

# “Parodies of Whiteness”: Discursive Frames of Recognition in Percival Everett’s *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*\*

Emine Lâle Demirtürk

Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey

The paper discusses how the white supremacist norms of recognition are essential to the constitution of black vulnerability as a precondition of the white human in Percival Everett’s *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*. Everett’s novel depicts the extent to which popular culture plays a constitutive role in the cultural governance of black bodies, as he dismantles white hegemonic discursive processes that coerce the black body into performing whiteness. Since racialized body is a script of whiteness, it is important to note that the racial script exposes the discursive exchanges in interracial encounters. The issue of how the whites reproduce the power of whiteness in the process of “scripting” blacks is represented through Everett’s satirical discourse on the everyday white discursive practices: “Parodies of whiteness” demonstrate how the black male protagonist Not Sidney undoes the white power at the moment of the constitution of the disjunctive black self, when Sidney Poitier’s image works against the particularity of Not Sidney’s identity. Whites’ urge to “see” and “recognize” the white-commodified racial paradigm (of Poitier) in Not Sidney who fails to become one, highlights the white mechanisms of power that produce blackness except as a mere “parody of whiteness”. It is in this contradictory space that Everett enables us to confront the issue of whiteness (and of race in general) as mere parody, because everyday performances of blackness (under white policing and surveillance) are as much a parody of blackness as that of whiteness.

*Keywords:* whiteness, recognition, racialization, discursive frames

## The Scripting of the Black Body

The white supremacist “norms of recognition” are essential to the constitution of black vulnerability as a precondition of the (white) human<sup>1</sup>. Butler (2009) claimed that since the human has traditionally defined “the norm of recognizability”, it is important to call into question the discursive processes of “how existing norms allocate recognition differentially”<sup>2</sup> (p. 6). If the “normative frame” is necessary for the interpersonal encounters

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Emine Lâle Demirtürk, associate professor of Department of American Culture and Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Letters, Bilkent University.

<sup>1</sup> The author adapted Butler’s association between norms of recognition and vulnerability, who develops into a theoretical framework in her *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), to the vulnerability of the black body, posited by the white supremacist norms of recognition as “unrecognizable”. Butler (2004) argued that vulnerability assumes a political meaning when it is recognized, because “recognition wields the power to reconstitute vulnerability”. More precisely, when we posit the other’s vulnerability, it becomes a form of recognition, which “manifests the constitutive power of the discourse” (p. 43).

<sup>2</sup> Here, Butler pointed to the issue of power in conferring recognition to produce legible subjects: The “differential of power at work”, she wrote, “distinguishes between those subjects who will be eligible for recognition and those who will not” (2009, p. 138).

to establish mutual recognition, then the unrecognizability of the other is one of those “breakdowns in the practice of recognition” that inevitably disrupt the normativity of social space, helping us question “the givenness of the prevailing normative horizon”<sup>3</sup> (Butler, 2005, p. 24). The available norms for the act of recognition make it possible for the “regime of truth” to set a frame of reference for recognition. The impossibility to recognize or be recognized within the available norms, enables us to question the regime of truth as much as our own identity. Since the lived black body emerges as a white project, the exclusionary practices by which norms of recognition are constituted determine the regime of governance of the black body by the white people who act as “sovereigns”. In this context, the “scripting” (Jackson II, 2006, p. 53) of the black body in its historical and contemporary configurations cannot be considered outside “the differential operation of norms of recognition” (Butler, 2004, p. 44). It is in its ideological underpinnings that scripting, as a discursive act, causes the black body to become a legible text for the white people insofar as it fits the dominant cultural norms.

Percival Everett’s *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009) depicts the extent to which popular culture plays a constitutive role in what can be called “the ‘cultural governance’” (as cited in Muller, 2008, p. 203) of black bodies. Everett’s critique of the politics of recognition challenges systemic oppression, as he negotiates “a palimpsest script” of black body, which emerges “based on several considerations such as how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how others’ perceptions influence how we define ourselves” (Jackson II, 2006, p. 75). Everett both exposes and dismantles white hegemonic discursive processes that coerce the black body into performing whiteness. Since racialized body is a script of whiteness, it is important to note that the racial script is a “social indicato[r] of the unacknowledged power differential” between whites and blacks, constitutive of their “discursive exchanges” (Gillman, 2007, p. 137). In this context, the plot summary of the novel expresses these operations of white power and its normative understandings of blackness in the constitution of black discursive body. The black male protagonist is named Not Sidney by his mother, whose last name is coincidentally Poitier, to avoid confusion with the black male icon Sidney Poitier, whom he looks alike. Born of a black mother who is a wealthy shareholder in the white entrepreneur Ted Turner’s Turner Broadcasting Company, a corollary in real life to CNN (Cable News Network) whose founder was the real Ted Turner, he is soon left with his guardianship, after his mother dies during his childhood. Not Sidney is raised mostly by black servants, hired with Not Sidney’s money by Turner in his Atlanta home, and he is also educated by black teachers including Betty. Turner ironically maintains the white supremacist ambitions of a capitalist, who cannot step out of the racial paradigms. Even though he is no different from a privileged white person, Not Sidney’s diverse experiences with white racist people are based on the reenactments and revisions of Sidney Poitier films in his everyday life. He is finally killed at the end and becomes his double Poitier, to receive the award in a ceremony. Since whites’ recognition of Not Sidney is built upon existing and sanctioned cultural narratives of blackness, implicated in Poitier, the unrecognizability of Not Sidney as himself is linked with broader norms of racialization. The failed moments of communication expose Not Sidney’s particularity as a deviation from the normative project of whiteness, incongruent with how whiteness is implicated in Poitier image.

