



Facultad de Filología

# GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

CURSO: 2023/2024

**Título:** Masculinities in Crime Fiction: An Analysis of S. A. Cosby's *Razorblade Tears*

**Alumno:** Pedro José Milans Ortega

---

**Tutora:** María Rocío Cobo Piñero

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Theoretical Framework.....	3
3. Analysis .....	7
3.1. Black Masculinities: Ike .....	7
3.2. White Privilege: Buddy Lee .....	13
3.3. LGBTQ+ Representations: Isiah, Derek and Tangerine .....	18
4. Conclusions .....	24
Works Cited.....	26

## 1. Introduction

This research focuses on the study of S. A. Cosby's crime novel *Razorblade Tears* (2021). The analysis will contribute to the studies that question and contest the role of men as dominant figures in our patriarchal society, taking into account how men are represented in U.S. literature, in this case in the genre of crime fiction. Different theories have been considered when analyzing the novel, particularly Masculinity Studies and Queer Studies. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that no other analysis of Cosby's novel has been carried out yet, due to its recent publication, which motivates the reasons behind this dissertation.

*Razorblade Tears* includes forty-five chapters and follows the life of two ex-convicts. One of them is Ike Randolph, a black Southern man, who was released from prison 15 years prior to the action of the novel. Now he is the boss of his own landscaping company, Randolph Lawn Maintenance, and has devoted all these years to his family and to put his past behind. His only unresolved matter is the acceptance of his son Isiah's queer identity, but Ike considers that they will make up somehow in the future. The other protagonist is Budy Lee Jenkins, a white man who lives in a trailer and was abandoned by his wife. Buddy Lee is an alcoholic and suffers from lung cancer, although it is not revealed until the end of the novel. He served five years in prison for trafficking drugs, which worsened his relationship with his son Derek. He is still trying to accept Derek's homosexuality, a source of his own mockery as far back as he can remember.

Isiah and Derek married a few years ago, which means that Ike and Budy Lee are in-laws, but neither of them accepts this same-sex union. However, they thought they would eventually resolve their differences with their sons, but it becomes impossible when Isiah and Derek are killed in a drive-by shooting. After realizing the police are not competent enough to uncover the murderer's identity, Ike and Budy Lee decide to join forces to discover the truth and ultimately avenge their deaths. The two of them have criminal backgrounds, which results in a journey full of violence and immoral actions to get to the bottom of the unresolved crime. Throughout the whole book, several relevant themes can be directly related to masculinity studies, such as sexuality, race, and parenthood, which will be discussed in the analysis.

S. A. Cosby is a black Southern writer whose novels have captivated thousands of readers. He has published four crime novels: *My Darkest Prayer* (2019), *Blacktop*

*Wasteland* (2020), *Razorblade Tears* (2021), and *All the Sinners Bleed* (2023). He was raised in Virginia, which led him to write Southern fiction that includes black people as protagonists. This genre is also called Southern noir, and it is characterized by the presence of dark themes, social issues, and violence, all set in the American South. When asked what the genre of Southern fiction means to him, Cosby answered that “the holy trinity of southern fiction is race, class, and sex. Those are the underpinnings of the great books of the south, whether it’s William Faulkner’s *Light in August* or Flannery and O’Connor’s *Wise Blood*” (Ghadiali). He names Walter Mosley, Elmore Leonard, and Dennis Lehane as his favorite and most inspiring crime writers, as well as the works of female crime writers of color, such as Rachel Howzell Hall and Zakiya Dalila Harris (Garner). Cosby’s *Razorblade Tears*, the novel under analysis in this paper, became an instant *New York Times* bestseller after its publication. It won the categories of Best Audiobook and Best Hardcover Novel in the 2022 International Thriller Writers Awards, and it was shortlisted as Best Novel in the Edgar Allan Poe Awards.

