

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

After analyzing Nella Larsen's novel entitled *Passing* and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's entitled *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted*, I would like to draw some conclusions. Both Nella Larsen's *Passing* and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted* deal with the issues of mulatto women who try to claim their identity. Both protagonists, regardless of their physical beauty, face the similar problem whether to accept or to hide their identity.

In spite of those similarities, there are also some differences. The first difference is that Clare chooses to pass for the white, while Iola chooses to be the part of the black people's society. The fact that they live in different conditions makes their reason for their decisions is also different. Growing up with her father who works as a janitor makes Clare lives in poverty. That is why she thinks that material wealth is the only source of happiness. Since the majority of white people at time live in prosperity, passing for the white is the only chance for Clare to be free from

poverty. The prosperity of white people is evidenced from the fact that white people usually dine at fashionable hotels. They drive limousine and are always dressed up. All of those mentioned make Clare choose to pass for the white so that she can marry a rich white man and get material wealth, even though she has to hide her identity and pretend to be someone else.

On the other hand, Iola Leroy grows up as a daughter of slave owner and lives in prosperity. She has a chance to get education as her father sends her to college. Later, after the war ends, she is supported financially by her long-lost uncle. When she experiences slavery, she becomes aware that white people have caused black people to suffer, and feels sympathy toward them. Despite the fact that she once lived a wealthy life, she now understands that wealth is not the source of happiness. The true happiness is actually to help black people to fight for their rights. That is why, she does not choose to pass for the white. Instead, she chooses to accept her identity as a mulatto and become part of black people, so that she can help them fight for their rights.

In the novels, the motivations of the protagonists for claiming their identities are different. Clare Kendry passes for the white for economic reason so that she can gain material wealth while Iola Leroy claims her identity as a black woman for the reason that the white society is the source of black's suffering. Though passing for white means freedom from slavery but Iola chooses to embrace her identity as a black woman so that she can help her own people.

This is in accordance with the different setting of time between the two novels. The first novel is set in 1929, a period in which segregation took place in

America. At that time, mulatto women do the act of passing because passing for the white offers opportunities such as better jobs, better housing. Passing for the white also means treated with respect not disdain. (Haynes) On the other hand, the second novel is set in the period during the civil war when slavery was still at practice. At that time, mulatto women pass for the white because it could mean freedom. There are many documented instances of fair-skinned slaves who pass for the white to escape. (Haynes)

Another difference is that Clare Kendry in *Passing* is portrayed as a selfish woman, while Iola Leroy in *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted* is portrayed as a selfless woman. Clare's selfishness results from her being raised by white people who do not care about her. Her white aunts consider her as a Negro and push her to do hard work. They also think that they are more superior than Clare due to her mixed blood. As a result, when a white and rich man turns up, she only thinks of her own happiness and leaves her aunts to marry the man. On the other hand, Iola Leroy becomes selfless as she is raised among black people who care about her. Iola's father isolates her from white people so that she would not get unfair treatments from them. Being raised among black people who care about her makes her become selfless and having witnessed the black people being treated unequally urges her to help them to gain equality.

The other difference is that Clare Kendry is portrayed as a reckless woman, while Iola Leroy is portrayed as a sensible woman. Clare Kendry becomes reckless because she always thinks that money is the source of happiness, which is why she makes a decision to pass for the white. She does not think of the consequences that

she will encounter after passing for the white. Different from Clare, Iola is portrayed as a sensible woman as she has experienced slavery and has been treated unfairly by white people. Because of her bitter experience, she decides to accept her identity as a mulatto and to be part of black people.

These novels are about the act of passing for the white. In times when people were separated based on skin color, passing for the white is an effort for the protagonists to escape from their condition. In the first novel with the setting of time around 1929, passing for the white is an effort for mulatto women to escape from poverty, to get opportunities that were closed for black people and to gain higher social status. While in the second novel with the setting of time during and after the Civil War, passing for the white is an effort for mulatto women to escape from slavery and gain freedom.

By portraying such characters, the authors of the two novels show their purposes of creating the novels. Nella Larsen exposes her criticism about the act of passing. Even though passing for the white is an option for light-skinned mulatto but one who wants to pass should have further consideration about the consequences of such action. Her criticism is related to her own experience, as she tries to pass for the white to connect with her white relatives but she is rejected by them as she inherits the negro blood from her black father.

On the other hand, Frances E. W. Harper would like to persuade mulattoes to embrace their black descent and to accept their identity as blacks. Furthermore, through *Iola Leroy, or, Shadows Uplifted* she also wants to show that mulattos should not be ashamed of being considered as black people. Black people also have good

characteristics and they deserve to be treated equally. Frances E. W. Harper's view on racial issues is related to her being raised as a black woman. She is proud of being black. She has written many articles on racial issues to uplift her own race. Larsen's and Harper's styles of portraying the characters makes these novels to become interesting and worth analyzing.