

Passing for white is a phenomenon that has affected the black community in the U.S. for hundreds of years. There is much controversy surrounding this choice in lifestyle, while some think it provides for better opportunities, others view it as a rejection of black cultural pride. My thoughts on the subject are mixed. I understand that because of the history of racism and discrimination in this country, people will do what it takes to gain privilege, even if it means passing as white.

The novel *Passing* by Nella Larsen, profoundly presents a fictional account of passing. Clare Kendry, whom chooses to pass for white, is a compelling character, described by Irene Redfield as “catlike” (144). Clare is very “catlike” indeed, for she is mysterious, sassy, strong willed, and coy. In the novel, Clare is portrayed as a woman who chooses to pass for white because of economic and material gain. Her reasons are much more complex than that and she experiences much turmoil and angst over her decision, especially once she rekindles her relationship with Irene.

What always perplexes me most is the fact that “passers” are depicted as villains and traitors to the race, but if they are partially white (in most cases more white than black), I don’t see why they can’t make the decision to identify with white culture. The theory of hypodescent largely contributes to why they can’t be categorized as white, but in contemporary society the “one drop rule” has little validity. Helga Crane, in *Quicksand*, also grapples with this issue because she too is torn between her two racial identities. She travels around so much, trying desperately to find a “home” and place where she feels as though she can fit in, but fails. She

moves to the South, Harlem, and even Copenhagen, but still feels empty inside. I wonder if this has to do with her mixed heritage or if it's because she doesn't have any immediate family surrounding her, thus giving her a sense of belonging.

Perhaps if she had a sibling, she would feel less alone and have a person who shares her same experience of growing up mixed race. In *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna, Birdie and Cole have each other, which helps to alleviate isolation because between the two of them they'll always have that sacred bond of kinship and lineage. Either way "passing" is complicated and takes a lot of courage and self-confidence to do, traits Clare Kendry definitely has plenty of.

*(***I also highly encourage you to incorporate textual evidence into your response to support the claim you are making)*