The representation of masculinity is tackled through different characters. Firstly, black masculinity and its role in the South of the United States is introduced through the character of Ike Randolph, Isiah’s father and a black ex-convict. In contrast with this, Buddy Lee, Derek’s father, is a white ex-convict and an example of white privilege. Concerning queer representation, there are two main sources in the novel: Isiah and Derek, who are an homosexual couple, and Tangerine, a transgender woman that is being targeted by a gang. Additionally, the characters’ actions and violent nature behind them are discussed concerning the genre of the novel, crime fiction.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Firstly, an analysis of masculinities cannot be carried out without mentioning the work of R. W. Connell, especially her research on masculinities and the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” that she coined in 1987. Connell defined the term “masculinity” in the second edition of her groundbreaking study *Masculinities* (2005) as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (71). In this book, Connell presents “hegemonic masculinity” as a form of masculinity that is socially praised over others and owns some kind of authority or power. Her work in the field can be taken as the basis for the research that came after.

Another important theory is the one that considers masculinity as an ideology, a set of principles or beliefs that influence a group of people's lives. In line with Connell's ideas of hegemony, masculinity is often linked to power and control, to the point that a man can benefit from his gender in certain social and economic situations. Masculinities and ideologies share points in common: they appear in a given context without being questioned, and as Todd W. Reeser indicates in *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*, they are spread through different social forms, such as discourses, practices and myths: "By virtue of their constant and unavoidable repetition throughout culture, these tools of ideology are eventually made to seem natural and thus to keep themselves from being questioned or interrogated" (21).

Reeser also presents the notion of "gendered dialogue," an approach to understand masculinity based on the theories of dialogic interactions by Mikhail Bakhtin. This theory maintains that masculinity is not able to function on its own terms, it is in fact defined by the very dialogue of stating what is *not* masculine: "This approach assumes that masculinity as sign and as subjectivity cannot be separated from all other signs and subjectivities against which it is defined" (Reeser 41). The idea of dialogue is very present in this approach since it is seen as a medium for men to define their masculinity: "Everything I say or write is in dialogue with something else, so every aspect of my masculinity dialogues with something else. The dialogue implies not a single definition of the other as not me, but a continual process of not me's" (Reeser 41). Furthermore, Reeser explores the concept of dialogic masculinity and states that "masculinity has no meaning in itself, but only in the way it is put in dialogue with an other and in the way in which it is perceived by someone else at a given moment in a given space" (42). In this dialogic approach, masculinity is perceived as specific and depending on each individual's perception, but those perceptions can coincide and result in a recurring type of masculinity.

When discussing gender, there is also a need to address race. Multiple examples show that both gender and race overlap and construct one another. Whiteness tends to be inherent to the idea of masculinity and there is usually no attribution of racial coding to it. Reeser provides the example of the figure of the bodybuilder, who is usually depicted as a white man in people's minds. Some cultural male figures do not even allow racial diversity since they are already so racialized that there are no alternatives, such as the (Asian) martial artist or the (white) Southern gentleman.

Within race, this analysis focuses on male blackness and its representation in fiction alongside its social and cultural constructions. In the book *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Patricia Hill Collins draws a comparison between blackness and jail in the U.S. A prison aims to incarcerate criminals to reintegrate them, but it usually comes with oppression, verbal and physical abuse, and ultimately dehumanization. This is relevant since *Razorblade Tears* offers the point of view of a black man who has been imprisoned for several years and is trying to stay away from his criminal past, but at the same time, he faces a racist society in rural Virginia that tries to take him down constantly.

One prominent element of racism throughout history is the idea of black hypersexualization. From the times of colonialism to the Jim Crow segregation period, a primitivist discourse was created around the black man and, since then, he has been perceived as a “beast”, a wild animal that is excessively sexual and needs to be tamed. This bestiality was the excuse behind lynching and the activities of groups like the Ku Klux Klan. As Cornel West argues, “White fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism” (90). Their inherent bestiality is also related to the notion of new racism, in which being tough and belonging to the street is essential in black masculinity: “The controlling image of Black men as criminals or as deviant beings encapsulates this perception of Black men as inherently violent and/or hyper-heterosexual” (Hill Collins 158). As a result, there is racial profiling, which is based on the potential threat that black men cause just by existing.

