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Race and Social Justice in *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *If He
Hollers Let Him Go*

Bachelor Thesis

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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná práce se bude zabývat tématem rasy a sociální (ne)rovnosti ve dvou románech: If He Hollers Let Him Go (1945) Chestera B. Himese a If Beale Street Could Talk (1974) Jamese Baldwina. V úvodu práce studentka nejprve nastíní relevantní historicko-kulturní kontext USA 20. století se zaměřením na rasovou problematiku Afroameričanů. Dále studentka také uvede kontext afroamerické literatury a oba autory a romány do něj zasadí. Studentka také nadefinuje základní pojmy, se kterými bude pracovat v analytické části (např. rasa, rasismus, sociální spravedlnost, otázky genderu, role náboženství, institucionalizovaný rasismus, rasismus a policie atd.). V praktické části se studentka pokusí zanalyzovat zobrazení zmíněných teoretických a historických prvků a následně oba romány porovná, jelikož jsou zasazeny do odlišných období. Studentka také zmíní vypravěčské prostředky obou románů. Své analýzy bude studentka opírat o vhodné akademické sekundární zdroje a bude je také ilustrovat úryvky z primárních textů.

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Annotation

This thesis deals with racism and social justice portrayed in the novels *If Beale Street Could Talk* by James Baldwin and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by Chester Himes. The thesis focuses on the literary and historical context of the novels as well as gender roles and religion in the United States during the 20th century. It also introduces the issue of structural and institutional racism. Besides discussing the theory, this thesis compares the two books.

Key Words

African-American literature, black feminism, colourism, discrimination, enslavement, feminism, modernism, naturalism, race, racism, realism, slavery, social injustice, the Second World War

Název

Rasa a sociální spravedlnost v *If Beale Street Could Talk* a *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rasizmem a sociální spravedlností vyobrazenou v knihách *If Beale Street Could Talk* od Jamese Baldwina a *If He Hollers Let Him Go* od Chestera Himese. Tato práce se zaměřuje na literární a historický kontext zmíněných knih a stejně tak na role pohlaví a náboženství ve Spojených státech ve 20. století. Práce se taky zabývá problematikou strukturálního a institucionálního rasizmu. Kromě pojednávání teorie tato práce taky porovnává zmíněné knihy.

Klíčová slova

Africko-americká literatura, afro-americký feminismus, diskriminace, Druhá světová válka, feminismus, kolorismus, modernizmus, naturalizmus, otroctví, rasa, rasizmus, realismus, sociální nespravedlnost, zotročení

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	8
1 History of racism and the social Situation in the 20 th century.....	10
2 African-American literature and literary devices in the 20 th century.....	22
3 Gender roles.....	28
4 Religion in America in the 20 th century.....	32
5 Comparing <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> and <i>If He Hollers Let Him Go</i>	35
Conclusion.....	40
Resumé.....	42
Bibliography.....	45

Introduction

Compared to the past, the society of the 21st century is becoming more inclusive and progressive. But despite the liberal ideologies overtaking the modern world, social justice is still unachieved, and some problems linger in the community, whether it is racial or gender inequality. Racism has played a part in the social injustice that has been separating people for centuries, and the 20th century was a time when racist ideologies were at their peak. This thesis aims to examine the historical and literary context of racism and social justice in 20th-century America and how it is portrayed in the novels *If Beale Street Could Talk* by James Baldwin and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by Chester Himes.

Both novels are written by African-American writers, set in 20th-century America, and portray social injustice issues connected to racism: employment difficulties, police brutality, institutional and structural racism, colourism, gender roles in society, and the influence of religion. Chester Himes and James Baldwin deal with racism in the community, but they describe racism from different perspectives. While Chester Himes focuses on racism in the workplace and the class difference between white people and African-American people in American society, James Baldwin describes police brutality and mistreatment of imprisoned African-Americans. Both perspectives on racism are analysed in the thesis.

This thesis combines theoretical and analytical parts, and the theory is supported by examples from the already-mentioned novels, which provides a more transparent demonstration of the issue. It is divided into five chapters, and each chapter focuses on the different things that influenced American society in the 20th century. The first chapter introduces the historical background of racism, discusses the development of racism, defines colourism, and how it corresponds with police brutality in the United States and structural and institutional racism. The second chapter focuses on the African-American literature of the 20th century and literary tools and introduces information about the lives of Chester Himes and James Baldwin. The third chapter describes the topic of gender roles and gender stereotypes and then provides information about the importance of feminism, the birth of Black feminism, and introduces some prominent figures of Black feminism. The fourth chapter offers a theoretical background to religion in America in the 20th century, events influencing religion in the United States, how religion changed American society, and how it is portrayed in the novels. The last chapter compares *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *If He*

Hollers Let Him Go in terms of differences and similarities and includes the points of view of literary critics looking into the two books.

Writing about racism and racial injustice is difficult for a person who has never experienced prejudice and mistreatment that African-American people and other people of colour face. However, it is vital for everyone to be educated about this problem, despite race and ethnicity, and spread awareness so society can get to the bottom of the problem, which many specialists believe to be deeply enrooted in the community and the highest institutions, and solve the problem. Luckily, many educational resources are available, such as books, articles, and online lectures, provided by African-American professors and researchers dealing with racism and Black feminism. Hence, collecting material for the thesis was a relatively easy task.

1 History of racism and the social situation in the 20th century

For many years, factors such as occupation, social status, religion, sex, and race, have divided people into groups, and this chapter focuses on the question of race. Trica Keaton defines the term race as a group of people who share similar traits that separate them from members of another group.¹ Defining the term race is crucial because the influence it had on society became an essential part of American history. A significant part of American history connected to race that influenced the community was the enslavement of Black people.

Most people are aware of this issue, which can be associated with inhumane practices. Slavery played an important role in the development of racism and racial segregation. Sowande' Mustakeem discusses slavery as a situation in which people are trapped in permanent servitude. Mustakeem continues that slavery has roots in ancient times and that people of the same race initially enslaved people, and it was the Atlantic slave trade that brought the question of race into enslavement.² The forms of enslavement differed in different parts of America, and some enslaved people were not as restricted as others - for example, some light-skinned individuals were used for housework and kept as pets of the enslavers. In contrast, dark-skinned enslaved people were given more complicated tasks. Slavery continued and evolved for years before it was abolished. Patrick Sowle states that American president, Abraham Lincoln, co-operated with Republicans in Congress, proposed and submitted the amendment to abolish slavery to the states. Slavery was abolished by the 13th amendment in 1865.³ Despite the abolishment, the influence of slavery in society remains to this day.

Slavery contributed to the ideology that Black people were allegedly inferior which lead to racist beliefs. Racism is something people have experienced in the past and are still experiencing to this day, but the 20th century was a time when, as some specialists believe, racism reached its peak, which will be further discussed in this chapter. Racism can be defined in many ways, but George Frederickson speaks of racism as bitter and negative feelings of one ethnic group towards another, which can result in unkind actions.⁴ African-American authors deal with this topic frequently and portray different forms of racism. James

¹ Trica Keaton, "Race," in *Keywords for African American Studies*, ed. Erica R. Edwards, Roderick A. Ferguson, and Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 163–167.

² Sowande' M. Mustakeem, "Slavery," in *Keywords for African American Studies*, ed. by Erica R. Edwards, Roderick A. Ferguson, and Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 201-205.

³ Patrick Sowle, "The Abolition of Slavery," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 52. No. 3., (September, 1968): 237-255, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40578844#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁴ George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.

Baldwin and Chester Himes are known for their portrayal of social injustice, and a lot of information about racism can be found in their novels, where characters, African-Americans, face racism on a daily basis, and it influences their lives significantly. The following quote from Baldwin's novel provides an example of how African-Americans in the book see the society in America: "But, man – this country really do not like niggers. They do not like niggers so bad, man, they will rent to a leper first. I swear."⁵ As the quote illustrates, African-Americans feel judged, looked down on, and not accepted by the majority in American society because of their skin colour. The topic of racism in America is also one of the main themes in Chester Himes's novel, where the main character feels the same way as Baldwin's characters about the community.

The protagonist of the novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* talks about how racism towards African-American people complicates their lives. One of the complications is the hardship of finding a job in the United States. This quote serves as a demonstration of how racism affects and confines African-Americans in terms of employment:

When I [Bob] got here practically the only job a Negro could get was service in the white folks' kitchens. But it wasn't that so much. It was the look on the people's faces when you asked them about a job. Most of 'em didn't say right out they wouldn't hire me. They just looked so goddamned startled that I'd even asked. As if some friendly dog had come in through the door and said, 'I can talk.' It shook me.⁶

The main character has a hard time getting employed in a company, and the quote discusses how white employers do not want to hire a Black person solely because of their skin colour. The main character struggles with finding a job where he is not harassed by his white co-workers and employers. Racism in a professional setting can sometimes result in difficulty in the employment of not only Black people but people of colour in general, lower paychecks, or harassment in the workplace, which will be further discussed in this thesis. Regarding the influence of slavery on society, such behaviour towards Black employees is a part of the racist ideologies remaining from slavery - Black workers are not as valued as white workers.

As previously mentioned, slavery influenced racist ideologies significantly, and racism reached its peak in the 20th century. According to Frederickson, the passing of segregation laws in the South of America on voting rights of the people of colour denoted African-Americans to a lower-caste status despite being equal citizens of the United States, and the

⁵ James Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, (New York: Dial Press, 1974), 46.