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<sup>3</sup> For Butler (2005), then, the serious impact of the unrecognizability of the other shows itself in “a crisis in the norms that govern recognition” (p. 24).

In an interview, Everett says that he “was drawn to Poitier because he is such a complicated figure—politically outspoken in public, and eminently ‘safe’ onscreen”<sup>4</sup> (Interview with Drew Toal, 2010, p. 2). Everett’s parodies of Poitier films, which constitute the political statement on the Hollywood film industry’s “framing blackness” (Guerrero, 1993, p. 2), are re-located within the everyday interracial relations, demonstrating how racial scripts set limits to black bodily intelligibility. He deconstructs whiteness as a lived experience of domination, as he exposes the disjunction between essentialized black bodies (i.e., Poitier), produced by the disembodied white gaze in popular culture and the individuated black selves (i.e., Not Sidney), who depart from the accepted norms of recognition. It is at this juncture that “the border maintenance” (Shotwell 2010, p. 118) becomes the deliberately conducted misrecognition of Not Sidney’s black body as the site of “discursive complexity” (Bailey, 2010, p. 69) in order to police white normative spaces. Poitier symbolized “tokenism” of white dominant culture, employing him, as he himself disproved, as “a symbol... of how they don’t really discriminate”<sup>5</sup> (as cited in Goudsouzian, 2004, p. 206). Hollywood’s representation of the “good Negro” and “bad nigger” stereotypes were historically based on the failure to recognize the complexity of black identities out of a desire for “ideological containment” (Grant IV, 2004, pp. 32-33). In total conformity to white institutional values and ideology, Everett strategically chooses to present a “proper” and “respectable” black to counter the denigrated one, who fails to live up to the “normative expectations” (Medina, as cited in Garcia, 2006, p. 848). All through his social encounters with whites and blacks, Not Sidney is confused with Poitier, and has to deal with the impact of this misrecognition. The Canadian philosopher and political theorist Charles Taylor, in his influential article, “The Politics of Recognition” (1992), explored the theoretical underpinnings of identity politics. Since his identity “depends on [his] dialogical relations with others”, he argues, misrecognition damages one’s identity, for “it can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being”<sup>6</sup> (Taylor, 1994, pp. 34, 25).

### **Parodies of Sidney Poitier Films as Parodies of Whiteness**

In this context, Everett’s use of parody of Poitier films in the novel is done in a satirical manner, that is satirizing the white supremacist absurdities of using strategies of “racial scripts” for cultural and political erasure of individuated blackness. He engages examples of “parodies of whiteness”, that is “the failed copies of whiteness” (Warren & Heuman, 2007, p. 222), and hence produces a satirical discourse on whiteness by exposing its constructedness. Simpson (2003) argued that one of the methods satirical discourse uses is the “incongruity”, which is built upon “the broad notion of “script opposition”, that works around “the transition between positive and negative polarities [and] the alternation between normal and abnormal scripts” (p. 70). The discursive shift here

<sup>4</sup> Grant IV (2004), in his *Post-Soul Black Cinema: Discontinuities, Innovations, and Breakpoints*, argued that the representation of blacks in early American films before 1960s was “under-informed images of Blacks” (p. 22), given totally from the white dominant perspective. The 1960s can be called “the decade of the Uncle Tom”, because Poitier persona did not fit into the demand for “a new and liberated Black sense of manhood and self” (p. 32). Philippa Gates suggests that Poitier, who stood for the decade’s American integrationist policy, “made identifiable for the dominant, white and middle-class audience through class and profession” (Gates, 2006, p. 216).

<sup>5</sup> In his autobiography, *The Measure of a Man: A Spiritual Autobiography* (2000), Poitier commented: “I was an ‘Uncle Tom’, even a ‘house Negro’, for playing roles that were nonthreatening to white audiences and for playing the ‘noble Negro’ who fulfills white liberal fantasies” (p. 118).

