

**“I Had Changed My Name ... To Break With The Past”:  
Identity Crisis Of African Americans In  
Maurice C. Ruffin’s Novel Entitled  
We Cast A Shadow (2019)**

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### Abstract

This study explores identity crisis in Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast A Shadow* (2019), focusing on African Americans' struggles for societal acceptance and personal fulfillment. Anchored in Franz Fanon's postcolonial theory (2008), the analysis examines the protagonist's negotiation of identity against a backdrop of historical oppression and systemic racism. The study employs a detailed literary analysis of the novel's prose to reveal how the protagonist's journey from childhood adversity to adulthood reflects a broader quest for self-actualization amid prejudice and inequality. Central to this exploration is the protagonist's aspiration to transcend their Blackness and assimilate into the dominant White American paradigm, highlighting the impact of internalized racism and societal pressures. The narrative poignantly depicts the erosion of the protagonist's agency as they resort to drastic measures to conform to an idealized standard of beauty and acceptance. This transformation into a semblance of Whiteness serves as a powerful allegory for the existential struggles of marginalized individuals navigating identity politics. Through a nuanced analysis of textual motifs and character dynamics, this study underscores the ongoing relevance of identity crises in contemporary discourse and emphasizes the need for societal introspection and transformation toward racial equity and inclusion.

**Keywords:** *African-American Identity, identity crisis, postcolonial*

### Abstrak

*Studi ini mengeksplorasi krisis identitas dalam novel We Cast A Shadow (2019) karya Maurice Carlos Ruffin, dengan fokus pada perjuangan orang Afrika-Amerika untuk diterima oleh masyarakat dan memenuhi kebutuhan pribadi. Berdasarkan teori postkolonial Franz Fanon (2008), analisis ini meneliti negosiasi identitas protagonis dalam konteks penindasan sejarah dan rasisme sistemik. Studi ini menggunakan analisis sastra yang mendetail dari prosa novel untuk mengungkap bagaimana perjalanan protagonis dari masa kanak-kanak yang penuh kesulitan hingga dewasa mencerminkan pencarian jati diri yang lebih luas di tengah prasangka dan ketidakadilan. Pusat dari eksplorasi ini adalah aspirasi protagonis untuk melampaui kulit hitam mereka dan berasimilasi ke dalam paradigma Dominan Kulit Putih Amerika, menyoroti dampak rasisme internal dan tekanan masyarakat. Narasi ini secara menyentuh menggambarkan pengikisan agensi protagonis ketika mereka resorting pada langkah drastis untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan standar kecantikan dan penerimaan ideal. Transformasi ini menjadi kesamaan dengan kulit Putih berfungsi sebagai alegori yang kuat untuk perjuangan eksistensial individu terpinggirkan dalam politik identitas. Melalui analisis mendalam terhadap motif tekstual dan dinamika karakter, studi ini menekankan relevansi berkelanjutan dari krisis identitas dalam wacana kontemporer dan menekankan perlunya introspeksi masyarakat dan transformasi menuju kesetaraan dan inklusi rasial.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Identitas Afrika-Amerika, Krisis Identitas, Pascakolonial.*

## 1. Introduction

In the intricate landscape of contemporary America, a diverse mosaic of races, ethnicities, religions, and cultural backgrounds creates a vibrant social tapestry. This rich diversity is often lauded as a strength of the nation, reflecting its commitment to pluralism and inclusivity. Yet, beneath this celebrated veneer lies a persistent and troubling reality: the ongoing struggle for genuine equality. Despite concerted efforts to promote inclusivity and address disparities, a significant gap remains between the ideals of equality and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. This disparity highlights a stark and enduring imbalance, where certain racial groups continue to enjoy privileges while others face systematic marginalization.

The quest for equality in America reveals a complex and often harsh reality. While numerous initiatives aim to bridge this gap and foster inclusivity, the ideal of an equitable society remains elusive for many. The persistent racial imbalances underscore a broader societal issue—one that compels disenfranchised communities to seek parity through various means. This quest for equal treatment frequently leads individuals to adopt drastic measures in an attempt to align with prevailing societal standards. The pressures to conform to these standards are particularly intense in a society that frequently upholds the myth of white superiority. As a result, individuals from marginalized backgrounds often grapple with the enduring legacy of systemic racism and entrenched prejudice, navigating barriers that impede their social and economic advancement.