⁶ Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, (New York: Doubleday Doran, 1945), 4.

extreme racist propaganda against African-Americans added to the issue.⁷ While African-Americans faced challenges in the United States because of their skin colour, racism in Europe was also rising due to a significant historical event that later had an influence on the United States. The Second World War was a tragic event of the 20th century that led to the deaths of millions of people. The Second World War, as Frederickson states, is another reason for the escalation of racism in the 20th century - the persecution of the Jews during the war reflected the effort to assure “race purity” in the South of America.⁸ The novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is set in this period, and the following quote from the book demonstrates the social situation and how race was seen as a handicap during the war: “Race was a handicap, sure, I'd reasoned.“ [...] „I knew if I kept on getting refused while white boys were hired from the line behind me I'd hang somebody as sure as hell.“⁹ Skin colour influenced the hiring process and also the position of employees within a company during this time. It was crucial to start addressing these issues, and The Civil Rights movement tried to address racism and racial segregation. According to Adam Fairclough, the Civil Rights movement established between 1955 and 1960 was primarily labour-oriented, class-oriented, and unable to address the poverty of Black people. Black people took the matter into their own hands, mobilized their resources, and organised bus boycotts as a form of protest. It was only in 1964 that the Civil Rights Act passed, and the racist policies in the United States were addressed.¹⁰ Despite addressing the racist policies and all the efforts of the Civil Rights movement, racism did not disappear completely and it still lingers within society in many forms. When talking about racism, the image of white people committing acts of racism toward African-Americans often comes to mind. However, a rarely discussed and mentioned form of racism is the racism between light-skinned and dark-skinned African-Americans which is frequent among the Black community and is connected to many social problems.

This underrated phenomenon is called colourism. An article by David Knight describes colourism as the favourable treatment of light-skinned individuals. At the same time, dark-skinned people face discrimination because of their darker complexion. Knight further explains that people of the same ethnicity often have different educational, economic, and social outcomes based on the colour of their skin.¹¹ Colourism can be an influence at

⁷ Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 1.

⁸ Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 2.

⁹ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 3.

¹⁰ Adam Fairclough, “Historians and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American Studies*, 1990, 390-392.

¹¹ David Knight, “What’s ‘Colorism’?,” *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, fall, 2015, 46-47.

schools, at the workplace, or in some cases, within a family. An example of such social outcomes is portrayed in Himes's novel, which will be mentioned later on in the thesis.

Just like racism, colourism has roots in slavery. The fact that enslavers preferred light-skinned individuals was already mentioned, and Ellis Monk, a professor teaching at Harvard, further explains the reason for this statement in his article. Monk states that Black people were sexually assaulted by enslavers, which led to the creation of a light-skinned population. Light-skinned individuals, having direct ties with white enslavers, were more literate and trained than dark-skinned individuals, which created opportunities for all Black people, not only light-skinned Black people, later on.¹² Colourism is portrayed in James Baldwin's novel, in this case, through Fonny's family, which often displays prejudice towards Tish's dad, who is dark-skinned African-American:

All they really saw was that big black hand of my [Tish] father's which held them at the waist – of course, my Daddy was really holding me at the waist, but it was somehow like it was them. They did not know whether they disapproved of its colour, its position, or its shape: but they certainly disapproved of its power of touch.¹³

The issue of Fonny's sisters and mother being prejudiced towards darker-skinned African-Americans was briefly mentioned in the novel. It appears it had an impact on the relationship between Baldwin's characters. The characters often used skin colour as an insult during their arguments, colourism was present, and the use of profanities aimed at skin colour was frequent.

Colourism is briefly mentioned in Baldwin's novel but Chester Himes discusses colourism on a deeper level in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. Himes created a character, Alice, and she is described in the novel in the following way: „And then I [Bob] was proud of her too. Proud of the way she looked, the appearance she made among white people; proud of what she demanded from white people, and the credit they gave her; and her position and prestige among her own people.“¹⁴ Alice is a light-skinned African-American woman with more privileges than other dark-skinned people in the novel. The quote discusses the image that Alice has in the community and suggests that both Black people and white people respect her. The privileges include her social status, which leads to multiple misunderstanding between her and her partner, Bob.

¹² Monk, „The Unceasing Significance of Colorism: Skin Tone Stratification in the United States,” 78.

¹³ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 46.

¹⁴ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 8.

While Alice has more opportunities because of her light complexion, her friends disapprove of Black people seeking white partners. In the following quote, Alice's friends talk about partnerships between African-Americans and white people:

'One of my teachers at Chicago U. was talking 'bout some girl 'bout your colour' - she indicated Alice - 'and I just up and told him that it was an insult to mention light Negroes' colour to 'em; it was 'most the same as calling 'em bastards, saying their mamas had been slipping off in the bushes with white men ...'¹⁵

The quote suggests that Alice's friends criticise such relationships and consider it an insult that Black people could have intimate relationships with white people, which leads to people being born as light-skinned African-Americans. This prejudice only adds to the issue of colourism portrayed in the novel. Light-skinned individuals in the novel are often praised for their complexion. However, it is important to mention the prejudice that could potentially come with it.

Not only does colourism influence the fictional characters of James Baldwin and Chester Himes, but more importantly, it has an impact on the daily lives of the Black community. David Knight further explains that this issue is rooted in childhood and the influence of adults - children associate positive traits with light-skinned individuals and negative characteristics with dark-skinned individuals. This perception can, as explained by Knight, affect young people at school in terms of relationships with teachers and fellow peers.¹⁶ The association of traits with skin colour is connected to the perception of people of colour as criminally active. This perception is often shared among the American police, resulting in making differences in the treatment of Black people and white people.

The police – people supposed to enforce the law, protect the people and be an example – commit racist acts toward Black people. This has been an issue for decades, and it was often overlooked and normalised in the past. The brutality of American police towards African-Americans has happened too often, and awareness started to spread quickly, mainly through the media. The murder of George Floyd, a Black man murdered by an American police officer in 2020, had a worldwide impact and the topic of violence against African-Americans resurfaced. According to the New York Times, the Minneapolis police officers arrested Mr. Floyd and he was then pinned to the ground, unable to breathe, until he was no longer alive.

¹⁵ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 105.

¹⁶ David Knight, "What's 'Colorism'?", *Teaching Tolerance Magazine*, fall, 2015, 48.

All four of the officers involved in Mr. Floyd's death were fired.¹⁷ Mass protests followed Mr. Floyd's death and justice for George Floyd was demanded by people across the globe. This tragedy helped to raise awareness of the police racism towards African-American people. The murder of George Floyd was talked about in the media, but many Black people are overlooked.

Despite Mr. Floyd's death happening in the 21st century, the issue was present in the 20th century as well, and African-American authors captured the topic of police brutality in their writing. James Baldwin refers to this issue in his novel, for example, with the following quote:

'Well – I have a file on him [officer Bell]. A long file. I can prove that he murdered a twelve-year-old black boy, in Brooklyn, two years ago. That's how come he was transferred to Manhattan. I know the mother of the murdered boy. And I know Bell's wife, who hates him.'¹⁸

Baldwin's character, officer Bell, is a policeman who discriminates against Black people and violates their rights. The quote suggests that Bell is guilty of murdering African-American people, which adds to the fact that Bell is purposely targeting Black people in the novel, which also plays a significant role in Fonny's imprisonment.

David Knight explains that this issue is closely related to colourism, and speaks not only about colourism but also its relation to discrimination of dark-skinned individuals regarding criminality. According to David Knight, the association of negative characteristics with dark skin is common, but so is the association of dark skin with crime, and dark-skinned people are supposedly seen as more suspicious and criminally active than light-skinned people.¹⁹ The association of skin colour with criminality plays a significant role in both Baldwin's and Himes's novels, and it portrays how difficult it is for Black people to prove their innocence in front of the police and judges. Police racism is one of the main topics in James Baldwin's novel, where the main character, Fonny, is falsely accused for raping a woman and imprisoned. The false accusation supports Knight's theory about people being more likely to connect dark-skinned people with crimes. The following quote from Baldwin's novel discusses how the characters feel about the false accusation: "Tish, that, after all, it isn't

¹⁷ Evan Hill, "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>.

¹⁸ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 88.

¹⁹ Knight, "What's 'Colorism'?", 47.

very much of a case. If Fonny were white, it wouldn't be a case at all."²⁰ The quote suggests that Fonny's skin colour contributed to his imprisonment because police officers associate black skin with crimes, so they consider him guilty without having any legitimate proof. By saying that there would not be a case at all, the author also indicates Fonny would have more rights as a white person, and the police would either let it go entirely or look into the crime more.

The negative association of Black people with crimes can have many forms, for example expecting Black people to be armed, aggressive, possess illegal substances, or not believing Black people when they report harassment. Such stereotypes of Black people, especially African-American men, are portrayed in Chester Himes's novel. The following quote from the book can serve as an example: "'*Native Son* turned my stomach,' Arline said. 'It just proved what the white Southerner has always said about us; that our men are rapists and murderers.'"²¹ The line is part of a discussion between characters, and one of them describes that people associate violent behaviour with Black men. Negative associations, false accusations, and police brutality are harmful to the African-American community. As well as having negative prejudice against Black people, there are more issues connected to the system and the police.