<sup>6</sup> As Patchen Markell (2003) explained, Taylor’s thesis is that “contemporary social and political movements can be understood as struggles for recognition”, demanding respect which express “the accurate knowledge of the particular identities borne by people and social groups” (p. 39).

between Not Sidney and Poitier is built upon a race-oriented conception that allows Not Sidney-Sidney Poitier “script opposition” to be incompatible in the context of a white supremacist discourse. The novel, in this sense, interrogates what “implicit frames of recognizability” are at work, when whites recognize Poitier as the only black person, who embodies familiar blackness (or legible blackness), to regulate Not Sidney’s unfamiliar blackness<sup>7</sup> (or illegible blackness) in his defiance of “available norms of likeness” (Butler, 2009, p. 36). The chaotic repetition of the white misrecognition of Not Sidney marks the failure of normative, what the author calls normative blackness, embodied by Poitier, to mean the normative construction of blackness by the white dominant culture.

Leaving Los Angeles after his mother Portia’s death, Not Sidney lives with Ted Turner in his Atlanta home. He is extremely wealthy, due to the millions of dollars his mother left him. Ted Turner is “comfortable in his skin” (Everett, 2009, p. 7), and he is proud of the power and privilege it provides him with, which is indicative of how he feels secure in his role in perpetuating white dominant power structures. He calls himself “a privileged white male” (Everett, 2009, p. 25), because of not hiring Not Sidney’s mother in the past, while he ironically enjoys her investment in his company leading to his success and fame. Turner’s patronage is based on the black woman’s investment, and hence, the black person’s presence is conducive to the maintenance of white status quo. Betty, Not Sidney’s history teacher, on the other hand, tries to raise his consciousness by enabling him to see through the basic paradox of American democracy with no tolerance for racial differences. She teaches him that the white corporate culture permeates all the areas of life, appropriating politicians “to make us think we have some choice and a little power” (Everett, 2009, p. 10). What she does is to get him realize that when individuals become active agents, they can challenge the prevailing white supremacist notions of authority and power.<sup>8</sup> In his relations with Turner and his wife Jane Fonda, he never experiences any direct racist treatment, for his wealth seems to make him “white” in their eyes. But he is unable to have any communication with the girls and the boys at school, who constantly beat him up for not understanding his name, thinking he is making fun of them. Unable to protect himself from being beaten up, he works with his martial arts teacher, but cannot get very far. He learns from a book the skill of what he calls fesmerism, an act of mesmerizing and gains control of his attackers to “stare them into submission” (Everett, 2009, p. 19). The black gaze ironically subverts the white gaze, and hence its “legitimate” authority, and this is the only way he can have power over white people, who are dangerous to him. The excess of discursive construction of his blackness construes the racial boundaries that allow for the “norm” of white supremacy to position him “outside the bounds of cultural intelligibility” (Ferris, 2003, p. 269).

Not Sidney’s white history teacher Miss Hancock, as an embodiment of the norm, rapes him acting like a “plantation mistress, who simply enjoys sex with a ‘nigger’ out of a ‘darky nostalgia’” (Hooks, 1995, p. 175), threatening not to let him graduate from high school. The symbolic “gender reversal” (Bordo, 1997, p. 141) is at work here when she rapes Not Sidney by pressing herself on him and emasculating him, while she voices the

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<sup>7</sup> The author coined these two terms: It seems to me that Poitier’s “familiarity”, which the author prefers to call familiar blackness, represents a legible blackness to white supremacist people. They impose it as a racial frame on an individual black such as Not Sidney, who embodies an unfamiliar blackness, or to put it more precisely, an intelligible blackness for them, and therefore they misrecognize or fail to “read” him as he is.

<sup>8</sup> Betty’s attempt at a personal level is what Henry Giroux strongly believes we can practice in the classroom to change and transform the society: He argues that it is only when the students and teachers join forces to engage the political in the classroom that they can challenge the white dominant power structure, which determine “the selection of specific forms of classroom knowledge, legitimate particular pedagogical practices and rationalize the exclusions of specific histories, experiences and ideologies” (Giroux, 1997, p. 148).

white normative expectations that it is the blacks who have the desire for whiteness and not vice versa. Her authority here functions as a way of making visible her privileges as a white woman with her colonizing role as a white teacher, who forces Not Sidney to be part of a system that oppresses him as a black student. When she still fails him in class, and he reports her sexual abuse to the school principal Mr. Clapper and later to the female school superintendent Dr. Gunther, all he hears is their laughter. This is the level at which “the normative operates”, that is “through norms that produce the idea of the human who is worthy of recognition” (Butler, 2009, p. 138). The sexual abuse causes Not Sidney to lose his trust in the school system and drops out of school, because he does not need to have a diploma: “I was filthy rich” (Everett, 2009, p. 43). He feels that he is a “risk taker” (Everett, 2009, p. 43) and will fight for his ideals just like Huckleberry Finn, Don Quixote and Ahab did. Even though these role models are ironically all white and fictional, he has to fight the “windmills” (Everett, 2009, p. 43) of white supremacy, an “invisible” enemy like those of Don Quixote.

