

Black, white: the cultural collision

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



Amiri Baraka's short story "Dutchman" is more complex than many. This story is more complex than many. Lula is a thirty-year old white woman that stereotypes males of the African American race and criticizes the African American culture. In "Dutchman", Lula stereotypes Clay, a twenty-year old man who is a representative of the form of assimilation practiced by many African Americans, a pursuit of white values and culture. Lula is able to observe and stereotype Clay due to his predictable bourgeois, or "white", ways. Lula observes his well educated speech- intellectual and middle-class, professional wardrobe- a narrow-shoulder, three-button suit and striped tie, and his whole demeanor. Throughout the story, Baraka demonstrates the cultural collision between two cultures, white and African American, through stereotype, racial oppression, and assimilation. The tone of the conversation is guided by the stereotype Lula has placed on Clay. She observes how Clay carries himself, in his three-button suit and striped tie, and his speech, an educated and middle-class dialect, and infers that he is trying to "white". While conversing with Clay, and truly knowing nothing about him, she ironically states familiarities in Clay's life. She claims, "I told you I didn't know anything about you...you're a well-known type." Lula's stereotypical ways are not just her own beliefs, but also the beliefs of the society- the modern day culture, both African American and white. Lula first stereotypes Clay then racially oppresses his culture. "Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard." Lula feels that since Clay's ancestor was a slave, the common occupation of a black man in

history for the African American culture, that he is not allowed to wear a nice suit and tie, the typical wardrobe of a white man. Racial oppression is also a part of modern day culture. With members of each culture believing they are superior, they ultimately racially oppress the members of the other cultures. The African American culture is widely oppressed by the white culture. Clay demonstrates the cultural collision between the white and African American cultures through assimilation. Clay is a representative of the form of assimilation practiced by many people of the black middle class, a pursuit of white values and culture through "white" education. Baraka distinguishes Clay from the rest by declaring he is a Negro man, instead of a nigger/black man, who is one that compromises his own identity in order to maintain a content relationship with his white oppressors. Clay realizes that he is racially oppressed but chooses to deal with it. He tells Lula, "If I'm a middle-class fake white man...let me be." Clay knows that by walking, talking, and dressing like a white man, as opposed to a black man, will get him more respect from the white man. African Americans, though they are not the only ones, are often stereotyped because of their cultural history and have been racially oppressed for years now, but like Clay, choose to deal with it through assimilation. Though assimilation is not always a bad thing, it is always wise to keep your identity and take pride in your culture. Clay assimilates himself to the white culture, but did not have his own identity as an African American. When Lula insults him about trying to be "white", or not taking pride in his own culture, he becomes offended and tries to defend his culture, a culture he does not show pride in in the first place. Taking pride in your culture does not entail that you dress and talk emulating your

ancestors, but that you do not deny your ancestors and the culture, or cultures, which they may stand for. "Dutchman" is a short story that illustrates the cultural collisions between the African American and white cultures, but keep in mind that these two cultures are not the only cultures that collide. Works Cited 1) Amiri Baraka, "Dutchman", Norton & Company, London