

Nella Larson's “passing” final

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Nella Larson's "Passing" Final Nella Larson's book, "Passing," was written during a time of racial complexity. During this period slavery has ended but that has not ended the conflicts of races to occur such as prejudice and segregation. The story being narrated by Irene and is about two childhood friends, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield, who have similar background because they both were born of mixed races, black and white. These two women have two different experiences in dealing with their racial identity and end growing up with opposite but similar lives from one another. This story deals with racial identity during a time where certain races were of higher statuses than the other. "Passing," demonstrates many themes present in the story; themes from lies to betrayal, to identity crisis to race barriers. The book narrates the life of two women who are trapped in a black and white world and are having trouble with deciding which race they should identify themselves with. After the encounters, each woman tries to find their identity and each woman in the story experiences a "passing," of their own. And lingering question remains, is it better to ignore a part of your racial heritage or should you find a way to cope with it? First let's explore the course of life that Clare Kendry decided to pursue. Clare Kendry, born of African American decent and White decent, decides that she will abandon her African American life and live her life as a White woman, because she feels that it will get her through life a bit easier. She ends up marrying a white doctor name John Bellew, who happens to be very racist and hates black. He often jokes and calls her "Nig" because of her slightly dark skin, but he doesn't mean it anything more than a joke. She plays the part of the white woman well and tries to hide her past as best she can. "There had

been, even in those days, nothing sacrificial in Clare Kendry's idea of life, no allegiance beyond her own immediate desire. She was selfish, and cold, and hard (pg 6). " Now moving onto Irene Redfield, she also is born of African American decent and White decent, but she decide to live her life as a Black woman and marry a black doctor and she has two sons with him. She doesn't really feel that being a black woman has made her life any more difficult ". She feels she has led a fine life and is content with the way it is. The two women happen to have two encounters later in life; these encounters have a major impact on their lives in which perception of their lives begins to change. Their first encounter happens to be on a rooftop at a time when Irene ironically is trying to " pass" as a white woman just to escape a heat wave. After the first encounter Irene hopes that would be the last one and really hopes to never see Clare again. This is where you begin to see a different side to Irene a jealous wall building. Irene is jealous of Clare and doesn't really trust her either. " For an instant a recrudescence of that sensation of fear which she had had while looking into Clare's eyes that afternoon touched her. A slight shiver ran over her (33). " The two women do have another encounter. Clare is a bit intrigued with the race she denied. She wants to spend more time around Irene just to feed her curiosity. She wants to discretely experience a bit of what she has been ignoring her whole life, and she seems to be enjoying it. Irene is jealous and doesn't really like what Clare is trying to do. " The trouble with Clare was not only that she wanted to have her cake and eat it to, but that she wanted to nibble at the cakes of other folk as well (35). " I think what Irene is trying to say is that she doesn't like the fact that Clare is trying to have the best of both side and that

she also tries to take from others as well. Irene seems to think that Clare may have something for her husband. But that isn't proven it is just what she thinks. Ever since Clare has made a presence in Irene's life, Irene feels she has lost some sense of stability and has begun to have wild fantasies and very paranoid. Clare on the other hand is oblivious to other's feelings and goes on living her new found life carelessly. The story " Passing, " ends with the death of Clare Kendry, or so it seems. Apparently a situation has occurred at a party Clare is at. The narrator seems to paint a scene in which people are surrounding Clare's lifeless body as it seems she has fallen from the sixth floor window. There are many speculations to why she is killed and who killed her. But clues in the story points to that she could have been killed by Irene, who has finally snapped from her jealousy and desire for stability and the only way to fix her problems is to eliminate Clare who she feels is the root of her problems. Or it could have been John who finally finds out about Clare's full racial heritage. But due to the vague ending, which I feel was the author's intention to leave readers wondering and questioning, Clare may not even be dead and it could be just a wild fantasy concocted by Irene. The story portrayed the racial struggle during that particular period in which the story was written in and the author portrayed internal as well as external conflicts, these two women dealt with as they were searching for their identity. As for the lingering question, I don't think the book really shows the women to have an answer to that, I believe the author left that answer up to the readers, to make their own judgment. Just like how they left the ending to be a cliffhanger. It's up to the reader to make their judgment on what occurred. Although the women dealt with race identity issues, I felt

their problems were more than what was on the outside, and more than just black and white. Larsen, Nella. "Passing. " 1929 New York: Colier, 1971