His interracial encounters in the outside world, after he quits school, are shaped by his confrontation with white officials. As he leaves Atlanta for L.A. with a fake driving license and a used Toyota he bought for himself, he is stopped by the white county sheriff’s patrol car. The sheriff stops him for “driving while black” (Lamberth, 2010, p. 32) with the suspicion that he must have stolen the car simply because he is black. Here, racial profiling is seen through the white supremacist reactions to blacks as an example of how whiteness is secured. The sheriff’s interpellation, “Hey, boy” (Everett, 2009, p. 46), is what he responds with “Officer”, “a smart-ass remark” (Everett, 2009, p. 46), instead of “Sir”, as it is expected of a young black man. While he follows the sheriff’s order to show his license and registration, he is stopped by the sheriff with a pistol in his hand. He is now interpellated a second time by the sheriff as “[d]on’t move, nigger!” (Everett, 2009, p. 47), for the racial differential treatment constitutes him as such. Not Sidney’s refusal of this form of recognition as “nigger” challenges the paradigms of whiteness, because when he dares to “display such agency [he is] deemed insolent... and even ‘uppity’” (Yancy, 2008, p. 45). Even when he says “OK”, as he is searched, and defends his right to be treated properly in this effective scene of racial profiling, the sheriff who calls him “an uppity nigger” (Everett, 2009, p. 47) also asks for backup on the radio. Here, the sheriff feels in charge if he proves his authority legitimate, and Not Sidney as the criminal, for this is what produces his whiteness as an authoritarian space. In Louis Althusser’s “notion of interpellation, it is the police who initiate the call or address by which a subject becomes socially constituted”: The sheriff, to adapt Butler’s (1993) words here, “not only represents the law but [his] address [‘nigger’] has the effect of binding the law to the one [Not Sidney] who is hailed” (p. 121). When he is interpellated, he receives recognition in the discursive domain of the black subject, for the ‘I’, who is interpellated, can no longer be dissociated with the historical configuration of blackness.

The law enforcement officials clearly act as sovereigns. His legal rights are not protected: His phone, his car and all his belongings are taken away from him, and he is arrested for “bein’ a nigger” (Everett, 2009, p. 48). He is called Poitier by the officers and the jailer, since he insists he is not, because they are unable to differentiate that which is “lived” (ordinary black person) from that which is commodified and consumed as white-sanctioned mediated black images<sup>9</sup>. The misrecognition of his identity in this scene demonstrates that when recognition helps the social world to become intelligible, “it often does so by stratifying it, subordinating some people and

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<sup>9</sup> As Nieuwland and Kuperberg explained how “negation processing” work in their article “When the Truth...” (2008), they claimed: “According to nonincremental, two-step theories of negation, evaluating ‘A robin is not a tree’ is difficult because people suppose the false inner proposition (‘A robin is a tree’) before applying the negation term to compute truth value” (p. 1213).

elevating others to positions of privilege or dominance” (Markell, 2003, pp. 1-2). He is not allowed to call his lawyer, and he is given two years instead of one year punishment at the Peckerwood County Correctional Prison farm, a work camp, simply because he asks for a lawyer. He cannot even “fesmerize” anyone for the fear that his gaze at white men will cause trouble, highlighting how his vulnerability is determined by the existing norms of recognition. How police perform their whiteness in the presence of black bodies is based on the authoritarian and discursive practices of whiteness: Hence, Not Sidney embodies a crime threat to the police, who employ a regime of “governance through crime”, positing blacks vulnerable, to adapt Simon’s (2007) words here, to “the strategies of those who would use [black threat] as an excuse to impose new strategies of governance” (p. 261). On their way to the Prison Farm, he is shackled to a white man, Patrice, who hates being chained to a black. The scene is based on a revised version of Poitier film with Tony Curtis, *The Defiant Ones* (1958). When the bus makes a serious accident causing some prisoners’ death, Patrice suggests to run away. Calling Not Sidney a “boy” and a “nigger” (Everett, 2009, p. 54), and not believing he is rich, and that being black is a crime, he enacts “the coercive force[s] of mutual and reciprocal norms of recognition” (Kompridis, 2007, p. 287).

