

Free essay on culture, history, and literature

[Life](#), [Home](#)



Analysis of Home by Toni Morrison

The main character of Home by Toni Morrison is Frank Mooney. Frank is a Korean war verteran, black and suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He has recently left his girlfriend, Lily to return home to Lotus, Georgia where his beloved sister, Cee is apperently very ill and close to dying. The setting of the story is the 1950's and Frank is travelling across country to get to Cee. Morrison tells the story through all three of the characters point of view. She uses the third person, but we hear the characters' thoughts. Some of the text is told as if the characters are being interviewed. The trials and tribulations that Frank faces, both externally and internally represent an era of racism and ignorance.

The story opens with a flashback of Frank and his sister. They are watching horses in a field play and prance. This idyllic scene is quickly broken when some men show up with shovels and begin digging a grave. The throw a blach body and and begin to cover it up. Frank is protecting Cee and trying to calm her until they can successfully escape. " When she saw that black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave, her whole body began to shake. I hugged her shoulders tight and tried to pull her trembling body into my own bones because, as a brother four years older, I thought I could handle it." (6). This excerpt demonstrates the protective, brotherly love Frank has for Cee. To protect her is a responsibility he takes on seriously and lovingly.

We then find Frank, coming to in a mental hospital. He cannot understan why he is there. He sucessfully escapes and finds help in the character Reverend John Locke. Locke comments, " You lucky Mr. Money. They sell a lot of bodies

out of there.” (10). The implications of this line are harrowing. The mental hospital sells corpses to the local medical school for research. The implication is that the mentally ill and minorities do not have a very good chance of survival in the hospital. According to Goodman and Gonzalez (2007), “ And the larger issue is that blacks are more likely to have their bodies taken for dissection. It’s a result of a long pattern of co-opting the bodies of slaves and then, later, of poor blacks.” The practice of using black cadavers for research was the norm for hundreds of years. It originated hundreds of years ago with slaves. Slaves were considered “ property” therefor the owner could do whatever he pleased with them. This included their bodies when they died. Blacks have been used as test subjects for years. Consider the Tuskegee Experiments, the most famous of insidious experimentation of blacks.

Hundreds of men with syphilis were studied for years and never told or treated for the disease. This experiment was conducted, not by a private research hospital but the United States Public Health Service.

“ An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better” (14), John Locke sums up the treatment of African American soldiers and their plight when they returned from the Korean War. Segregation in the military was abolished in 1948 in an executive order signed by President Truman. Integration during the Korean War was stressful and strained. Integration during the Korean War was not so much a conscious step towards equality, but a necessity. The Army and the Marines needed more men, studies also showed that black soldiers fought

harded when integrated. However, the entire military was not integrated. Noncombat areas and bases were not intergrated for quite some time later (Garamone 2008). Blacks were also not nearly as well educated as whites. When tested upon entry to the military, high scoring soldiers were given noncombat assignments. Low scoring soldiers went right into action. The majority of blacks were in the latter group.

“ Negroes, burdened with the fatigue of travel, were still barred from the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities: (King, Martin Luther 1967). “ There were very few passengers, yet Frank dutifully sat in the last seat,” (15). The back of the bus, this is where a black man was supposed sit in the 50’s, even in the North where racism wasn’t suppose to be as rampant as the South. Frank meets Rev. Jessie Maynard in Portland at Rev. Locke’s suggestion. Maynard is helpful, he suggests places to eat and rooms for the night in Chicago because the choices for black travelers were limited, even in a major northern city. Jim Crow laws were not enacted in the northern states, but there were unspoken rules of “ etiquette” that black were expected to comply with. They ate in their own restaurants, stayed in their own hotels and sat in the back of the bus.

“ He wanted to go into the bathroom to pee, and look in the mirror to see if he had an eye infection. But the sign on the door stopped him. He relieved himself in the shrubbery behind the station” (18). Having been on a bus from quite some time and suffering from hallucinations, Frank needs to use the bathroom during stop on his bus trip. We don’t need to be told that the sign on the door says “ Whites Only”.

“ Frank walked down Auburn Street, across from the station. A waitress, a

short-order cook, a woman called Thelma-finally he got the make of a car and the name of an unlicensed cabdriver who might take him to Cee's suburban workplace" (70). Again, as a black traveler, Frank cannot simply grab a cab from the train station like white travelers can. This is still an issue today. Cab drivers are notorious for passing by black fares.