The imprisonment based on no real evidence is problematic, but the cruel treatment of imprisoned Black people only adds to the issue. Baldwin discusses the inhumane treatment of Black people in prison and how police officers violate prisoners in different ways. The following quote from Baldwin's book demonstrates how police officers physically abuse Black prisoners: "He's beautiful. They beat him up, but they didn't beat him – if you see what I mean. He's beautiful."²² Tish, Fonny's partner, speaks of the imprisonment of Fonny, and how despite physically beating him, police officers could not beat Fonny mentally. Fonny is not the only imprisoned one in the novel - Fonny's friend Daniel, who is also African-American, was also imprisoned in terrible conditions. The following line from Baldwin's novel describes situations that Daniel had to experience: „He [Daniel] is placed in solitary for refusing to be raped. He loses a tooth, again, and almost loses an eye."²³ The statement concerning Daniel states that Daniel, just like Fonny, is beaten and abused in many ways by the police in prison. The horrors described in Baldwin's novel are inspired by the real

²⁰ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 89.

²¹ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 107.

²² Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 143.

²³ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 140.

problems of Black people. Unfortunately, and Black people still face this discrimination even in the 21st century. Regarding the social situation of the 20th century, the American police treated Black and white people differently. They could not treat white people as poorly as African-Americans because of the status in the community that white people possessed. As a result, Black people and other people of colour suffered the harassment. Even in prison, white people were treated more humanely than African-Americans. Racism and class differences went hand-in-hand in 20th-century America. The class division impacted how the police treated people - white and the upper class were treated better than Black people and the lower class. The white majority often looked down on Black people who were often associated with the lower class, which is also portrayed in Himes's novel and will be mentioned further into the thesis.

The thesis previously discussed Mr. Floyd's death and the fact that not every case of police brutality is publicised. To spread awareness, Black people started to speak up about police brutality in the United States. One of the people was Megan Ming Francis, who spoke about police brutality towards her family member in one of her speeches. Ms. Megan Ming Francis described her brother Kenny as being falsely accused by the American police of having drugs on him while talking to his friends and being handcuffed and slammed to the pavement without proof. The police let Kenny go after finding his student ID.²⁴ The described police violence against Kenny did not result in death as in Mr. Floyd's case, but it still left a significant scar. Ms. Megan Ming Francis used her brother's experience with the American police as a demonstration of what Black people go through while encountering the police despite being innocent. Such behaviour is unacceptable and goes against the social justice people of all races deserve.

Social justice is a concept where all people are equal and have the same rights. John Rawls speaks of justice as a set of rules that society recognises, tries to live by, and benefits the people following them. Such rules and principles are part of social justice, which essentially means the structure of society and the way the institutions divide rights, duties, and benefits among the members of the community. Legal documents like the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenants on Human Rights contain the principles of social justice and define human rights.²⁵ Every

²⁴ Megan Ming Francis, "Let's Get to the Root of Social Injustice," filmed March 2016 at TEDxRainier, video, 0:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s&t=22s>.

²⁵ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 4.

person, despite their race, gender, sexuality, or religious preferences, deserves respect and should have the same benefits as the majority. Department of Economic and Social Affairs speaks of social justice and describes three areas of equality in the mentioned legal documents. The first area is equality of rights which focuses on erasing discrimination and states that all individuals are born free and deserve civil respect and freedom no matter what their race, sex, gender, religion, nationality, wealth, or any political opinion is. The second area is about equality of opportunities, which means that communities and the government avoid discrimination and provide individuals to contribute to the economy and society – pursuing any career or developing talents. Finally, the third area consists of equality in living conditions which deals with inequalities in terms of income, wealth and living conditions because this type of equality has, according to author, never been achieved.²⁶ Justice in society is still not achieved because it faces challenges, one of the challenges being entitlement. Entitlement of some groups is a great enemy of social justice - some people believe they are superior and worthy of opportunities. Victims of this entitlement are often people of colour and minorities. While the majority is more privileged, Black people have to face obstacles and suffer the consequences of structural racism. Ms. Megan Ming Francis claims that the issue of racial injustice cannot be fixed unless the root of the problem is spoken about. For example, racial injustice in the form of murdering unarmed Black people keeps happening because racial terror in the United States has not been properly addressed. Ms. Francis also suggests that one of the causes is the association of Black people with criminality and prejudice – an example being women protecting their purses when an African-American man walks by.²⁷ The speech by Ms. Francis corresponds with the ideas in David Knight's theory of the association of black skin with criminality and other negative characteristics.

Thanks to the effort of the Civil Rights movement in the 20th century, racism was addressed, but, as previously mentioned, it did not disappear for good. Racist ideologies and patterns remain enrooted in society, examples being structural and institutional racism. Defining the terms structural racism, as well as institutional racism is important to understand the question of racism on a deeper level. Tricia Rose, a professor from the Brown University Centre for the study of Race and Ethnicity, defines structural racism as the normalisation of cultural values in a society that provide advantages for white people while people of colour

²⁶ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The International Forum for Social Development: Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations*, (New York: UN, 2006), 15-16.

²⁷ Francis, "Let's Get to the Root of Social Injustice," 5:00.

experience unfavourable outcomes.²⁸ Structural racism can lead to people having double standards in different areas of daily life, for example, longer prison sentences for a person of colour with the exact same charges as a white person. Even if individual white people do not necessarily discriminate against Black people, there still can be discrimination within an institution itself. Institutionalised racism, according to Coretta Phillips, is enrooted in established conventions in American society and is based on anti-black ideologies of Black people being inferior to white people.²⁹ This means that in some cases, the problem is institutional racism ruling over society rather than racism between individuals.

Both structural and institutional racism suggest that the problem is in the customs of the community, and Black people are discriminated against in different areas of daily life. Tricia Rose divides structural racism into five areas where this form of racism is prominent: housing, media, education, workplace, and criminal justice. These areas are intertwined, and Professor Rose describes it as a continuous cycle. Neighbourhoods in America had a colour system in the past, telling how suitable residents were for loans – green symbolised an area without Black people, and red indicated a district inhabited by many Black people and other people of colour – which led to low loans and low taxes. Low taxes led to poor schooling, people dropping out of school, and participating in the criminal justice system, which was influenced by media portraying Black people in bad lighting.³⁰ The constantly repeating cycle based around white privilege created by American society was difficult to break out of, and it was a significant disadvantage for Black people. The character of *If He Hollers Let Him Go* talks about the issue of structural racism and this never-ending cycle: „They don't even want a coloured man to go to the school here anymore,' Homer put in. [...] 'You know they don't want no more nig - no more of us getting no mechanic's pay,' Pigmeat said.“³¹ The quote from the novel describes how the main character feels about the situation of the workplace in the US and the lack of opportunities for Black people. It also suggests that Black people are not accepted and welcomed in the workplace by white people and white employers. Like Tricia Rose, who divided structural racism into five areas, Coretta Phillips separated discrimination into a multileveled system. According to Coretta Phillips, there are three levels of discrimination – micro, meso, and macro. Micro-level realisations rely on face-to-face

²⁸ Tricia Rose, “How Structural Racism Works,” filmed 2015 at Brown University, Providence, video, 0:44, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3KsVRkbnn4&t=168s>.

²⁹ Coretta Phillips, “Institutional Racism and Ethnic Inequalities: An Expanded Multilevel Framework,” *Journal of Social Policy* 40 (1), Cambridge University Press: 2011, 1.

³⁰ Rose, “How Structural Racism Works,” 9:35.

³¹ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 14.

interactions between families and communities in everyday life in which the dominant group (white people) express prejudice towards people of colour. Meso-level realisations are about the neighbourhood composition and effects, institutional practices, media, and political discourse – institutionalised racism is therefore in the meso-level of discrimination. The last realisation, macro-level, is expressed through regulation, management, economic control, criminalisation, ethnic monitoring, and limited access to financial resources for people of colour.³² The division provides a clear explanation of how deep the issue of racism really is.

Institutional racism, the meso-level, is depicted in the following quote from the novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*:

Hank was the tacker leaderman, a heavy-set, blond Georgia boy about my age and a graduate of Georgia Tech. White mechanics could go to him and get any tacker they wanted, but he made the coloured mechanics wait until he could find a coloured tacker that was free. Most of the white tackers didn't like to work for coloured mechanics, and Hank wouldn't assign them to.³³

The quote demonstrates a system in the company where the main character of the novel works based on institutional racism because the company divides mechanics and customers based on their race. Black people had to wait until an African-American mechanic was available and white mechanics only served white customers.

Chester Himes also talks about how the race influences positions within a company and how white people have more power despite being in lower position at a workplace:

'Take me [Bob] for instance,' I went on. 'I've got a job as leaderman at a shipyard. I'm supposed to have a certain amount of authority over the ordinary workers. But I'm scared to ask a white woman [Madge] to do a job. All she's got to do is say I insulted her and I'm fired.'³⁴

The quote from the novel demonstrates that even though Bob is a leader-man, a white person has more privilege and power over him and can easily get him fired. Despite being an African-American, Alice, Bob's girlfriend, does not understand how the situation at Bob's workplace influences him and argues that it is not about Madge being racist towards Bob but because Bob is unsuitable for his job. Therefore, she claims that there is no racial issue which

³² Phillips, "Institutional Racism and Ethnic Inequalities: An Expanded Multilevel Framework," 175-178.

³³ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 29.

³⁴ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 108.

creates even more problems and tension between Bob and Alice. It is also related to issues with colourism – Alice does not face the same challenges as Bob because she is more privileged as a light-skinned Black woman.