After they seek refuge with Sis, a white racist blind woman, and her brother Bobo, whose grandfather used to be a slave owner, Not Sidney sees a dream: He is a slave called Raz-ru in New Orleans, 1861, who witnesses at the slave auction that a “white” woman Samantha Moon is sold to his own master Hamish Bond because of the one-drop rule. Samantha is brought up as white and feels she is not a slave because she is in love with the white man. Raz-ru hates her because of “her inability to accept herself, for her refusal to acknowledge her real self” (Everett, 2009, p. 68) as a black woman. Bond has persuaded Samantha, who is in love with him, that his kindness saved slaves in Africa from bad slave traders, because he teaches his slaves to read and never beats them. The master’s performativity of whiteness as a protective guardianship of humane values is disrupted by Raz-ru’s explanation to Samantha that slavery is a system of exploitation, for the master owes his wealth to treating slaves as his capital, and he finally kills Bond in the Civil War. The dream reveals how the ideology of whiteness has worked historically in American society to bear comments on how racism currently operates. Hence, his dream ends with a liberating discourse as a discursive statement on the attitudes of Patrice, Sis and Bobo, who employ “habits” (Macmullan, 2009, p. 181) of whiteness. Patrice and Sis, who already start a close relationship, impose themselves on him to move to his house in Atlanta. Because he does not openly defy their coercive attitude, Patrice sees him as “a good nigger” (Everett, 2009, p. 77). It is one of those moments that exposes how white identity is materialized and situated in power-laden discursive practices. Patrice and Sis’s family are white trash, but they still see the skin color as the real sign of class inferiority, even if Not Sidney belongs to the upper-middle class. He walks out on them and gets on the train when his white partners, who are asleep as overly drunk close to the tracks, unlike Poitier character, Murphy in the original film script, who refuses to leave his white partner alone with the police, acting as the “ideal” black ready to make “a sacrifice to solve problems the white man defines” (Guerrero, 1993, p. 131). It is only the site of a “bad nigger” that gives him the opportunity to use his agency: He refuses to act within the ascribed social space, designated for Poitier, challenging the white comfort with the commodified black image invoked in the white supremacist discourse.

As they re-unite, Ted Turner advises him to go to College: He meets Gladys Feet, for whom Not Sidney looks exactly like Poitier, and tells her that he will offer a considerable amount of money to the College to help “contribute to the education of talented black men” (Everett, 2009, p. 83). A high school dropout, he buys his way

into the Morehouse College: He pays the money, but he refuses to be patronized and sexually exploited by Gladys. He is back in a school system, which has oppressed him, because it is built around the white dominant values: The black buddies such as Morris Chesney, who act as white patriarchs in their domineering attitude, force him to pass through fraternity trials to prove if he is man enough. His practices of colorism enables the Big Boss to give orders to all the black boys to sunburn to become “black enough to be Omegas” (Everett, 2009, p. 94), reinforcing the exclusionary discourse implicated in the white dominant culture. His black-on-black relations at the College demonstrate various levels of (mis)recognition, including that of his roommate Morris, that are as oppressive as his social relations with white police officers and Miss Hancock. He has to give up on his subjectivity, “compelled to abide by its rules” (Everett, 2009, p. 96), to be a member of Omegas. If he can learn to embody fraternity rules, he will receive social recognition as a conformist member to become a “good nigger”, who knows his place in the society.

He receives lots of contradictory messages at school: The messages Dr. William H. Cosby Jr., the guest speaker gives, are in direct conflict with the real life out there, because, as Bill Cosby<sup>10</sup> in real life, he claims that blacks should blame themselves for bad conditions they put themselves in, rather than the whites. Morris wants to break down Eugene’s spirit because he is weak: Being affected by the boy’s attacks on Eugene and him, he “fesmerizes” Morris, who follows his instructions. As he sleeps, he dreams of his mother who gives candies to him to sell and earn more money. She gets angry at a teacher’s complaint because the principal calls Not Sidney’s profit-making as disruptive, for he wants to share it. When the business transaction is cut, his mother’s eating all the candies due to her anger results in the coming of inventory out of his mouth. The dream represents him almost as a robotic participant in the capitalistic money-driven society, which motivates him to increase his wealth. The senselessness in the capitalist urge is revisited by his “Philosophy of Nonsense” class: Professor Everett believes that every single aspect of life and educational system, including grades, are nonsensical. Everett cannot even make sense of his own lectures and he gives home assignments on Althusser and Habermas, because he fails to understand them. Since he cannot grade what he does not know, he prefers to give him an “A” for the course before the semester ends. He is confused by all these conflicting messages about how black boys employ intraracial prejudice, harass and oppress each other to have a group membership in a society in which blacks are to be blamed rather than the white supremacist social system, and that education does not mean much. At this moment in his life, Not Sidney’s image is distorted by a boy from his high school: He is humiliated by his spreading stories of his being a dropout, raising the suspicion among students about how he got into Morehouse College, of his sexual “affair” with a white teacher and that of his life with Ted Turner. All these “colorist” gossips constitute him as a negative stereotype (“bad nigger”), because they serve as discursive practices of misrecognition. As the boy circulates his image as a white man’s “houseboy toy” (Everett, 2009, p. 105), even Eugene calls him “a white man’s toy” (Everett, 2009, p. 106) without realizing that all the black boys in the fraternity strive for becoming a “white man’s boy” in imposing internalized stereotypes on one another in similar ways to the white people’s oppressive attitudes to blacks. He becomes the owner of NET (Negro Entertainment Television), a parody on BET (Black Entertainment Television), just to get his money grow faster, Turner’s

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<sup>10</sup> Entman and Rojecki, in their *The Black Image in the White Mind* (2000), explained that the whites who watched the Cosby show came away with the message that “the fictional Huxtable family proved that Blacks could make it in American society if they worked hard enough. Unsuccessful Blacks therefore had only themselves to blame” (p. 146).

desire for more ratings comes out alive in his suggestion that Podgy may put on some racist shows. The capitalistic urge to increase his profit is set against Not Sidney's lack of fear of failure at school, because he is wealthy, a situation which belies the American myth that education is the key to success.