Nowadays, the black male community keeps being represented in mass media as violent and in need of discipline, which contributes to stereotypes and the distortion of their public image, as well as the systematic portrayal of their behavior, way of living, family roles, and jobs, among others. This violent nature is represented mostly through the image of the “gangsta” or thug, a figure that not only appears in Cosby’s novel but becomes the main focus of attention. Anthony J. Lemelle Jr. affirms in *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics* that the gangsta life “offers a method of surviving against the odds in a society that is hostile toward black males” (97-8). It is usually a result of segregated neighborhoods and a lack of education and job opportunities in comparison with white people. However, not even black men from higher social classes can escape this stereotype. Concerning this, bell hooks attributes the action of being violent to a surrender to black stereotypes. Nonviolent black men may feel forced to be violent since they find themselves fighting prejudices every day: “many black males

explain their decision to become the “beast” as a surrender to realities they cannot change. And if you are going to be seen as a beast you may as well act like one” (hooks 45).

Queer studies are also considered for this analysis, since Cosby writes about marginalized characters, among which there is space for LGBT+ representation. As Paul Baker and Giuseppe Balirano state in *Queering Masculinities in Language and Culture*, “The main aim of any approach informed by queer theory is to disrupt normality and provide counter-narratives to ‘common sense’ ideas about gender and sexuality” (27). Until recently, queer voices have been marginalized in literature, media and popular culture in general. LGBTQ+ representations were minimum, and most of the visibility in mainstream culture from the last decades did nothing but establish and intensify stereotypes of queer people. And, while queer visibility keeps increasing, violence against queer people is still present in society. Thomas Peele writes in the introduction of *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television* that “Proliferating queer representations in popular culture, however various and diverse, have not eliminated the problem of heteronormativity or anti-queer violence” (5). Baker and Balirano claim that the exercise of putting queerness in the spotlight in mainstream culture is “an act of queering in itself” (8). Cosby goes further and incorporates the violence present in the streets in order to denounce it. He creates a fictional plot that revolves around the murder of a homosexual couple, Isiah and Derek, and the search for a missing transgender woman, Tangerine.

Sex is usually a concept that we consider stable. As Reeser explains, we take the male biological sex as given and link masculine traits with the male body. Furthermore, most people assume that once a boy is born, his “maleness” will emerge from his sex, and he will eventually be fond of training or flirting with girls. However, this linear order is not natural, and Reeser maintains that “masculinity does not lead, in any simplistic way, to heterosexual desire” (73). It is the assumption of a stable masculinity that allows the “deviations” from manhood. Nonetheless, if it is considered that gender influences sex and not the other way around, maleness becomes unstable, and masculine hegemony turns out to be harder to maintain for men. As a result, the existence of transsexuality blurs the lines of gender and sex, and challenges the “perceived natural order by which maleness is considered the superior sex” (Reeser 77). This explains the male anxiety around non-conventional identities and sexualities. Likewise, homosexuality and other non-normative sexualities are usually invalidated due to the

assumption of the existence of only two opposite sexes, male and female, which are required to reproduce. In addition, black queer identities are even more invalidated since two fundamental elements come together: blackness and queerness. E. Patrick Johnson expounds that our world is at war “over whether black lives matter; whether black desire, especially that perceived as outside the bounds of some imposed respectable perimeter, can be pursued . . . and whether the institutionalization of black queer studies means its irrelevance to black people struggling for justice and freedom” (13-4).

Paying attention to the issue of transsexuality, Baker and Balirano argue that, although it may seem controversial to take into account transgender women into the field of masculinities, it is done to support the idea that “women and transwomen produce performances and models that contribute to changing ideas around traditional maleness and masculinity” (149). Moreover, Reeser contributes to the field with an interesting point: “The desire by some male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals to want to leave behind the signs of masculinity . . . and to acquire female or non-male traits suggests that masculinity and maleness are not always valued or privileged” (139-40). According to him, considering transsexuality as a part of the gender system would mean challenging the inherent view of masculinity.

### **3. Analysis**

The following analysis is divided into three sections that discuss black masculinities, white privilege and queer representation, with some mentions to the role of violence and vengeance in crime fiction. Each part is devoted to one or more characters from *Razorblade Tears* that provide different representations and a nuanced view of the same story.

#### **3.1. Black Masculinities: Ike**

Ike Randolph is one of the main characters of *Razorblade Tears* and he embodies the stereotypical figure of the Southern black man: he is muscular and robust, hard-working, narrow-minded, and violent. His aggressive nature comes from his childhood, when both of his parents died in a car accident when he was nine years old. He and his sister had to move with their grandparents and Ike developed a feeling of resentment that he could not ease. Once he joined a gang of black people, he saw it as the perfect opportunity to channel his hatred towards something productive, even if it



involved becoming a criminal. He became “Riot Randolph”, a nickname that he gained by murdering anyone who stood in his way.