In response to these challenges, many marginalized individuals engage in processes of self-transformation. This transformation is often driven by the need to overcome societal obstacles and align with dominant cultural norms. It may involve significant alterations to one's identity and self-perception, including physical and psychological changes. For instance, some individuals may resort to skin-lightening products, cosmetic surgeries, or other measures aimed at emulating the physical attributes deemed desirable by the dominant culture. Such drastic actions reflect a broader societal pressure to conform to an idealized standard of beauty and acceptance, which is frequently associated with whiteness. By adopting these outward signs of whiteness, individuals hope to gain access to the privileges and opportunities afforded to those perceived as part of the dominant group.

This pursuit of assimilation reveals the profound impact of internalized racism and societal pressures on individual identity. The desire to fit within a cultural norm that one does not inherently belong to can have significant effects on one's sense of self. The transformation into a semblance of whiteness—though seemingly a path to acceptance—often exacerbates the very inequalities it seeks to overcome. This process not only erodes individual autonomy but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces systemic inequalities. As such, the quest for assimilation serves as a stark reminder of the persistent and multifaceted nature of racial inequality.

Identity crisis is a central theme in understanding these dynamics, as it provides insights into how individuals confront and manage their sense of self amidst societal pressures and discrimination. The concept of identity crisis encompasses both direct and indirect indicators of how individuals navigate their identities in challenging social environments. This exploration of

identity crisis reveals much about the broader societal forces that shape personal and collective identities.

Theoretical frameworks from scholars such as Franz Fanon, Erik Erikson, and Deng offer valuable perspectives on identity crisis. Fanon's postcolonial theory, Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, and Deng's insights into identity formation provide a comprehensive understanding of how racial and cultural dynamics impact individual identity. These frameworks help to contextualize the experiences of those grappling with identity crises, shedding light on the complex interplay between personal identity and broader sociopolitical forces.

Maurice Carlos Ruffin's novel *We Cast A Shadow* (2019) serves as a poignant reflection of the limitations imposed upon African Americans within the American societal landscape. Through its narrative, the novel explores the intricacies of identity formation amidst racial discrimination and systemic oppression. The protagonist—a nameless African American father—navigates a tumultuous environment marked by social and racial challenges, reflecting broader issues faced by marginalized communities. His journey from childhood adversity to adulthood aspirations encapsulates the broader struggle for self-actualization in a racially stratified society.

This study focuses on the theme of identity crisis as depicted in Ruffin's novel. The protagonist's experiences highlight the profound impact of systemic mistreatment and violence on his sense of identity. By examining the protagonist's transformation and internal conflict, the study aims to uncover the nuanced relationship between individual identity and broader sociopolitical forces. The protagonist's struggle to reconcile his own identity with societal expectations reflects a broader examination of how identity crises manifest in response to external pressures.

Identity crisis, as defined by Deng (1995), involves categorizing individuals based on factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. It encompasses a profound uncertainty regarding one's origins, race, and cultural affiliations. In the context of the novel, the protagonist's identity crisis is shaped by his experiences of racial discrimination and systemic injustice. His struggle to reconcile his identity with societal norms reflects a broader examination of how identity crises manifest in response to external pressures.

Erik Erikson's (1968) concept of identity confusion, particularly during adolescence, offers valuable insights into the developmental aspects of identity formation. Erikson posits that adolescence is a critical period marked by rapid transitions and upheavals, during which individuals grapple with questions of self-perception, character, and roots. This stage of identity exploration is characterized by a sense of dissonance and ambiguity as individuals attempt to align their evolving self-concept with external expectations and societal norms. Erikson's framework underscores the significant role of environmental factors in shaping identity during this formative period.

The impact of early childhood experiences on identity formation is profound. Research highlights that exposure to adverse experiences, such as domestic violence, can significantly influence an individual's future behaviors and beliefs. Children who witness or experience domestic violence are more likely to exhibit violent behaviors later in life. This correlation underscores the lasting impact of early experiences on shaping individual behavior and societal attitudes.

In *We Cast A Shadow*, the protagonist's experiences of racial discrimination and systemic injustice underscore the profound influence of early life experiences on identity formation and future behavior. The novel's portrayal of the protagonist's struggles reflects broader themes of how systemic racism and societal pressures shape individual identities. The character's journey illustrates the impact of these experiences on his sense of self and his efforts to navigate a racially stratified society.