However, despite not facing as many challenges as Bob, Alice admits that there are many defects in the system. The following quote from Himes's novel discusses the institutional racism in the United States:

„Many Negroes whom we think are in top positions are actually no more than figureheads and are much more frustrated than you. I [Alice] can't give direct orders on my job either, although I am classified as a supervisor. Only suggestions. It almost drives me mad to see cases handled incorrectly and have no power to correct them.“³⁵

Alice can clearly see how the system discriminates against Black people and that despite being in high positions, they do not have as much power as white people. She is aware of the problem, but instead of supporting Bob in standing up for his rights, she wants him to go along with it and get used to the situation for the sake of their future family.

Society has made attempts to fight racism, but some strategies might not be as productive and could cause more harm than good. Tricia Rose spoke about the colour-blind theory, which some people believe helps fight racism. However, Ms. Rose argues that practicing the colour-blind theory essentially means that in order to achieve racial equality, society must reject the distinction of people based on their race entirely. This could potentially be problematic because it can contribute to assumptions that racism is not causing inequalities in society and that individuals are bringing the problems upon themselves.³⁶ Pretending to be colour-blind and discrediting the issue will not end racism but instead result in a lack of awareness, invalidating the past racist acts of people and Black people's trauma.

³⁵ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 207.

³⁶ Rose, “How Structural Racism Works,” 0:59.

2 African-American literature and literary tools in the 20th century

This thesis focuses not only on the historical context but also the literary context, which means it is essential to define African-American literature. According to the article published on the Leonard Lief Library website, African-American literature is produced by authors of African-American origin and the literature is closely related to their life.³⁷ Since the literature is closely related to the lives of African-Americans, who deal with racism and social injustice connected to racism, the literature often portrays such issues and reflects their feelings. Douglas Jones states that African-American literature responded to the Jim Crow era's political, cultural, and social situation, which Black people had to live through and face the racial segregation, which contributed to African-American literary production. The Jim Crow era ended with the beginning of the civil rights movement.³⁸ The civil rights movement advocated for racial equality and African-American authors promote it in their writing. However, Rafia Zafar states that African-American authors promoted the equal treatment of Black people even before the civil rights era.³⁹ The social situation of the 20th century America was not the only influence on the African-American literature.

The literature of the mid-20th century was influenced by literary categories such as modernism, realism, and naturalism. Henry Louise Gates and Valerie Smith define realism as something that refers to material reality. At the same time, naturalism depicts nature in terms of what nature is to human beings and how harsh conditions shape individuals. The mid-20th century did not only bring the influence of realism, naturalism, and modernism but also the Great Migration, following the end of the Jim Crow era, in which Black people migrated from the south.⁴⁰ Chester Himes mentions migration in his novel multiple times. For example, in the following quote in which Alice's mom talks about the shipyard: "I imagine some of the white young men at the shipyard in some of the more advanced departments are college trained, but I understand our Negro workers are mostly Southern migrants."⁴¹ The quote briefly discusses that people from the South are migrating and seeking job opportunities. However, Alice's mother criticises people who migrated from the South several times in the novel, which will be further discussed in this thesis.

³⁷ Lehman College Leonard Lief Library, "Definition of African-American Literature," accessed February 28, 2023, <https://libguides.lehman.edu/-/AfricanAmericanLiterature>.

³⁸ Jones, Cohen, Stein, Phan, Warren, "Early Black American Writing and the Making of a Literature," 555.

³⁹ Rafia Zafar, "What Is African American Literature?" PMLA 128, no. 2, 2013: 401.

⁴⁰ Henry Louis Gates, Valerie A. Smith, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 94.

⁴¹ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 60.

Aside from migration, World War 2 was an event of the mid-20th century, and many authors reacted to the war. Chester Himes's novel is set in the period during the Second World War and discusses the war in relation to lives of Black people. The following quote describes how Black characters feel about fighting in the American army: "I don't care who he is. If Bob lets them put him in the Army he's a coward. If you let them put you in the Army you're a coward. As long as the Army is jim Crowed a Negro who fights in it is fighting against himself."⁴² The quote suggests that the American army is full of white people who support racist Jim Crow ideologies. This means that if a Black person joins the army and fights for a racist country, in this specific case, the United States, they essentially support the racist system.

Black authors also react to the post-war period. The post-war African-American literature from 1940 to 1960 is described by Louise Gates and Valerie Smith as urban and set in Black-American capital cities, such as Chicago, Boston, and Harlem (New York). It supposedly encouraged African-American literary production and the African-American urban street culture changed the mainstream, and also influenced the language.⁴³ The influence of African-American urban street culture on the English language can be spotted in Baldwin's novel *If Beale Street Could Talk* which provides many examples. The two main characters, Fonny and Tish, use the term "cats" to describe people: "And other people came, looking at us strangely, but, 'We know the cats who own the joint.'"⁴⁴ They referred to Black people as "black cats" and white people as "white cats" throughout the novel. Similarly to Baldwin's novel, Chester Himes captures many examples of the language influenced by the African-American urban street culture as well, one of them being the following line in the novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*: "We're sorry for everybody but ourselves; the worse the white folks treat us the more we love 'em."⁴⁵ The difference in language in the novels is that while Baldwin's characters use the slang word "cats" to describe people, Himes's characters use the word "folks." Regarding similarities in the language use, both novels use contracted forms of words and also normalise profanities used by white people against Black people. The following line from Himes's novel serves as a brief example: "She came out of her phoney act and jerked her line out of my hand, 'I ain't gonna work with no nigger!' she said in a harsh, flat

⁴² Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 149.

⁴³ Louis, Smith, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 95.

⁴⁴ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 42.

⁴⁵ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 7.

voice.⁴⁶ White characters in both novels use such language and profanities connected to race in order to trigger a reaction from African-Americans and to degrade them. Chester Himes, aside from urban slang, captures Southern accent since some of his characters come from Texas: “Sometimes I sho wish I was back in Texas.”⁴⁷ Another example of Himes capturing the language used by people from Texas is portrayed in the following quote: “Lotta coloured boys working in 'dustry nowadays, right 'long with white people,' she observed, taking out a ham sandwich and nibbling at it daintily.”⁴⁸ Himes writes in a way that makes it easy for people to distinguish different accents. It is important to mention the language used in the books because it is specific and reflects the setting.

Since this thesis analyses the novels by James Baldwin and Chester Himes, it is also essential to include some general information about both authors in order to provide more details. They were some of many successful and prominent African-American writers of the 20th century. Firstly, this thesis will introduce James Baldwin, the modernist and African-American author of *If Beale Street Could Talk*. The life of James Baldwin is documented in a book he wrote in collaboration with David Leeming, and it provides detailed information about Baldwin’s personal life, career and writing. James Baldwin’s biography states he was born on the 2nd of August 1924 in Harlem as a grandson of an enslaved person, as the oldest of nine children. He had a problematic relationship with his religious stepfather and later decided to follow in his footsteps and become a preacher. The biography informs that Baldwin did not search for his real father but rather for a father figure. James Baldwin supposedly began writing early in his life and used reading as an escape from reality – especially from his stormy relationship with his stepfather. Baldwin, according to his biography, preferred to use his illegitimacy, minority status, and homosexuality for a representative persona used for his writing.⁴⁹ Louise Gates and Valerie Smith provide some additional information about James Baldwin. According to Gates and Smith, Baldwin’s writing career began with his essay titled “The Harlem Ghetto” about black anti-Semitism, which was considered controversial.⁵⁰ The essay was a start to his successful writing career, which he built throughout his life. According to Baldwin’s biography, he was diagnosed with

⁴⁶ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 33.

⁴⁷ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 145.

⁴⁸ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 163.

⁴⁹ David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, (New York: Knopf, 1994), 19-21.

⁵⁰ Louise Smith, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 390.

cancer and died in 1987 in France.⁵¹ Following information about James Baldwin's life, this thesis will introduce another influential Black author, Chester Himes.

Chester Himes is an African-American writer of the 20th century and the author of *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. According to Louise Gates and Valerie Smith, Chester B. Himes was born on July 29, 1909, in Missouri as a son of teachers.⁵² One of the themes in Himes's novels is colourism among Black people. Chester Himes's biography informs that his father was dark-skinned African-American and his mother was a light-skinned African-American which shaped Himes's outlook and possibly created some resentment.⁵³ However, aside from his family, other significant events in his life served as an influence on his novels and stories. According to Gates and Smith, Himes began studying at a University in Columbus and then dropped out because of disciplinary reasons and, according to Gates and Smith, Himes was allegedly displeased with the white environment. Himes was arrested for armed robbery in the 1928 and his imprisonment apparently played a role in his writing career. He became an apprentice writer during this time of his life. The first story written by Chester Himes called "His Last Day" was published while he was still imprisoned and he based some of his stories on his prison experiences.⁵⁴ Chester Himes was inspired by his own life, reflected in his novels, such as his work life. Gates and Smith inform that Himes's novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, a novel which portrays the hardships of being Black in the 20th century America, was based off of his own job at a shipyard in Los Angeles. Himes moved to Europe before his death in 1984.⁵⁵ The additional information about authors provides more context to the novels and also explains the influence that the lives of authors have on their writing.

This chapter will also introduce additional details about *If Beale Street Could Talk*. It is a novel written by James Baldwin, set in the 1970s in New York. The story is a romance about a young African-American couple, Clementine Rivers, nicknamed Tish, and Alonzo Hunt, nicknamed Fonny. Tish and Fonny have been together their entire lives, first as friends and later as lovers. They get engaged, and Tish finds out she is pregnant with Fonny's child. Fonny and Tish are very much in love, and despite their struggles, their unconditional love and trust in one another are inspirational. Aside from having a loving relationship with Fonny, Tish seems to have a good family relationship with her mother, father, and older sister,

⁵¹ Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography*, 461.