Not Sidney, in the parody of a Poitier film called *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), starts his first "real" relationship with a white girl at school, Maggie Larkin, the daughter of a lawyer father and a physician mother. Emasculated by Miss Hancock, he has unsatisfactory sex with her: She takes him home to Washington D.C. for Thanksgiving to meet her parents, where her ex-boyfriend Robert, a white boy, is also invited. He lies to Maggie that he worked at three jobs to save money for College, an image that fits him into the black version of the white American success myth. When they reach home, black maid Violet does not welcome Not Sidney because of colorism. Unlike in the original film, Maggie's parents are racists: Her mother works in "conservative think tank" (Everett, 2009, p. 128), while she is also against the welfare system and affirmative action. She falls back on the racist argument that it is not the white racist system but these practices that keep blacks down, an indirect discourse on how the black poor are the burden of the white society. In his room he overhears through the heating vent that Maggie's parents find him despicable: Her mother Ruby feels he is "so dark", while her father Ward believes his strange name must be some "ghetto nonsense" (Everett, 2009, p. 131). Ward's definition of himself as multi-racial and multi-ethnic, "an American", is ironically positioned as white against the stereotype of the Other—"no needy minority" (Everett, 2009, p. 134). His pride lies in modeling himself on the rags-to-riches white American success, "from dirt poor Alabama to Yale" (Everett, 2009, p. 137).

When Maggie takes him to her friend Lydia's house, where he meets Jasmine, Sophie and Robert, he becomes aware that they define their personal whiteness against his blackness, "my presence was essential to them" (Everett, 2009, p. 141). Unlike Poitier in the original script, who is sexual, Not Sidney is forced into sex by Maggie's sister Agnes out of jealousy. In his sleep, he dreams of the Poitier film *No Way out* (1950) in which he is the black doctor whose white racist patient dies. He is blamed for it by the doctors and nurses, "The nigger killed him", as well as by the patient's brother, "I'm going to kill you, nigger" (Everett, 2009, p. 143). Thus, a black man's misrecognition by the racist whites as "nigger" is also what defines his existence, because it is the interpellation that positions Not Sidney as dependent on the address of the white people. The terms that facilitate his recognition as such are the strategies of exclusion and verbal violence through which Not Sidney's "recognition of existence becomes possible" (Butler, 1997, p. 5). His white-over-black humiliation in the film script, his dream, is reinforced by what he overhears, as he wakes up. The Larkins made a research and learned that he owns NET, which they call in their racist language as "Nigger Entertainment Television": They are fascinated by his wealth so as to overlook his blackness, even if Ruby finds him "so dark" in contrast to Maggie's skin color. He calls Turner and Everett to get their opinions on what he should do with this family's racism. Turner articulates his socialization as a white man, when he comments that whites are "almost required to hate you" (Everett, 2009, p. 147). Everett, on the other hand, encourages him to think about "his position of power" (Everett, 2009, p. 151), because he is rich, and to have fun with them. As a result, he ridicules Ward with his comment on how he enjoys seeing black fur against Maggie's white skin: "I had... undone Ward Larkin" (Everett, 2009, p. 151). When he realizes that Maggie invited him to subvert her parents' authority, he also sees through his objectification. Being aware of the power of his wealth, he acts "white" to Robert and Ward at the dinner table about how white people profit from the system, which makes them appear successful. In response to the criticism of affirmative action as how blacks get undeserved admission to



school, he humiliates Robert about his GPA (Grade Point Average). When he questions Robert's grades, he confronts the Larkins who feel uncomfortable with his reactionary attitude. He also puts down Ward about his hypocrisy in his veneer of success by questioning who the real successful people are in a racist system, which does not provide black students with equal opportunity to qualify for Yale.

He makes his final attack on whiteness, when he says that his own mother "didn't want to be white", for she liked being black, while he playfully adds: "I don't hate you because you're light" (Everett, 2009, p. 162). He does not like their racialized class consciousness in not allowing Violet to sit and enjoy her food at the same table with them. He also reveals he had sex with Agnes, reinforcing the white stereotype of oversexed black male, and how he overheard Ward's and Ruby's thoughts about him, and hence he undoes the parents. He breaks "the silence of white normativity" (Yancy, 2008, p. 42), as he acts "white" toward all of them, while re-positioning Robert within a non-privileged space whose whiteness in fact masquerades his failure. His humiliation of Robert is about how his white identity has helped him profit from a racist culture in which whites are accorded privileges and success largely at the expense of racial groups. Hence, Not Sidney "rescripts oppressive racial dynamics" (Gillman, 2007, p. 131), as he uncovers lies behind the content-less white identity, the falsity of their lives. The parents' allegiance to the status quo is misguided because of their uncritical acceptance of white scripts, they feel their whiteness is "vulnerable and under siege" (Giroux, 1997, p. 114).