This study distinguishes itself from previous research by focusing on *We Cast A Shadow* and the unique experiences of its protagonist. Unlike studies of immigrant identity crises, which often explore issues of assimilation and cultural displacement, this study emphasizes the impact of racial discrimination on an individual's identity. The protagonist's decision to undergo radical physical transformations, such as demelanization, highlights the extremity of his identity crisis and provides a unique perspective on how racial discrimination influences personal identity.

Previous research on identity crisis has explored various aspects of racial and cultural identity across different literary genres. For instance, Husna and Marlina (2020) have examined Black identity within poetry, shedding light on the nuanced expressions and challenges faced by individuals navigating their racial identity through poetic forms. Randa and Marlina (2017) have explored crossroad identity within novels, highlighting the intersections of cultural, social, and personal identity. Additionally, Handayani (2020) has discussed identity issues faced by Muslim immigrants in American literature, focusing on preservation, resistance, and negotiation.

Chaudhry's (2016) examination of identity crisis in *The Namesake* provides valuable insights into the struggles of immigrant families with assimilation and cultural displacement. Dizayi's exploration of identity crisis in *The Lonely Londoners* highlights the experiences of West Caribbean migrants navigating survival and identity in London. Both studies contribute to a deeper understanding of how identity crises manifest in response to cultural displacement and societal integration.

This research adds to the discourse by focusing on *We Cast A Shadow* and the protagonist's unique experiences. The study emphasizes how racial discrimination, rather than immigration or cultural displacement, drives the protagonist's identity crisis. The radical measures taken by the protagonist, including physical alterations to align with white American standards, offer a novel perspective on identity crisis and its implications for personal and societal dynamics.

In conclusion, the exploration of identity crisis in Maurice Carlos Ruffin's *We Cast A Shadow* provides a compelling examination of how racial discrimination and societal pressures shape individual identity. By focusing on the protagonist's experiences and transformation, this study offers new insights into the complexities of identity formation and the impact of systemic inequalities. The research highlights the profound implications of these experiences for personal identity and societal attitudes, contributing to ongoing discussions about racial equity and inclusion.

## 2. Method

This study employs qualitative research methods, using character development and narrative elements from Maurice Carlos Ruffin's novel *We Cast A Shadow* to explore the theme of identity crisis. Qualitative research, as defined by Creswell (2009), is an approach used to

understand and interpret the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to social or human problems. In this case, the study focuses on the fictional portrayal of identity crisis as experienced by the protagonist in *We Cast A Shadow*, specifically within the context of racial discrimination in America. Through a detailed analysis of the novel's characters and narrative structure, this research aims to uncover deeper insights into how identity is formed, shaped, and destabilized under the pressures of racial hierarchy and systemic racism.

By focusing on character development, the study seeks to explore how the protagonist's internal and external conflicts reveal the complexities of identity crisis. The characters' beliefs, actions, and interactions are analyzed to provide a window into how systemic oppression and societal expectations shape individual identity. This approach enables a thorough exploration of how the protagonist navigates his racial identity in the face of deeply ingrained societal biases, leading to an identity crisis marked by attempts to conform to or reject dominant cultural norms.

In terms of data collection, this study draws on specific quotations and passages from *We Cast A Shadow*, using sentences and paragraphs as primary sources of data. These textual elements are scrutinized to examine the portrayal of identity crisis, with a particular focus on the protagonist's experience. Descriptive analysis is used to interpret the novel, while content analysis allows for the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to the intersection of race and identity. Through these methods, the study aims to uncover how the narrative conveys the protagonist's internal struggle and the external forces that drive his identity transformation.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in postcolonial theory, particularly the work of Franz Fanon (2008), which addresses issues of race, identity, and colonial legacies. Fanon's ideas are employed to analyze how characters in *We Cast A Shadow* experience and cope with racial discrimination and the resulting identity crises. Postcolonial theory helps to contextualize the protagonist's journey within a broader historical and sociopolitical framework, illustrating how colonial and racial power dynamics continue to shape personal identity in a postcolonial context. By using this theoretical lens, the study sheds light on the ways in which racial discrimination both limits and redefines the protagonist's sense of self.