⁵² Louis, Smith, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 156-157.

⁵³ Chester Himes Pages, "A Biography," accessed March 3, 2023, http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/HIMES/himes-chester_BIO.html.

⁵⁴ Louis, Smith, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 156-157.

⁵⁵ Louis, Smith, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 156-157.

Ernestine, who supports the pregnancy. Tish's family is non-judgmental and supportive not only of her but also Fonny and their relationship. Fonny's family, however, seems to have their own family issues. Referring to the ideas of the first chapter, the colourism of Fonny's mother and sisters, who are light-skinned African-Americans, is a factor in damaged relationships between characters. Aside from colourism, religion is a considerable factor affecting Fonny's family. Mrs. Hunt is a highly religious woman who relies on God compared to her husband, Frank, who is not religious and, as already mentioned in chapter four, often criticises her faith. Trudier Harris talks about Mrs. Hunt's faith in the review of Baldwin's novel by stating that Fonny's mother left her son in the hands of God due to believing that his imprisonment will help him surrender his soul to God instead of trying to help him.⁵⁶ Frank seems to rely on alcohol and is often criticised by his wife for not being religious like her and their daughters which results in tensed relationships. The issues of police brutality and social injustice are brought to light when Fonny is falsely accused of raping a woman, Victoria Rogers, and imprisoned shortly after. Baldwin introduced a character who represents police brutality – officer Bell. Officer Bell is a racist police officer who contributes to Fonny's imprisonment and is claimed to have killed an African-American boy in the past. Bell is after Fonny intentionally because he feels humiliated after losing an argument during an encounter in a grocery store where a man assaulted Tish, and Fonny stood up for her. Tish's family tries hard to get Fonny out of prison and prove his innocence – they look up the woman who accused him and find a good lawyer. Tish and Fonny are an example of staying together through thick and thin. They relate to each other very well, compared to Himes's characters who, despite being African-American, have trouble understanding each other's struggles.

It is crucial to provide further details about Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* as well. It is a novel written by Chester Himes, set in Los Angeles 1940s during the Second World War. The narrator and the story's main character is Robert Jones, often referred to as Bob. Bob moves to Los Angeles from Ohio and works at a shipyard as a leaderman in the sheet-metal department, where he deals with racism from his co-workers on a daily basis. Bob gets the position to ensure peace between white workers and African-American workers in the company. The following quote from the novel serves as an example of the types of mockery that Bob has to face from his colleagues: "At the entrance to the dock the guard said, 'Put out

⁵⁶ Trudier Harris, "The Eye as Weapon in *If Beale Street Could Talk*," review of *If Beale Street Could Talk*, by James Baldwin, MELUS, autumn 1978, 55.

that cigarette, boy. What's the matter you coloured boys can't never obey no rules?"⁵⁷ This mockery is frustrating for Bob, but as the novel progresses, the abuse escalates. Bob often talks about his feelings around white people and the issues with structural racism. Bob has a girlfriend, Alice, who does not understand Bob's feelings, and their relationship, compared to Tish and Fonny, is unhealthy. Their issues are rooted in class differences in the United States based on colourism and the different points of view of each character.

⁵⁷ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 18.

3 Gender roles

In addition to the historical and literary context, it is important to discuss how gender roles affect society, fuel injustice, and appear in the novels. The idea of gender roles has several behavioural implications for each gender. Linda Lindsey explains the difference between gender and sex. Sex is connected to the biological characteristics of men and women, and gender is related to the social, psychological, and cultural aspects associated with men and women. Gender roles as anticipated feminine or masculine attitudes and behaviours related to each gender in the community.⁵⁸ Despite living in a progressive era, some individuals still label people with stereotypes associated with their gender. Gender roles are often accompanied by both positive and negative stereotypes and labels. Women are stereotyped to be weak, fragile, irrational and emotional. Society has been putting pressure on women for hundreds of years to be mothers and homemakers, marry young, look a certain way, be feminine, obedient, and keep quiet.

Baldwin's novel depicts an example of a woman who does not fit the typical stereotype. The following line from the book describes the older sister of the main character, Ernestine:

She knows who she is, or, at least, she knows who she damn well isn't; and since she's no longer terrified of uprisings in those forces which she lives with and has learned how to use and subdue, she can walk straight ahead into anything; and so she can cut Daddy off when he's talking – which I [Tish] can't do.⁵⁹

The quote describes Ernestine as a woman confident in herself and not afraid to speak up against a man, who does not fit the stereotype of a quiet and obedient woman compared to the main character, Clementine.

Another stereotype often used to label women is connected to motherhood – women should be mothers and wives. Women are often shamed for not wanting to be mothers and rights to their own bodies – for example, banning or regulating abortions – are taken from them. These negative stereotypes can have consequences and create a sexist environment. Ms. Lindsey defines sexism as a product of patriarchy – a social structure dominated by males which leads to the oppression of women – which supports the idea that women are inferior to

⁵⁸ Linda L. Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, (Routledge, 2015), 5.

⁵⁹ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 36.

men.⁶⁰ Referring to the ideas of Ms. Lindsey about sexism, not only does society create stereotypes about genders, but also often uses double standards. For example, if a woman is hypersexual, she is shamed for it, but when it comes to males, it is normalised, seen as usual and their nature. Chester Himes's novel briefly touches on the subject of gender roles, for example, the following conversation between Bob and his partner: "I wish I was a man,' she [Alice] said. 'If you were a man what would you do?' I [Bob] asked. Suddenly she began crying. 'I never had anybody talk to me like that,' she sobbed."⁶¹ The quote suggests that Alice feels that she would have been treated better if she were a man and that she would be taken more seriously by men, in this case, the officer who stopped her and Bob. Women, however, are not the only ones experiencing stereotypes, labels, and discrimination.

Men have numerous stereotypes connected to their gender. They are stereotyped as masculine and dominant, stereotyped as avoiding housekeeping and cooking, providing for the family financially, and not being emotional. Stereotypes of men often come with homophobia – gay males are seen as weak and not “real men.” Homophobia and transphobia go hand-in-hand when it comes to male stereotypes. Transphobia is a very harmful phenomenon occurring in stereotypes, which can result in bullying and physical abuse. Men who feel confident dressed in feminine clothing or makeup are also seen as “not real men” and mocked in horrible ways by other individuals. The issues of transphobia and homophobia are more complex, and any transgender person, no matter their gender, can experience this prejudice. The 21st century is becoming more liberal and open-minded towards LGBTQ+ people, and the prejudice connected to the movement is slowly disappearing from the community.

Women found an opportunity to fight for their rights and face oppression through feminism. Ms. Lisa Day defines feminism as an approach to inequality and equality based on sex, gender, and sexuality. Feminist individuals seek change in aspects that still discriminate and create inequality among people.⁶² Despite feminism being used to fight for women's rights, it does not always cater to everyone's needs - white women still had more opportunities than black women in the 20th century. While white women were facing sexism from men, black women, on top of having to deal with sexism and misogyny, had to face racial oppression and never-ending racial injustice. Black women needed their needs to be

⁶⁰ Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, 3.

⁶¹ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 79.

⁶² Lisa Day, “What Is Feminism?,” Women & Gender Studies at Eastern Kentucky University, last modified February 18, 2016, <https://wgs.eku.edu/what-feminism-0>.

addressed and represented, which led to the birth of Black feminism. According to Patricia Hill Collins, Black feminism focuses on two ideas that come from it, address the entire issue of possibilities, and work together: intersectionality and flexible solidarity. Intersectionality is about how factors such as race, gender, sexuality, and religion add to the intersecting system of power and attend to social justice issues. Flexible solidarity means that Black feminists work with other groups – men, the working class, the LGBTQ+ community, Latino people, Asian-American people, and indigenous people. Solidarity attending to racial issues, gender, and sexuality is connected to freedom, which is essential to people who have been enslaved or come from that kind of background.⁶³ Referring back to the issues mentioned in the first chapter, all of the ideas of Black feminism are striving for social justice, which is challenged by structural and institutional racism enrooted in society. Professor Tricia Rose adds to the topic of Black feminism by suggesting that Black feminism is meant to be a political challenge.⁶⁴ Both Tricia Rose and Patricia Hill Collins seem to have similar ideas of Black feminism and essentially agree that it is meant to challenge the community.

Black feminism could not thrive without successful and brave Black women fighting for justice. One of the most prominent people of Black feminism in the 20th century, according to Patricia Hill Collins, is Ida Wells Barnett, who was a civil rights activist fighting against the lynching of Black people and the violence used to dominate people. She also challenged the ideas about sexuality and race created by society – black men lusting for white women having to be killed – and put out the intersectional analysis which emerged as intersectionality. Another important figure of Black feminism is Angela Davis who fought against state violence and prison violence.⁶⁵ As previously mentioned in this paper, prison violence and police brutality are some of the most mentioned topics in James Baldwin’s novel. The following quote from the book demonstrates the prison violence that Angela Davis advocated against: “He managed to see Daniel, who has been beaten.”⁶⁶ Representation of victims of prison violence is important for spreading awareness, and it serves as a reminder that the community has a lot of issues that need to be resolved.

People of the 20th century did not have as many opportunities for spreading awareness through social media in the way that is available today. Women can share their experiences

⁶³ Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminism, Intersectionality and Democratic Possibilities,” Montgomery College, filmed April 13, 2017, video, 18:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qU10tQ_rHo.

⁶⁴ Tricia Rose, “Black Feminism, Popular Culture, and Respectability Politics – Professor Tricia Rose,” YouTube, filmed May 24, 2016, video, 6:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtDJQ3TcaNc>.