For blacks travelling in the 1950's, the journey was full of obstacles, humiliations and danger. Ernest Green, a postal worker from Harlem wrote and published "The Green Book". This book listed restaurants, gas stations, hotels and motels and many other businesses that welcomed black patrons (Lacey-Bordeaux and Drash 2011). More than a travel guide, this book was a survival guide. Many blacks have been brutally murdered for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, especially in the South.

"Want me to call the cops?" "Hell no" (71). Police treatment of blacks is notorious for being brutal and unjust. After Frank is mugged, a passerby offers to call the police. Frank knows enough not to get the police involved. In Chicago, Frank's friend describes what happened to his son's arm: "'Drive by cop', he said. 'He had a cap pistol. Eight years old, running up and down the sidewalk, pointing it. Some redneck rookie thought his dick was underappreciated by his brother cops.' 'you can't shoot a kid' said Frank. 'Cops can shoot anything they want'" (23).

"We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people" (Newton and Seales 1966). Harassment of blacks by law enforcement occurred all over the country. Police would often stop and search blacks with no probable cause. They would also shake them down, taking money and valuables. "The police would have thought so too, but

during a random search outside the shoe store they just patted pockets, not the inside of workboots. Of the two other men facing the wall, one had his switchblade confiscated, the other a dollar bill.” (27).

Police were not especially eager to solve crimes that blacks reported to them. Frank’s step grandmother remembers what happened when she reported her first husband’s murder to the police, “ It happened during the deepest part of the Depression and the sheriff had more important things on his mind. Searching the county for a common shooting was not one of them” (57). Her husband was murdered because he owned a successful gas station, the murderer even left a note on the body. The police were completely disinterested. The common attitude among law enforcement was that crimes committed against black was inconsequential. Most blacks in the 1950’s simply accepted this as a part of life.

Brutality and discrimination against blacks and other minorities still a serious problem today. Considerably more blacks are imprisoned due to the War on Drugs that began in the 1980’s. When they are released they often lose their right to vote, are forced to take low paying jobs, which results living in poverty. Nelson (XXXX) describes this phenomenon a new racial cast system where white society is continuing to control minority populations.

After his mugging in Atlanta, Frank stumbles across a nightclub, “ pausing suddenly when he heard a trumpet screech” (72). Frank follows the sound down some stairs. It is a black nightclub. “ He preferred bebop to blues and happy love-making songs. After Hiroshima, the musicians understood as early as anyone that Truman’s bomb changed everything and only scat and bebop could say how” (72). Blacks have developed their own styles of music

over the years. The roots are in the slave songs, church songs and African rhythms from colonial times. The music of jazz, bebop, blues, scat and gospel are all products of blacks. Segregated music clubs allowed the performance and evolution of these styles of music. Whites would eventually come to appreciate and listen to this music. One of the first ways blacks and whites were naturally integrated was through the sharing and love for this music and the clubs where it was performed. Record companies preyed on black artists, paying them little and cheating them in deals despite the success of their music. The regard whites had for black employees was biting described when Frank arrives at the doctor's house to rescue his sister. At first the doctor thought Frank was going to rob him, when Frank collects Cee the doctor thinks, " No theft. No violence. No harm. Just the kidnapping of an employee he could easily replace" (75). Black employees were easily replaceable. Blacks had actually slid farther down the scale of humanity from slavery. If Cee had been his slave, the doctor would have put up a fight or called the police to get his property back. At this time and place though, she was a negligible piece of equipment that he could replace.

Home is a beautifully written novel, that not only tells the story of an Korean veteran on his way home to save the sister he loves so deeply but the racial segregation and harassment of the 1950's. In casual conversations and brief descriptions of his cross country trip to Lotus, Georgia, Frank encounters so many of the conflicts that plagued blacks during that time: bitter integration in the Army; maltreatment of mentally ill patients; harassment by police; his sister almost killed by a white doctor who experimented on her. His

encounters with other blacks along the way shows how blacks looked out for, helped and protected each other in such a hostile world.

References

*Alexander, Michelle.

Garamone, Jim. "Historian Charst Six Decades of Racial Integration in U. S. Military"

U. S. Deaprtment of Defense 23 Jul 2008

Goodman, Amy and Gonzalez, Juan. "Medical Aparthied: The Dark History of Medical

Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present".
Democracy

Now, 19 Jan 2007.

King, Martin Luther. "Where Do We Go from Here?". 16 Aug 1967.

Lacey-Bordeaux, Emma & Drash, Wayne. "Travel Guide Helped African Americans Navigate

Tricky Times". CNN 25 Feb 2011.

Newton, Huey & Seale, Bobby. "The Black Panther Platform: What We Want, What We

Believe". 1966