaissance is one of the most significant developments in African-American history in the twentieth century. The *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, in two-volumes and over 635 entries, is the first comprehensive compilation of information on all aspects of this creative, dynamic period. For a full list of entries, contributors, and more, visit the *Encyclopedia of Harlem Renaissance* website.

the blacker the berry analysis: *Wallace Thurman's Harlem Renaissance* Eleonore van Notten, 1994 Wallace Thurman (1902-1934) played a pivotal role in creating and defining the Harlem Renaissance. Thurman's complicated life as a black writer is described here for the first time: from his birth in Salt Lake City, Utah; through his quixotic and spotty education; to his arrival and residence in New York City at the height of the New Negro Movement in Harlem. Seen as it often is through the life of Langston Hughes, the Harlem Renaissance is celebrated as a highly successful Afro-centrist achievement. Seen from Thurman's perspective, as set against the historical and cultural background of the Jazz Age, the accomplishments of the Harlem Renaissance appear more

qualified and more equivocal. In Thurman's view the Harlem Renaissance's failure to live up to its initial promise resulted from an ideological underpinning which was overwhelmingly concerned with race. He felt that the movement's self-consciousness and faddism compromised the aesthetic standards of many of its writers and artists, including his own.

the blacker the berry analysis: Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R Miller, Anthony B. Pinn, 2019-09-25 Kendrick Lamar has established himself at the forefront of contemporary hip-hop culture. Artistically adventurous and socially conscious, he has been unapologetic in using his art form, rap music, to address issues affecting black lives while also exploring subjects fundamental to the human experience, such as religious belief. This book is the first to provide an interdisciplinary academic analysis of the impact of Lamar's corpus. In doing so, it highlights how Lamar's music reflects current tensions that are keenly felt when dealing with the subjects of race, religion and politics. Starting with Section 80 and ending with DAMN., this book deals with each of Lamar's four major projects in turn. A panel of academics, journalists and hip-hop practitioners show how religion, in particular black spiritualities, take a front-and-center role in his work. They also observe that his astute and biting thoughts on race and culture may come from an African American perspective, but many find something familiar in Lamar's lyrical testimony across great chasms of social and geographical difference. This sophisticated exploration of one of popular culture's emerging icons reveals a complex and multi faceted engagement with religion, faith, race, art and culture. As such, it will be vital reading for anyone working in religious, African American and hip-hop studies, as well as scholars of music, media and popular culture.

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movement, such as Wallace Thurman. Its perspective combines gender, sexuality, and race studies with a thorough literary analysis and historicist investigation, an approach that has not been extensively applied to analyze the New Negro Renaissance.

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the blacker the berry analysis: Black Womanist Leadership Toni C. King, S. Alease Ferguson, 2011-06-01 Featuring the stories of fourteen Black women scholars, Black Womanist Leadership: Tracing the Motherline offers a culturally based model of Black women's leadership practices, and examines the mother-daughter transmission of these skills. The personal narratives fit into a storytelling tradition that reveals the ways Black mothers and women of the community—the Motherline—teach girls the ways women lead. The essays present a range of different practical and theoretical issues of leadership and development, including mother nurture, emulation of and divergence from core values, internalized oppression, self determination, representation of the physical self, guardianship/governance of the body, cooperative economics, activism, contentiousness with or differentiation from the mother, and negotiation of leadership across public and private spheres. Together, they make a compelling argument for the necessity of continuing to teach the cultural and gender-specific resistance to oppression that has been passed along the Motherline, and to adapt this Motherline tradition to the lives and needs of women and girls in the 21st century.

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the blacker the berry analysis: Culturally Responsive Assessment in Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts Carla M. Evans, Catherine S. Taylor, 2025-03-10 Culturally Responsive Assessment in Classrooms and Large-Scale Contexts explores how scholars and professionals in educational measurement and assessment can use the unique cultural and social identities of

students to shape assessment purpose, design, implementation, use, and validation processes. Despite the sheer diversity of student populations in the United States, the tools used to understand their performance and progress have not substantively changed in decades. Large-scale testing and related policies still privilege “culturally neutral” test content, standardization, and comparability. Classroom assessments often mimic these procedures, even though rich tasks and activities could easily be incorporated into curriculum and instruction to allow students to see themselves, their interests, communities, beliefs, and backgrounds represented and valued. This book collects the theory, research, and best practices that are essential to ensuring cultural responsiveness in classroom assessment and standardized testing procedures, policies, and practices. Chapters by assessment and measurement experts along with scholars who are experts in sociocultural learning theory, philosophy of education, critical theories, multilingual education, and Indigenous education, summarize findings from existing research and suggest how future research can move classroom and industry practice as well as federal, state, and local policy forward.