When he comes back from D.C. to Atlanta, he learns at the airport from Podgy that he keeps making more money on NET, and he asks why he should stay in College. Professor Everett, cynical on educational system, tells him that he can at least stay to have fun with girls, for College education does not seem to provide young people with any real serious objectives. His next experience is a revised version of a Poitier film, *Lilies of the Field* (1963). As he goes to Alabama and stops in Smuteye to get his car fixed, he meets three white nuns, refugees from East Germany, who ask him to build a fence, which he does. While he sleeps in the backseat of his car, he has a dream, based on a Poitier film, *Buck and the Preacher* (1972). He becomes Buck, a slave who looks for his woman Bes, another slave: Since she is a white man's property, the slave master shoots and chases Buck, who runs away and steals a horse. Since the slave master and his helpers cannot take revenge on Buck, they kill all the other blacks as an activation of white-on-black hatred: "The faces of the white men are fierce, evil and full of hate" (Everett, 2009, p. 175). This dream on slavery times demonstrates that we simply cannot ignore the stereotypes inherited from slavery, limiting "the possibilities for black subjectivity, which has an incredibly damaging effect on society's image and treatment of black people" (Worsley, 2010, p. 5). When he wakes up and plans to go to California, the three nuns ask him to build a Church. Learning from Diana in Smuteye Diner that the three sisters need money to build the Church, he decides to finance it. His check for 50,000 dollars cannot be cashed in the small local place. He calls Podgy to send the money to him in Montgomery, but he realizes that his "skin color and youth were an impediment to my being taken seriously": With his white shirt, black tie and black shoes, "nonthreatening and safe" (Everett, 2009, p. 191), his image is ironically close to the members of the Fruit of Islam<sup>11</sup>. When he is done with Mr. Scrunchy at the First National Bank of Alabama, who pays his money after he resolves the name dilemma, while still addressing him as Sidney Poitier, he is scared to leave the bank with

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<sup>11</sup> The FOI (Fruit of Islam) is "the security force of the Nation of Islam, originally trained by Malcolm X. Because the FOI has improved the lives of many African-Americans from all walks of life, they have acquired the respect of those who live in Black inner-city communities" (Grant IV, 2004, p. 57).

this huge amount of money in his car. As he leaves for Smuteye, Alabama, he hides in the darkness, till the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) members leave, glad that “[t]he white-clad idiots hadn’t spotted me” (Everett, 2009, p. 195). He goes back to the Diner and chats with Diana without realizing that money is all what Mr. Scrunchy cares about. He is a liar and hypocrite and he pretends to be an architect to the nuns just to get the money.

Since a black man is killed in the area, the Deputy, who comes in the Diner, addresses Not Sidney as “boy” (Everett, 2009, p. 203), and enacts “racial profiling” by arresting him because he is the first black he sees around, an episode based on a Poitier film, *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). He embodies the potential criminal, especially after the Deputy sees his money bag: “This here is a lot of money for a nigger to be carrying around” (Everett, 2009, p. 203). His black body signifies crime because he is “constructed as a problem,” and his body “is given back to [him], returned, criminal-like, a site of danger” (Yancy, 2008, p. 55). When Not Sidney replies that he is not a nigger, and that this money is not too much, the Deputy calls him an “uppity one” (Everett, 2009, p. 203). Much like in the earlier encounters with the white people, these insulting words such as “nigger” are related to, what Alex Honneth calls, “the denial of recognition” (as cited in Fraser, 1997, p. 14). He is arrested and put in jail in Smuteye Police Station on murder charge: Even though the Deputy Chief is not a racist, while Horace is, he still calls Not Sidney a boy. White police act as agents who constantly demand conformity to the regulatory norm of white-constructed mediated blackness rather than an acknowledgement of particularity of Not Sidney as an individual. Not Sidney proves he is not the murderer by naming Mr. Scrunchy as the alibi, but he is still suspicious for carrying too much money for a black. When the Chief, who does not like him, wants Not Sidney to identify the corpse at the undertakers, he is surprised to see that this murdered young black is his own self. If he is murdered, then “I was not Not Sidney Poitier” (Everett, 2009, p. 212), but Poitier himself in terms of the logic of double negatives. Not Sidney who is not an intelligible black body, becomes legible only when he is not “biologically alive” (Miller, 2009, p. 118). The Chief takes Not Sidney to his house to protect him, where he tells him that the money is for the nuns. Not Sidney is scared of being alone with this white man, much like he was with the KKK members, which reinforces the sense of his vulnerability: “The idea of this white, rednecked and little southern town sheriff... driving an unarmed... black man into the deep woods was unsettling at best, surreally terrifying at worst” (Everett, 2009, p. 213). He “fesmerizes” the Chief to ensure that he will not harm him, while he learns that the suspect is Scrunchy. As they eat at the Diner, Turner comes in but Horace arrested Everett, simply because of racial profiling: “He’s a nigger, so I arrested him” (Everett, 2009, p. 223). Everett takes the cause of Not Sidney’s murder as “colorization” (Everett, 2009, p. 224), but Turner can only remember the term from the film *Heaven Can Wait* (1978), because he is not even aware that he performs it in his relations with blacks in everyday life. Not Sidney, the Chief, Turner and Everett all go back to the nuns’ place to find Not Sidney’s money. They find the money in the overturned pickup in which Mr. Scrunchy and Sister Irenaeus died in the accident, while running off after they stole his money.