In addition to postcolonial theory, the study integrates identity crisis theory, particularly the ideas of Erik Erikson (1968), to further explore how identity confusion emerges in response to societal pressures. Erikson's concept of identity crisis, which involves uncertainty about one's character, aspirations, and social belonging, is applied to the protagonist's struggle. The novel's portrayal of the protagonist's attempt to assimilate into White American culture exemplifies the internal conflict that results from this identity crisis. His desire to physically transform himself, undergoing a demelanization procedure to appear white, highlights the extreme lengths to which he goes to resolve this crisis. This exploration of identity crisis within the context of racial discrimination offers a unique perspective on how systemic inequalities impact personal identity.

The choice of *We Cast A Shadow* as the subject of analysis allows for an in-depth examination of how identity crises manifest in the African American experience. By focusing on a Black protagonist born in America, as opposed to immigrant characters often explored in previous literature, this study highlights the specific racial dynamics that fuel identity crises for African Americans. Unlike characters in immigrant narratives who grapple with assimilation and cultural displacement, the protagonist in Ruffin's novel experiences identity crisis as a direct result of racial discrimination ingrained in American society. His radical physical transformation

becomes a powerful metaphor for the extremes of racial identity and the pressures to conform to dominant white norms.

By employing these qualitative research methods, the study seeks to uncover not only the protagonist's personal struggle but also the broader societal and psychological implications of racial identity crises in a postcolonial framework. The use of content analysis allows the researcher to systematically analyze the narrative, identifying how identity crisis is portrayed through recurring themes of race, power, and personal agency. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how the protagonist's identity is constructed, contested, and transformed within the context of systemic racism.

Furthermore, the study positions *We Cast A Shadow* within the broader discourse on Black literature and postcolonial theory, contributing to an ongoing scholarly conversation about race, identity, and literature. While previous research has examined identity crises in immigrant narratives or within postcolonial contexts, this study's focus on a native-born Black American protagonist adds a new dimension to the analysis of identity crisis in literature. By situating the novel within the framework of postcolonial identity theory, the research offers fresh insights into how racial identity crises are shaped by both historical and contemporary power dynamics.

Ultimately, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how identity crisis is portrayed in *We Cast A Shadow*, using qualitative research methods to reveal the complex ways in which race, identity, and power intersect within the narrative. Through a close reading of the novel's characters and themes, the research seeks to illuminate the protagonist's internal struggle with racial identity, as well as the societal forces that shape and define his sense of self. By exploring these dynamics through a postcolonial lens, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the role of literature in reflecting and interrogating issues of race, identity, and inequality in contemporary society.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The theme of identity crisis forms the core of *We Cast A Shadow* (2019), a novel by Maurice Carlos Ruffin. Through its unnamed African American protagonist, the novel navigates the complexities of racial identity, privilege, and societal acceptance within a racially discriminatory society. The protagonist's journey toward societal assimilation, marked by a deep internal conflict between his Black identity and his desire for White privilege, is a powerful exploration of the personal and societal pressures surrounding racial identity. This chapter delves into the protagonist's transformative journey, examining how his quest for acceptance leads him to a profound loss of identity. In doing so, it highlights the broader implications of identity crisis for marginalized communities and offers a critique of systemic inequality in America.

#### ***Identity Crisis and Societal Pressures***

The protagonist's journey in *We Cast A Shadow* is best understood through the lens of identity crisis, a concept widely explored in psychological and sociological discourse. According to Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development, an identity crisis refers to a period of uncertainty about one's self-perception, character, and role in society. This crisis often occurs when an individual's internal sense of self clashes with external societal expectations, leading to confusion and disorientation. In the novel, the protagonist experiences a profound identity crisis

as he grapples with the tension between his racial heritage as an African American and his desire to escape the societal constraints imposed on Black individuals.

From a young age, the protagonist is subjected to systemic discrimination and racial violence. These experiences shape his perception of the world and fuel his internalized racism. He comes to believe that his Black identity is a barrier to success and happiness, leading him to embark on a journey of transformation aimed at erasing his Blackness and assimilating into White society. This desire for societal privilege and acceptance becomes the driving force behind the protagonist's actions, and his identity crisis intensifies as he contemplates the lengths to which he is willing to go to achieve these goals.