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the blacker the berry analysis: Misfit Modernism Octavio R. González, 2020-08-31 In this book, Octavio R. González revisits the theme of alienation in the twentieth-century novel, identifying an alternative aesthetic centered on the experience of double exile, or marginalization from both majority and home culture. This misfit modernist aesthetic decenters the mainstream narrative of modernism—which explores alienation from a universal and existential perspective—by showing how a group of authors leveraged modernist narrative to explore minoritarian experiences of cultural nonbelonging. Tying the biography of a particular author to a close reading of one of that author's major works, González considers in turn Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*, Jean Rhys's *Quartet*, and Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man*. Each of these novels explores conditions of maladjustment within one of three burgeoning cultural movements that sought representation in the greater public sphere: the New Negro movement during the Harlem Renaissance, the 1920s Paris expatriate scene, and the queer expatriate scene in Los Angeles before Stonewall. Using a methodological approach that resists institutional taxonomies of knowledge, González shows that this double exile speaks profoundly through largely autobiographical narratives and that the novels' protagonists challenge the compromises made by these minoritarian groups out of an urge to assimilate into dominant social norms and values. Original and innovative, *Misfit Modernism* is a vital contribution to conversations about modernism in the contexts of sexual identity, nationality, and race. Moving beyond the debates over the intellectual legacies of intersectionality and queer theory, González shows us new ways to think about exclusion.

the blacker the berry analysis: The American Biographical Novel Michael Lackey, 2016-04-07 Before the 1970s, there were only a few acclaimed biographical novels. But starting in the 1980s, there was a veritable explosion of this genre of fiction, leading to the publication of spectacular biographical novels about figures as varied as Abraham Lincoln, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich

Nietzsche, Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, and Marilyn Monroe, just to mention a notable few. This publication frenzy culminated in 1999 when two biographical novels (Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Russell Banks' *Cloudsplitter*) were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and Cunningham's novel won the award. In *The American Biographical Novel*, Michael Lackey charts the shifts in intellectual history that made the biographical novel acceptable to the literary establishment and popular with the general reading public. More specifically, Lackey clarifies the origin and evolution of this genre of fiction, specifies the kind of 'truth' it communicates, provides a framework for identifying how this genre uniquely engages the political, and demonstrates how it gives readers new access to history.

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the blacker the berry analysis: Reading in Time Cristanne Miller, 2012 This book provides new information about Emily Dickinson as a writer and new ways of situating this poet in relation to nineteenth-century literary culture, examining how we read her poetry and how she was reading the poetry of her own day. Cristanne Miller argues both that Dickinson's poetry is formally far closer to the verse of her day than generally imagined and that Dickinson wrote, circulated, and retained poems differently before and after 1865. Many current conceptions of Dickinson are based on her late poetic practice. Such conceptions, Miller contends, are inaccurate for the time when she wrote the great majority of her poems. Before 1865, Dickinson at least ambivalently considered publication, circulated relatively few poems, and saved almost everything she wrote in organized booklets. After this date, she wrote far fewer poems, circulated many poems without retaining them, and took less interest in formally preserving her work. Yet, Miller argues, even when circulating relatively few poems, Dickinson was vitally engaged with the literary and political culture of her day and, in effect, wrote to her contemporaries. Unlike previous accounts placing Dickinson in her era, *Reading in Time* demonstrates the extent to which formal properties of her poems borrow from the short-lined verse she read in schoolbooks, periodicals, and single-authored volumes. Miller presents Dickinson's writing in relation to contemporary experiments with the lyric, the ballad, and free verse, explores her responses to American Orientalism, presents the dramatic lyric as one of her preferred modes for responding to the Civil War, and gives us new ways to understand the patterns of her composition and practice of poetry.

the blacker the berry analysis: Women, Power, and Therapy Marjorie Braude, 1988 The woman seriously interested in her personal growth and self-awareness will find this volume indispensable reading! She can learn how to assume power over her relationships, mind, body, and positions in society. Leading feminist therapists provide methods that can help women make their aspirations for power a reality--in the workplace, in social situations, in intimate relationships. Topics include black women and the politics of skin color and hair agoraphobic women and behavior change, unlearning victim behavior, decision-making about contraception, single mothers by choice, female alcoholism and affiliation needs, and much more. This volume is on the cutting edge of the rapidly expanding body of literature and knowledge in women's studies, and describes new and frequently controversial ideas and programs. It deals with issues of power over the intimacies of women's bodies and psyches, as well as power in the workplace, professional societies, and the courts. In order to help the reader understand these issues more fully, this fine book also describes

some of the historical and social contexts in which women have not had power or have gained power.

the blacker the berry analysis: The Color of Love Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman, 2015-10-30 Winner, Section on the Sociology of Emotions Outstanding Recent Contribution (Book) Award, American Sociological Association, 2016 Charles Horton Cooley Award for Recent Book, Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, 2017 Best Publication Award, Section on Body and Embodiment, American Sociological Association (ASA), 2018 The Color Of Love reveals the power of racial hierarchies to infiltrate our most intimate relationships. Delving far deeper than previous sociologists have into the black Brazilian experience, Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman examines the relationship between racialization and the emotional life of a family. Based on interviews and a sixteen-month ethnography of ten working-class Brazilian families, this provocative work sheds light on how families simultaneously resist and reproduce racial hierarchies. Examining race and gender, Hordge-Freeman illustrates the privileges of whiteness by revealing how those with “blacker” features often experience material and emotional hardships. From parental ties, to sibling interactions, to extended family and romantic relationships, the chapters chart new territory by revealing the connection between proximity to whiteness and the distribution of affection within families. Hordge-Freeman also explores how black Brazilian families, particularly mothers, rely on diverse strategies that reproduce, negotiate, and resist racism. She frames efforts to modify racial features as sometimes reflecting internalized racism, and at other times as responding to material and emotional considerations. Contextualizing their strategies within broader narratives of the African diaspora, she examines how Salvador’s inhabitants perceive the history of the slave trade itself in a city that is referred to as the “blackest” in Brazil. She argues that racial hierarchies may orchestrate family relationships in ways that reflect and reproduce racial inequality, but black Brazilian families actively negotiate these hierarchies to assert their citizenship and humanity.

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