When he flies to L.A., Not Sidney is welcomed as Poitier at the airport, and is taken to Beverly Hills Hotel where he watches the Poitier film *For Love of Ivy* (1968). “[H]ugged by Elizabeth Taylor and kissed on the cheek by Harry Belafonte”, he still asks himself: “Was I Not Sidney Poitier or was I not Sidney Poitier?” (Everett, 2009, p. 233). Taylor announces Poitier as the recipient of the award for the “Most Dignified Figure in American Culture” (Everett, 2009, p. 234). Denied the recognition of his individual difference, this is the first time he can enter the public sphere as a non-threatening presence. In his speech, he reveals what effects “consciously strategic

claims” (Alcoff, 2004, p. 101) bear on him: His self and his name are not really his, and that people “know myself, perhaps better than I can know myself” (Everett, 2009, p. 234). He feels his mother’s and his own headstones should have the following words: “I am not myself today” (Everett, 2009, p. 234). Ironically enough, his body was never his, because it was the location of white supremacy, “grounded in corporeality” (Goins, 2007, p. 252). Not Sidney’s statement to the multi-racial audience is a political act that defines his critical subjectivity as a deliberate disruption of the absolute normativity and institutional power of whiteness. As an “excessive location”, Not Sidney’s black body unravels “the immediate and semantic violence of homogeneous readings of blackness” (Smith, 2010, pp. 106, 108), based on the racial politics of [mis]recognition. Shifting the politics of recognition from the discourse of white supremacy, ranging from slavery times to the present, the novel reveals the white exclusionary practices within the current social order. In that respect, the novel works in two cultural registers of blackness at once, mediated through the cultural “collision” of two different conceptual domains of “White Blackness” (Bates, 2007, p. 208) (Poitier) and authentic blackness (Not Sidney). The interdiscursive transition between the two domains entails a “cross-domain mapping” (Simpson, 2003, p. 141), demonstrating how whiteness is performatively constituted through the “scripted” performances of blackness. Everett here exposes the disjunction between racial identity categories, as the particularity of each black body is “always in excess of any particular and fixed identity” (Hansen, 2004, p. 108). Hence, the “excess” designates that there are other discursive choices available that can open up other frames of recognition. The possibility for radical change that occurs here lies with Everett’s satirical discourse, built upon the incommensurability of the black image and the body in the white public imaginary, that makes us aware of the absurdity of such situations as the “parodic performances” of whiteness in everyday life: We are meant to see how these “parodies of whiteness” allow for changes in different constructions of interracial relations.

### Conclusions

While he raises the issue of how we should engage the complexity of whiteness and blackness, his effective use of parodies of whiteness enables us to see how the mechanism of whiteness works to obscure white people’s sight to “recognize” blacks as human. Since Not Sidney steps out of the scripted performance of blackness, to enact his personal blackness in the immediate contexts of his everyday life, Poitier films stand out as major “parodies of whiteness”. “Parodies of whiteness”, then, are paradoxical: They inhabit those spaces between the normalized and the unexpected performances of blackness. Not Sidney’s last words “I am not Myself today” maintain a critical relation to the existing norms of recognition, he represents, in the eyes of the white people, “an image of resistant black masculinity that does not conform to white standards” (Rizzo, 2009, p. 152). The issue of how the whites reproduce the power of whiteness in the process of “scripting” blacks is represented through Everett’s satirical discourse on the everyday white discursive practices: “Parodies of whiteness” demonstrate how Not Sidney undoes the white power at the moment of the constitution of the disjunctive black self, when Poitier’s image works against the particularity of Not Sidney’s identity. Whites’ urge to “see” and “recognize” the white-commodified racial paradigm (of Poitier) in Not Sidney who fails to become one, highlights the white mechanisms of power that produce blackness except as a mere “parody of whiteness”. It is in this contradictory space that Everett enables us to confront the issue of whiteness (and of race in general) as mere parody, because everyday performances of blackness (under white policing and surveillance) is as much a parody of blackness as that of whiteness.

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