### ***The Protagonist's Transformative Journey***

The protagonist's transformative journey is marked by a series of physical, psychological, and social changes that reflect his internal struggle with identity. His ultimate goal is to secure a better future for himself and his family, one free from the mistreatment and violence he associates with being Black in America. In pursuit of this goal, the protagonist undergoes a radical transformation, culminating in demelanization surgery to lighten his skin and appear White. This decision to alter his physical appearance symbolizes a broader rejection of his Black identity and an attempt to conform to societal norms of Whiteness, which he perceives as the key to achieving privilege.

The protagonist's journey begins with his decision to change his name, an act that signals his desire to break away from his past and reinvent himself as someone who can succeed in White society. In the novel, he reflects on this choice:

“I had changed my name within the past eighteen months to break with the past. To renew my life. When he called, the receptionist, a new girl from Minnesota, had no idea who he was asking for. Only select persons had my new email. The complications of being a transracial person” (Ruffin, 2019: 250).

This quote illustrates the protagonist's deliberate attempt to distance himself from his former identity as a Black man. By adopting a new name, he seeks to erase the markers of his Blackness and present himself as someone who can navigate White spaces without the baggage of racial discrimination.

The protagonist's physical transformation is further underscored by the surgical procedures he undergoes to lighten his skin. These procedures, which he views as a necessary step in his quest for acceptance, reflect his internalized racism and deep-seated shame about his Black identity. As Fanon (1952) explores in his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks*, the psychological effects of colonialism and racism often lead marginalized individuals to aspire to Whiteness as a means of escaping the limitations imposed by their racial identity. The protagonist's desire to become White echoes this phenomenon, as he believes that shedding his Blackness will grant him access to the privileges enjoyed by White Americans.

One of the most significant moments in the protagonist's journey occurs when he reflects on his physical transformation after undergoing demelanization surgery. In a moment of self-awareness, he acknowledges the extent to which he has changed:

“Looks like you got a lot of white.” She grabbed my hand and turned it over in hers. “What's white and white and white all over?” She poked my chest. “You are”. “I had almost forgotten about my demelanization” (Ruffin, 2019: 263).

This quote highlights the protagonist's internal conflict, as he grapples with the dissonance between his new White identity and his lingering sense of self as a Black man. Despite his efforts to erase his Blackness, the protagonist cannot fully escape the psychological and emotional weight of his racial heritage.

The protagonist's identity crisis reaches its climax in his interactions with his son, Nigel. Unlike the protagonist, Nigel embraces his Black identity and refuses to conform to societal expectations of Whiteness. This contrast between father and son highlights the generational divide in attitudes toward racial identity, with the protagonist's internalized racism clashing against Nigel's pride in his Blackness. In one poignant exchange, Nigel confronts his father about his rejection of Blackness:

“You wouldn't even let me call myself black,” Nigel says. “You're not black,” the protagonist responds, “You're mixed. Two-fifths Irish, one-fifth German—” (Ruffin, 2019: 271).

This conversation reveals the protagonist's refusal to acknowledge his son's Black identity, further illustrating the extent of his identity crisis.

### ***Identity Crisis and Privilege***

The protagonist's desire for privilege is intricately linked to his identity crisis. His belief that becoming White will grant him access to societal privilege reflects the deep-rooted inequalities that define American society. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is acutely aware of the disparities between Black and White Americans, and his decision to undergo demelanization surgery is motivated by a desire to escape the limitations imposed by his Black identity. In this sense, the protagonist's identity crisis is not only a personal struggle but also a response to the broader societal pressures that force marginalized individuals to conform to dominant cultural norms in order to succeed.

The concept of privilege, as explored in the novel, is closely tied to societal acceptance and the ability to navigate spaces of power and influence. For the protagonist, Whiteness represents a pathway to privilege and acceptance, and his transformation is driven by a desire to secure a better future for himself and his family. However, this quest for privilege comes at a profound cost. In rejecting his Black identity, the protagonist sacrifices his connection to his heritage and loses touch with the aspects of himself that define who he is. His identity crisis is therefore not only a psychological struggle but also a commentary on the societal forces that perpetuate inequality and marginalization.

The protagonist's journey also highlights the complexities of privilege within marginalized communities. While the protagonist believes that becoming White will grant him access to privilege, his son Nigel takes a different approach. Unlike his father, Nigel embraces his Black identity and refuses to conform to societal expectations of Whiteness. This generational divide underscores the different ways in which individuals navigate questions of identity and privilege within a racially stratified society. Nigel's pride in his Blackness serves as a counterpoint to his



father's internalized racism, illustrating the varied responses to systemic discrimination within marginalized communities.