⁶⁵ Collins, “Black Feminism, Intersectionality and Democratic Possibilities,” 20:28.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 94.

with feminism, and Black feminists can educate the community about the issues Black women face. Spreading awareness and supporting acceptance help with creating a more inclusive society not only for women of all races but also for the LGBTQ+ community, which allows people to express their sexuality, become the person they desire to be through transitioning regardless of their gender, and break the stereotypes and stigma. Aside from race and gender, religion is another category that divides people into different groups.

4 Religion in America in the 20th century

No matter if it is religion or spirituality, the one thing people have in common is that everyone believes in something. Religion and faith are important to many individuals, and having religious freedom is a right every person should have. According to Mark Hulsethers, the United States created a neutral space in terms of religion – attempts to bring back religious traditions from the Enlightenment reason as well as Protestant establishments. The three main religions of 20th century America were Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religions. Jewish people migrated to America, made up more than 3% of the American population by the year 1925, and the Jewish influence grew.⁶⁷ The people in the United States had the opportunity to choose the religion of their preference.

Still, despite the religious freedom in the United States, not everyone agreed with the faith of other people, for example, the Ku Klux Klan with their anti-Catholic ideologies. Professor Julie Byrne claims that the Ku Klux Klan supported anti-Catholicism in 1915, and Catholics, along with Black people and Jewish people, were the victims of the organisation.⁶⁸ The infamous Ku Klux Klan, known for attacking the Black community and burning churches, contributed to the social injustice issue by attacking the already mentioned groups of people. Mark Hulsether defines the Ku Klux Klan as a secret society that began after the Civil War. Members of the Ku Klux Klan burnt wooden crosses and participated in their own rituals dressed in the infamous hooded costumes.⁶⁹ The rise of the Ku Klux Klan was a considerable obstacle that Catholic people had to overcome.

Religion in the United States faced many struggles and challenges, aside from the terrorising of Catholics by the Ku Klux Klan, during the 20th century – religious depression and Americanisation were a considerable influence resulting in many changes. Robert Handy claims that the United States did not only go through an economic depression during the period between the two world wars but also through religious depression. Reasons for religious depression were that Protestantism lacked missionary enthusiasm during the religious depression of 1925 – 1935, and missionary funds were declining. Another thing that contributed to the religious depression was the fact that young people were losing interest,

⁶⁷ Mark Hulsether, *Religion, Culture and Politics in the Twentieth-Century United States*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 49-51.

⁶⁸ Julie Byrne, “Roman Catholics and the American Mainstream in the Twentieth Century,” National Humanities Center, revised November, 2000, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/tmainstr.htm>.

⁶⁹ Hulsether, *Religion, Culture and Politics in the Twentieth-Century United States*, 45.

and there was a decline in joining Sunday school.⁷⁰ Aside from the mentioned difficulties, religion was also influenced by the Americanisation that overcame society in the 20th century. Julie Byrne states that Roman Catholicism in America changed due to migration because children of the immigrants created their own Catholicism – they were influenced by their surroundings, which changed their opinions on what was good or bad.⁷¹ The United States melting pot ideology influenced the community, and people wanted to fit into the American mainstream. Professor Byrne describes two events that contributed to the acceptance of Catholic people into American society during the post-war period: the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 and the Second Vatican Council. The anti-Catholic ideology during the times of the Ku Klux Klan created a belief that a Catholic candidate could not win the election, and President Kennedy, a Catholic, won the election and became an icon for the American community. The second event, the Second Vatican Council, helped bring the Catholics into the American community by making the traditional rituals and doctrines relevant for the modern era.⁷² The melting pot ideology managed to help Catholic people blend into American society.

The topic of religion is very common in literature and James Baldwin included it in his novel. He created a very religious character, Mrs. Hunt. Mrs. Hunt, Fonny's mother, talks about her religion and love for God on multiple occasions, and the following quote is a demonstration of her faith: "I trust in God," said Mrs. Hunt. "I know He cares for me."⁷³ Highly religious Mrs. Hunt relies on God and Baldwin contrasted Mrs. Hunt's religiousness with her husband, Frank, who does not share Mrs. Hunt's love for God.

In fact, Frank questions Mrs. Hunt's God, criticises her faith and her actions when Fonny was imprisoned:

"I don't know," Frank said, "how God expects a man to act when his son is in trouble. Your God crucified His son and was probably glad to get rid of him, but I ain't like that. [...]" "And if you say a word to me about that Jesus you been making it with all these years, I'll blow your head off first. You was making it with that white Jew bastard when you should have been with your son."⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935," *Church History* 29, no. 1., 3-4, 1960, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3161613>.

⁷¹ Julie Byrne, "Roman Catholics and the American Mainstream in the Twentieth Century," National Humanities Center, revised November, 2000, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/tmainstr.htm>.

⁷² Byrne, "Roman Catholics and the American Mainstream in the Twentieth Century."

⁷³ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 49.

⁷⁴ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 49.

The quote from Baldwin's novel suggests that the character, Frank, is not religious and does not rely on God in difficult times at all. Instead, Frank is portrayed as a person who confines in alcohol during difficult times. Franks seems to be criticising his wife for supporting God more than her son. These religious differences created some tension between the married couple. Trudier Harris commented on the portrayal of Christianity in Baldwin's novel by saying that Baldwin tries to capture Christianity through love and that highly religious Mrs. Hunt is portrayed as a joke because despite being religious, she does not acknowledge the issues of her son. Harris claims that the sacrifices Jesus made for people are reflected in the sacrifices that Tish makes for Fonny. Harris calls the love Tish and Fonny have for each other and the intimacy sacred.⁷⁵

Chester Himes's novel mentions the topic of religion in a different way than James Baldwin's. While Baldwin portrays characters that confine in God, characters in Himes's novel use religion as an excuse for justifying racism against African-Americans. The following quote is a demonstration of a person who tries to justify their racist ideologies through religion:

'We're different frum coloured people. The Lord God above made us white and made you folks coloured. If He'da wanted to, He coulda made you folks white and us people coloured. But he made us white 'cause he wanted us the same colour as Him. [...] And the sooner you coloured folks learn that, the sooner you understand that God made you coloured 'cause he wanted to, 'cause when He made us in His Image He had to make somebody else to fill up the world, so He made you. Not that I say coloured folks should have to serve white people, but you know yo'self God got dark angels in heaven what serve the white ones - that's in the Bible plain enough for anybody to see. And the sooner you coloured folks learn that, then the better off you'll be.'⁷⁶

The quote is by a white character, Elsie, who tries to explain the customs of the community in the South and that white people and people of colour stay away from each other. According to Elsie, they do not interact with each other at all, which means they do not have any issues together. To point out the differences between the two races, she mentions God and that white people were supposedly created to be like God, and Black people were created to fill the space, which does not contribute to bringing people together but instead creates an even more significant distance between the two races. Elsie is using the Bible to justify racist ideologies and tries to tell Bob to get used to racism.

⁷⁵ Harris, "The Eye as Weapon in *If Beale Street Could Talk*," 64.

⁷⁶ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 165.

5 Comparing *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *If He Hollers Let Him Go*

The novels *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *If He Hollers Let Him Go* have similarities and differences and this chapter will further analyse and compare the two books. As already mentioned, both novels are written by African-American writers who deal with the topic of racism - racism is depicted in both of the mentioned novels, but each deals with different problems. While Baldwin's novel deals with social injustice and police brutality, Chester Himes writes about racism in the workplace, difficulties in the employment of Black people, and how race influences the social class system in the United States. Despite the authors portraying a different aspect of discrimination, characters seem to feel the same way about living in America among the white majority.

James Baldwin and Chester Himes expressed the issue of colourism differently. Baldwin only touched on the topic of colourism by suggesting that Mrs. Hunt, Fonny's mother, and her daughters disapprove of the colour of Tish's dark-skinned family. On the other hand, Chester Himes, as previously pointed out, talked about the advantages of being light-skinned. The character Alice is pictured as more privileged than Bob and other dark-skinned African-Americans in the novel. Alice belongs to the upper class of American society and is respected among the Black community as well as having her status among the white people. She is wealthy and not bothered by the issues Bob and other Black people face – employment issues because of her skin colour.

The author suggests that Alice does not understand Bob and tries to persuade him to return back to work where he feels mistreated and the following quote is a demonstration of Alice persuading Bob into staying in the company:

'In the things you do and the decisions you make you just can't think of yourself alone. You have to consider our future ...' [...] 'If you don't go to that girl and apologize and try in every way you know to get reinstated - If you can't do that much, Bob, don't consider me as being with you any more ...'⁷⁷

As the quote demonstrates, Alice wants Bob to apologize to Madge, Bob's white co-worker, for storming out of the work after she was degrading him because, according to Alice, he should work so he could provide for their future despite the racist treatment. She believes in racial segregation in terms of economy (people of colour have trouble achieving financial success due to restrictions), education, and healthcare. However, according to Alice, Black

⁷⁷ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 143.

people are still able to control their family life which is how she justifies wanting Bob to keep working at the shipyard. Alice does not care that the company is mistreating Bob. She cares about her social status and marrying a wealthy man, and she threatens Bob with a breakup. On the other hand, Tish and Fonny, both dark-skinned African-Americans, feel the same about society and support each other, and they do not care about social status.

