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Abstract

Podium

Major English

Faculty Mentor: Majorie Allison

Cross Racial and Queer Solidarity in McCuller's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*

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In my project, I analyze how hegemonic Jim Crow Laws and sexual oppression surfaces in Carson McCullers's novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. This novel is much more than a story set in a small Georgian mill town that follows five separate characters (Mick, Biff, John, Jake, and Dr. Copeland) and their journeys of self-discovery and struggle. McCullers, a queer person herself, created a story of intense longing, class conflict, and racial tension amongst different oppressed people, particularly white queers and Black people. Throughout the paper, I argue that this oppression was not portrayed one-dimensionally; the treatment of the white queer was different than that of the Black population, subject to frequent beatings and arrest. McCullers differentiates these struggles purposefully to cross racial boundaries created by white supremacy. Through their own sexual and gendered repression, white queer characters, like Mick and Biff, are able to sympathize with and support the Black characters, Portia, Willie, and Dr. Copeland.

My analysis offers a contemporary criticism of race and sexuality from a novel published in 1940. As issues of race and hegemonic policing of Black and Brown bodies continue, McCullers's work denounces institutionalized white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. In addition, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* subverts the barriers between its white and Black characters. Racial scapegoating is continuously utilized by powerful entities and people to stoke racist ideology and prevent racial, class, and sexual solidarity. I argue this novel has powerful implications for current racial and queer oppression today.