The novel thus explores the tension between privilege and identity, emphasizing the psychological and emotional toll of pursuing societal acceptance at the expense of one's heritage. The protagonist's transformation ultimately leads to a profound loss of self, as he becomes disconnected from the very aspects of his identity that once defined him. This loss of identity underscores the broader theme of societal inequality, as the protagonist's actions reflect the pressures placed on marginalized individuals to conform to dominant cultural norms in order to succeed.

### ***Commentary on Societal Inequality***

At its core, *We Cast A Shadow* is a critique of the systemic racism and societal inequality that define American society. Through the protagonist's journey, the novel offers a powerful commentary on the ways in which marginalized individuals are forced to navigate a world that privileges Whiteness and devalues Blackness. The protagonist's transformation serves as a metaphor for the broader pressures faced by individuals who seek to escape the limitations imposed by their racial identity in order to achieve success and acceptance.

The novel's portrayal of the protagonist's internalized racism highlights the destructive impact of societal inequality on personal identity. The protagonist's belief that he must become White in order to succeed reflects the pervasive influence of racial discrimination and systemic injustice. His actions, while motivated by a desire to protect his family from the violence and mistreatment associated with being Black, ultimately perpetuate the very systems of oppression he seeks to escape. By rejecting his Black identity and attempting to assimilate into White society, the protagonist reinforces the harmful narratives that equate Whiteness with success and privilege.

The novel also critiques the broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality and marginalization. Through its portrayal of the protagonist's identity crisis, *We Cast A Shadow* emphasizes the psychological toll of navigating a world defined by systemic racism. The protagonist's journey is not merely a personal struggle but a reflection of the societal forces that shape individual identity and self-perception. The novel's exploration of the protagonist's internal conflict serves as a broader commentary on the ways in which societal inequality erodes personal identity and perpetuates cycles of marginalization.

The protagonist's interactions with his family further underscore the theme of societal inequality. His attempts to alter his son's physical appearance through demelanization surgery reflect his internalized belief that Blackness is a barrier to success. However, Nigel's refusal to conform to these societal expectations highlights the potential for resistance and pride within marginalized communities. Nigel's embrace of his Black identity serves as a powerful contrast to his father's rejection of it, illustrating the varied responses to.

## **4. Conclusion**

In *We Cast A Shadow* (2019), Maurice Carlos Ruffin masterfully explores the identity crisis faced by African Americans within the context of systemic racial discrimination. Through the

protagonist's deeply personal journey, the novel highlights the complexities of navigating a society that devalues Black identity and pressures marginalized individuals to conform to White norms in order to access privilege. The protagonist's internal conflict, driven by his desire to protect his family from racial violence, leads him to undergo a drastic transformation, ultimately culminating in a loss of his Black identity. This journey exemplifies the broader societal issue of racial inequality, where the aspiration to escape oppression forces individuals to reject essential parts of themselves.

Ruffin's portrayal of the protagonist's struggle serves as a powerful reflection on the enduring battle African Americans face in asserting their identity amidst systemic oppression. The protagonist's decision to undergo demelanization surgery symbolizes the desperate lengths to which individuals may go in an effort to escape the harsh realities of racial inequality. Yet, as the novel demonstrates, this attempt at assimilation comes at the cost of one's sense of self, leading to a deeper crisis of identity.

The novel's relevance extends beyond its immediate narrative, offering critical insights into how identity formation is influenced by societal discrimination. The protagonist's experiences not only mirror the challenges many African Americans continue to face but also illuminate the emotional and psychological toll of living in a society defined by racial hierarchies. Ruffin's work brings to the forefront the ongoing struggle for racial identity and acceptance, resonating with broader social and cultural discussions about race in America.

Finally, *We Cast A Shadow* contributes meaningfully to the discourse on identity crisis in both literature and society, opening up avenues for further exploration of how marginalized individuals navigate the pressures of systemic inequality. As a reflection on race, identity, and societal injustice, this novel provides a foundation for future research on the intersection of racial identity and societal discrimination, offering scholars valuable insights into the complexities of identity in a world marked by racial inequities.

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