Not only does Alice not understand the issues Bob and other African-Americans have to face, her white mother is also ignorant to racism. The following quote from the book shows how Alice's mother feels about racial issues:

'[...] White people are trying so hard to help us, we've got to earn our equality. We've got to show them that we're good enough, we've got to prove it to them. You know yourself, Bob, a lot of our people are just not worthy, they just don't deserve any more than they're getting. And they make it so hard for the rest of us. [...] Southern Negroes are coming in here and making it hard for us.' [...] 'We must pray and hope. We can't get everything we want overnight and we can't expect the white people to give us what we don't deserve. We must be patient, we must make progress.'⁷⁸

Alice's mom claims that it is not a question of race and that white people are accepting of Black people, but Black people are ruining it for themselves by not trying hard enough to earn respect from white people. She also criticises the migration from the South by saying that migrants ruin it for other people. She discredits Black people's experiences and claims that they should work hard and wait for white people to acknowledge them over time. These beliefs seem to have an impact on Alice, who wants to pass as a white person so she can be treated better by society and the police, who treat white people better than African-Americans.

The relation of colourism to the difference between social classes was often discussed in Himes's novel. The novel demonstrates the class difference between the upper and lower class and between white people and Black people. Bob belonged to the working class, and Alice and her parents, Mrs. Harrison and Dr. Harrison, belonged to the wealthy upper class. Upper class characters look down on the working class and underestimate their abilities. Mrs. Harrison has not only her opinions on racism but also on the lower class. She talks about how people at the shipyard do not have many opportunities to dress in a fancy manner because they spend their free time at bars and calls it a shame. Society treated Black people like outcasts – looked down on in institutions. For example, Bob is looked down on when he makes a reservation in a fancy restaurant for himself and Alice. Alice spends time with white

⁷⁸ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 63.

people at fancy dinners and events, and it seems like she does not want to admit she is black in front of white people, so she is hesitant to go with Bob. Alice's fear of white people judging her for her skin colour and associating her with the lower class is demonstrated in the following quote from Himes's novel: "She [Alice] said without thinking. 'But, Bob, with you everybody here knows just what we are.' [...] Finally I got it out: 'You mean when you go in with the white folks the people think you're white.'"⁷⁹ The quote portrays how Alice tries to use her light skin to blend in with white people so she would not be mistreated for being an African-American and she could maintain her upper-class character. Alice wants to pass as a white person not only to maintain her persona but so she can be treated better by society and the police, who treat white people better than African-Americans.

On the other hand, the novel also suggests that just like people associated with the lower class are treated poorly at places where upper-class people gather, upper-class people, but also white people, can face similar prejudice. The following quote hints at this topic: "That was a new club out on Central she'd [Alice] been trying to get me [Bob] to take her to ever since it opened; I suppose she figured that the people in her class didn't patronize such places and the only way she'd get there was for me to take her."⁸⁰ The quote suggests that it would be easier for Alice to blend with the community in the club if she were with Bob. This is because people would be more welcoming towards her since the people mistreated by the entitled upper-class society – Black people, people of colour, and working-class- and the white majority would not associate her with such groups. It displays the other side of the spectrum.

Racism of American police officers against Black people is present in both *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Referring to the ideas of David Knight in chapter one about association of black skin with criminality, the police officers in both novels are guilty of discriminating against Black people. Officer Bell in Baldwin's novel associates Fonny with criminality on multiple occasions - during the already mentioned fight in a store and after the false accusations. During the confrontation in the store, Officer Bell did not believe in Fonny's innocence and that he was standing up for his partner. Both Tish and Fonny were confronting Bell, and he did not believe the two African-American people and dismissed them with the following line: "We're going to take you down, boy," the cop said,

⁷⁹ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 73.

⁸⁰ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 55.

“for assault and battery.”⁸¹ The Italian owner of the store defended the young couple which is when Bell had no choice but to leave Fonny alone. Despite Fonny only defending Tish from the man who assaulted her, Bell labelled Fonny as the aggressive one, which supports the theory that Black people are seen as violent by the police.

Trudier Harris comments on *If Beale Street Could Talk* by saying that the power of eye contact is an essential element in Baldwin’s novel. The power of eye contact is present during the incident at the store. According to Harris, during the confrontation, officer Bell conveys power over Tish and Fonny through eye contact, and aside from power, this particular eye contact can be associated with symbolic rape. Harris explains that the symbolic rape, or seduction, is connected to the submission of women during sex and that Bell is trying to overpower Fonny and make him submit. This connection of rape is purely symbolic - Bell is trying to control Fonny through the legal system, which discriminates against Black people.⁸² Officers in Himes’s novel are no better than the police in Baldwin’s novel. Bob often dreams about violence, and his dreams often include the police. When the two police officers stop light-skinned Alice and dark-skinned Bob, they treat Bob and Alice poorly because of their race, but after discovering Alice’s social status and the influence of Alice’s parents and their position in the community, they choose a slightly different approach to the situation. Compared to Baldwin’s novel, where Fonny had no advantages in the community, Alice and Bob are released because of Alice’s status.

When it comes to similarities, the element that the two novels share is that both authors portray rape accusations. In Baldwin’s novel, Fonny is accused of rape by a woman, Mrs. Rogers, who does not know Fonny personally. The following quote from Baldwin’s novel discusses the accusation and the reason for blaming Fonny: “Because Fonny was presented to her as the rapist and it was much easier to say yes than to try and relive the whole damn thing again. This way, it’s over, for her. Except for the trial. But, then, it’s really over. For her.”⁸³ She is raped by an unknown man, and she picks Fonny as a suspect. Despite Tish’s mother talking to the woman about the accusation, she does not want to deal with the situation anymore since it is traumatic for her. Trudier Harris suggests in the review of *If Beale Street Could Talk* that Mrs. Rogers is influenced by officer Bell who is after Fonny. Therefore, she agrees with Fonny being the one who raped her, and she no longer deals with

⁸¹ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 101

⁸² Harris, “The Eye as Weapon in *If Beale Street Could Talk*,” 59.

⁸³ Baldwin, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, 87.

the situation, which ends up being convenient for both Mrs. Rogers and officer Bell.⁸⁴ On the other hand, in Himes's novel the accusation is meant to cause harm to Bob and the following line is a demonstration of Madge's intentions: "I'm gonna get you lynched, you nigger bastard."⁸⁵ Madge wants to harm Bob intentionally, and she tries to use her white privilege to achieve that. She wants to show Bob how much power she has over him by accusing him of rape and getting him lynched, and then later on dropping the charges.

Both novels share certain similarities connected to rape accusations. Baldwin's character, Tish, and Himes's character, Alice, are hopeful that their partners will get justice and try to fight the allegations in a legal battle. On the other hand, Baldwin's character, Fonny, and Himes's character, Bob, do not trust the system. Bob tries to run away from California and start over in a different city to escape the punishment for false rape accusations which only causes him more problems.

The main character in Himes's novel talks about how the justice system fails Black people in America, for example, the following quote:

But now I was scared in a different way. Not of the violence. Not of the mob. Not of physical hurt. But of America, of American justice. The jury and the judge. The people themselves. Of the inexorability of one conclusion - that I was guilty. In that one brief flash I could see myself trying to prove my innocence and nobody believing it. A white woman yelling, 'Rape,' and a Negro caught locked in the room.⁸⁶

Bob knows he does not stand a chance as a Black man accused of rape by a white woman in society of the 20th century and that the police are on her side despite the lack of evidence and the same goes for Fonny. Both Bob and Fonny got their lives ruined by getting falsely accused – Bob planned on marrying Alice and continuing his studies, and Fonny wanted to raise his baby with Tish. However, Bob ends up joining the army unwillingly, and Fonny remains imprisoned. Therefore, neither Bob nor Fonny gets justice.

⁸⁴ Harris, "The Eye as Weapon in If Beale Street Could Talk," 55.

⁸⁵ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 224.

⁸⁶ Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, 231.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to analyse racism and social injustice depicted in the novels by James Baldwin and Chester Himes and then compared the two novels. Racism is an issue contributing to the social injustice that has lingered in society for years. In terms of the historical context, racism has roots in slavery, which contributed to the idea that Black people are inferior to white people, and racism continued to develop before it reached its peak in the 20th century. The racial segregation of the 20th century was influenced by many prominent events, one of them being the Second World War, which influenced Europe and the United – Europe was persecuting Jews, and South America also tried to achieve racial purity. Black people The Civil Rights movement tried to end racism, but it did not vanish from the community altogether.

The thesis also dealt with the issue of colourism, which, like racism, has roots in slavery. Colourism is present in *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. The analysis showed that both authors portrayed colourism differently. While Baldwin focused on the affects of colourism among light-skinned and dark-skinned African-Americans on the relationships, Himes showed the advantages that light-skinned African-Americans have in the community. The ideas of colourism are closely related to the police brutality, structural racism, and institutional racism. All of these issues are portrayed in both novels. The thesis discussed that people, including the police, connect dark skin with criminality which lead to social injustice. Black people are often violated by the police despite being innocent and this issue was supported by examples from both novels. Regarding institutional racism, Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* discusses racism at workplace and how Black employees are not as valued as white employees. Himes' novel also portrays the class differences in the 20th century America and how the skin colour influenced the position within the community. In conclusion, both novels share the notion that light-skinned African-Americans are regarded better than dark-skinned Black people in the society of the 20th century, despite the varied approaches to colourism.

