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The Harsh Reality

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The Harsh Reality

Imagine yourself as a chameleon, persistently changing your colors and disguising yourself to hide from predators for survival. This is what some people are forced to struggle with day-by-day. The book *Born a Crime* introduces readers to a character who exemplifies the idea of camouflaging one's true self in order to survive. Trevor Noah, a native South African born into the harsh environment of apartheid, is dishonored for being multiracial. He shuffles through his personalities to avoid being excluded and shamed for the color of his skin. Identified as a colored mixed race female, I also find myself navigating through which identity I want to portray. Being immersed in a predominantly white community, I have struggled deciphering whether I want to fit in with 98% of the population in my school or be different and risk being left out because I don't act the same. Just like Trevor, some students at my school transpose the way they look and act; their "color didn't change, but [they] could change your perception of [their] color" (56). They could talk and dress a certain way to mirror how they want to be perceived, similar to Trevor alternating languages to assimilate into different groups. High school guides our moral compass, human nature, and shapes our ideas of humanity, but fails to recognize and approach the ideas of identity among students.

To my senior high school English teacher, Mrs. Stephens: I strongly recommend incorporating *Born a Crime* in the curriculum. Noah reveals the unapparent truth throughout his anecdotes: racism and sexism still exist. Racism is like a personified demon that many believe only creeps into predominantly white societies; however, it lingers in countries where the majority of people are black and mixed race. It is crucial for youth in the education system to grasp the idea of these -isms, as they play a role in the development of one's identity. Noah's mother, Patricia, is in constant battle with the sexism and racism from controlling men in her country. She is viewed as someone who is incapable of working in an office or raising a colored son who is born a sin to the world, pretending like he is nonexistent as they walk the streets. Though it seems like she is living in a world of burden, a sense of resiliency empowers her to stay in Africa. *Born a Crime* acts as a vessel to enlighten readers that despite the option of moving to a safer community, there are those who rise above the systematic oppression that surrounds them. Patricia unapologetically sticks to her roots and faith by remaining in the country she calls home. Today, there is a stigma that any poor family will escape their

hardships and emigrate to a foreign place in attempt at finding any type of success. Trevor Noah proves the stereotype wrong by glorifying his mother's buoyancy after all the heavy weight that is forced upon her by apartheid, a system that segregates the black people and imposes white rule. Not everyone gives up on their culture; Noah's mother "wanted to do something, figured out a way to do it, and then she did it" (22). She signifies people today who are fighting to hold onto their identity.

Many can agree that the books included in the current curriculum are outdated. George Orwell's *1984* was a staple in my senior English class, highlighting a dystopian society in which "Big Brother" aims to control people's minds. While reading Noah's story, *1984* strongly reminded me of *Born a Crime*. The system of apartheid is congruent to "Big Brother," as it was "designed to keep black people under total control" and strip them of his or her citizenship (19). Instead of reading the fictional novel by Orwell, Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime* could ultimately replace *1984* as it provides the same thesis and theme with more current truth and reality. Overall, Noah discloses the reality of South Africans; they could have the same talents as Americans but don't have the platform to move forward. Learning English in South Africa is more important than food and water; therefore, some are left foreign to their own country if they don't know the language. Reading about people's lives and the harsh reality that is forced upon many at birth is vital to a student's understanding of the world.