Regarding relevant literary context, this thesis introduced African-American literature and events and literary categories - modernism, realism, and naturalism - that influenced African-American literature of the 20th century. This thesis explored how writers of African descent responded to the racial ideas prevalent during the Jim Crow era, the Second World War, and the post-war period. In this chapter, the thesis made a passing reference to the

language that was inspired by African-American urban street culture - examples from the books supported the thesis - and the Southern accent that Himes captured in his novel. Black authors draw inspiration from their own experiences and discuss racism in order to spread awareness and advance Black people's equality. The thesis provided more details about the lives of James Baldwin and Chester Himes and indicated that Chester Himes reflected on some of his own experiences working at a shipyard in his novel.

In addition to historical and literary context, the thesis briefly discussed the influence of gender roles on society and provided a few examples from the novels. Stereotypes connected to each gender and problems that stereotypes cause, for example, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism, were included. It was regarded as important to introduce feminism, which did not cater to the needs of women of all colours, which led to the birth of Black feminism, and Black feminism was introduced, as well as some prominent figures of African-American feminism - Ida Wells Barnett and Angela Davis. The thesis implies that Baldwin created a feminine character that does not correspond with the stereotypes connected to women.

The topic of religion was present in both *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, which is why religion is discussed in this thesis. The thesis defined the religion of the 20th century United States as well as prominent events. Problems influencing Catholicism, for example, the rise of the terrorist group Ku Klux Klan that terrorised not only religious people but Black people in the United States, were mentioned because they are connected to racism. As discussed in the thesis, religious people wanted to fit into the American mainstream, and the melting pot contributed to the change of Catholicism. To conclude, Baldwin portrayed religion differently than Himes, meaning that Baldwin's characters relied on God's help, while Himes's characters used God to justify racism towards African-Americans.

The storylines of the two novels were discussed in further detail in the last chapter, which also compared and contrasted the two works. The storylines of the two novels were discussed in further detail in the last chapter, which also compared and contrasted the two works. The chapter primarily focuses on rape allegations, their impact on the protagonists of the two novels, and how class differences and colourism affected Bob and Alice's relationship. This topic is connected to social injustice, and to conclude, both characters, Bob and Fonny, were failed by the system in America.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rasou a sociální nerovností v románech *If Beale Street Could Talk* od Jamesa Baldwina a *If He Hollers Let Him Go* od Chestera B. Himese. Cílem této bakalářské práce je zkoumat historický a literární kontext rasismu a sociální nerovnosti v 20. století v Americe a analyzovat jejich vyobrazení ve dvou zmíněných románech. Práce není rozdělena na teoretickou a praktickou část. Teorie je doložena ukázkami z románů pro jasnější demonstraci problematiky.

Z hlediska historického kontextu se tato práce zabývá rasou a rasismem. V první kapitole je definován pojem rasa a popsán způsob, jakým zotročování Afro-Američanů přispělo k vývoji rasismu a jak se rasistické ideologie projevují v Americe ve 20. století. Zotročování Afro-Američanů přispělo také ke kolorismu, který je v práci definován jako diskriminování Afro-Američanů s tmavší pletí a zvýhodňování lidí se světlejším odstínem pleti. Kolorismus má negativní vliv na vztahy postav v románu Chestera Himese, což je analyzováno na ukázkách z románu. Chester Himes dal do kontrastu život Boba (Afro-Američana s tmavší pletí) a jeho přítelkyně Alice (Afro-Američanky se světlejším odstínem pleti) a poukázal tím na rozdíly, které mezi nimi dělala společnost. Jednou z myšlenek kolorismu je spojování negativních vlastností s lidmi s tmavším odstínem pleti a pozitivních vlastností s lidmi se světlejším odstínem pleti. Tento fenomén je relativně častý u americké policie, která diskriminuje Afro-Američany a často je považuje za agresivní a nebezpečné. Rasismus je problém, který se Afroamerické hnutí za občanská práva pokoušelo odstranit ve 20. století, nicméně rasismus se ze společnosti nevytratil úplně. Rasismus je problém způsobující sociální nespravedlnost a je hluboce zakořeněn ve společnosti. Práce také pojednává o pojmu institucionalizovaná diskriminace a o způsobu, jakým tato forma diskriminace znevýhodňuje Afro-Američany, například v oblasti zaměstnání, kde jsou Afro-Američani diskriminováni a méně doceněni než bílí pracovníci. Tématiky policejní brutality vůči Afro-Američanům, kolorismu, institučního rasismu a také sociální nerovnosti jsou vyobrazeny v obou románech a ukázky z románů jsou zmíněny v této kapitole.

Co se týče relevantního literárního kontextu, tahle práce pojednává o afro-americké literatuře 20. století a historických událostech, které poznamenaly životy afro-amerických autorů. Zmíněné historické události, například zákony Jima Crowa a Druhá světová válka, měly významný dopad na životy Afro-Američanů, což se také odráží na literatuře. Na literatuře se odráží i afro-americký městský slang, který oba autoři zachycují v jejich tvorbě.

V práci byly též použité příklady zmíněného slangu a také přízvuku, které zachytili oba autoři. Pro literaturu 20. století jsou kromě historických událostí charakteristické literární směry jako realismus, naturalismus a modernismus, který je zmíněn ve druhé kapitole. Práce poskytuje detaily o životech Jamese Baldwina a Chestera Himese a také stručně popisuje jejich romány. Tvorba Afro-Amerických spisovatelů je často odrazem jejich života, což je také případ Chestera Himese, který se inspiroval svojí prací v Kalifornii.

Otázka genderových rolí je zmíněna ve třetí kapitole, která se zaměřuje na pohlaví a stereotypy, které společnost připisuje jednotlivým pohlavím. Zmíněné stereotypy jsou například přecitlivělost a submisivnost u žen, nebo dominance a neprojeování emocí u mužů. Tyto stereotypy mohou vést k sexismu, homofobii a také transfobii. Muži, kteří preferují ženský styl oblečení a používají kosmetiku, jsou terčem posměchu některých transrodních lidí, protože „nejsou praví chlapi.“ Taktéž bylo poukázáno na sexismus a utlačování žen patriarchátem. James Baldwin představil ženskou postavu, která se vymyká stereotypům o ženách. Ernestine není submisivní a tichý typ ženy, no právě naopak je popsána jako žena, která se nebojí postavit se muži. Tato práce také diskutuje o podstatě feminismu, který poskytuje ženám možnost bojovat za rovnost ve společnosti. Protože feminismus se nepřizpůsobil problémům všech skupin, vznikl afro-americký feminismus, který se kromě genderových otázek zabýval také problematikou rasismu. V souvislosti s afro-americkým feminismem tato práce představila pár osobností afro-amerického feminismu a to Idu Wells Barnett a Angelu Davis. Obě představitelky feminismu bojovaly proti násilí páchaným na Afro-Američanech a sexismu ve společnosti.

Dále práce popisuje i náboženství v Americe a pojednává o problémech náboženství ve 20. století, například terorizování od Ku Klux Klanu, amerikanizaci a taky ztrátu misionářského entuziasmu. Mladí lidé neměli takový zájem o náboženství a migrace měla vliv na společnost. Katolíci chtěli být součástí americké mainstream společnosti, což vedlo ke změně katolicismu. Jednou ze změn bylo přizpůsobení náboženských rituálů moderní době. Práce dále zmiňuje důležitost zvolení Johna F. Kennedyho za amerického prezidenta. John F. Kennedy byl katolický prezident a jeho zvolení bylo ve sporu s ideologiemi Ku Klux Klanu o tom, že katolík nebude zvolen, což drasticky přispělo k akceptování katolíků v mainstream společnosti. Tématika náboženství je přítomna v obou románech a Chester Himes a James Baldwin vyobrazili náboženství v odlišných směrech. James Baldwin vyobrazil náboženství v podobě lásky a kritizoval matku jedné z hlavních postav, protože mluvila o Bohu a pobožnosti, ale zároveň nebrala v potaz problémy svého syna. Na druhou

stranu, v románu Chestera Himese jedna z postav přirovnávala rasismus k náboženství a černé a bílé anděly k rasám.

Poslední kapitola práce analyzovala rozdíly a podobnosti dvou románů, co se týče vztahů mezi postavami a vyobrazení problémů společnosti. Zatím co James Baldwin rozebírá tematiku policejní brutality, rasismu a náboženství, Chester Himes se zaměřil na společenské rozdíly, kolorismus a rasismus na pracovišti. Práce porovnává vyobrazení kolorismu v románech. James Baldwin zmiňuje kolorismus jen stručně, zatím co v románu *If He Hollers Let Him Go* kolorismus výrazně ovlivňuje vztahy mezi hlavní postavou a jeho partnerkou. Hlavní postava je Afro-Američan s tmavším odstínem pleti ve vztahu s Afro-Američankou se světlejším odstínem pleti, což vede k nepochopení a nedorozumění. Alice je vážená ve společnosti díky svému statusu a bohatství a používá svojí světlou pleť, aby nebyla spojována s Afro-Americkou komunitou, která byla diskriminována. Bob je obětí rasismu ze strany svých kolegů a nadřízených, což Alice nechápe a tlačí na něj, aby navzdory rasismu zůstal ve své práci. Oba romány se zabývaly policejní brutalitou, ale James Baldwin také diskutoval o podmínkách, které Afro-Američani zažívali ve vězení. Problematika falešných obvinění ze znásilnění byla projednávána v obou románech a souvisela s tím, jak systém zklamal Afro-Americké lidi, protože je těžké obhájit svou nevinu před policií a soudem, který je diskriminuje. Součástí analýzy románů je také zahrnutí literární kritiky románu Jamese Baldwina *If Beale Street Could Talk*.

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