Ike lives in small-town Virginia, a place that has shaped him into becoming what he is today. Part of the plot takes place in Richmond, and the setting of the novel is not accidental. S. A. Cosby himself is from Virginia, which explains why most of his plots take place in that Southern state. It is the author’s hometown, but he uses the setting deliberately to reflect the narrow-minded nature of the rural areas. In an interview for National Public Radio, Cosby stated the following: “I love where I come from. But to paraphrase James Baldwin, because I love the South, I reserve the right to criticize, because I know it can be better than what it is” (Briger). The reporter Michael E. Ruane asserts that Virginia could be considered “the birthplace of American slavery” since it is the state where the laws on slavery became effective, and where the Nat Turner uprising took place in 1831, which was the deadliest revolt of slaves in U.S. history. It is also in Northern Virginia where the end of both the Civil War and slavery happened. Due to recent controversies, it seems like Virginia and its inhabitants cannot escape its legacy. It is a place where “reverence for slavery’s defenders and monuments to its military heroes still haunt public spaces and dialogue, and memorialize a time when the country was ripped in two” (Ruane). It is also presented as the perfect setting for crime; as Ike states: “I can get a gun if I need to. This is Virginia. They damn near sell them at Seven-Eleven” (Cosby 190).

Subsequently, the rural setting provides the opportunity to show how the black community still struggles to earn a place in society. The past is still present, as the white panic about the black presence in the South is undeniable. Ike explains multiple times in the novel that there are only a few places in his hometown where he feels safe as a black man. One of them is a barbershop that he has been visiting for years:

Ike used to like coming to the barbershop, before he started losing his hair and took to shaving his own head. The agile banter, the casual camaraderie, the give-and-take of friendly insults and jabs—it was all a part of the character and culture of the barbershop. Many times he thought of it as the last place you didn’t have to apologize for being a Black man. (Cosby 209)

As the omniscient narrator explains, the barbershop functions as a haven for black men. It serves as a safe place for Ike to surround himself with people from his

community. A barbershop is also where men share their experiences and the perfect location for masculine gatherings: “Black males teach the meaning of masculinity in unconventional ways among themselves . . . The barbershop is an important place for male socialization. It also provides a setting for male bonding. The barbershop setting provides a space for both boys and men to learn expected masculine roles” (Lemelle 99). This is the other reason why Ike feels comfortable in the barbershop: he can learn and teach about masculinity, so he can fulfill his “role” as a black man in Virginia.

In this sense, the novel reinforces some of the norms of blackness in the current U.S. society. Ike spent seven years in the Coldwater State Penitentiary and was charged with homicide after he beat a man to death. At the time, he belonged to the North River Boys, a gang that had lost their leader. Ike saw the leader as an older brother and decided to take things into his hands. He murdered the man responsible for the leader’s death in front of his family, which is why he ended up getting caught. After serving seven years in prison, he promised to change and became a new person. In the first chapters, the reader meets Ike in his prime: he owns a company, lives happily with his wife Mya, and has not committed a crime in years. The story follows a chronological order, but the reader discovers his past through flashbacks. Nonetheless, with the murder of his son and Buddy Lee’s proposal of searching for the truth, Ike goes back to his old self, the man who gained the reputation of being one of the most ruthless thugs in the town. Throughout the novel, he breaks someone’s fingers to get information, threatens to kill a man with a machete, and even beats a guy to death with a tamper in a fit of rage. Therefore, one could affirm that Ike meets the expectations of the violent and black “gangsta,” and he hates being that guy.

Vengeance and violence are two of the main themes of *Razorblade Tears*. The novel honors crime fiction’s name and the main characters display several violent actions that they have learned from their time in prison. One of the most famous quotes from the book has to do with this topic: “That was the thing about violence. When you went looking for it you definitely were going to find it. It just wouldn’t be at a time of your own choosing” (Cosby 111). As Cosby indicates, the presence of violence in the characters’ lives is the result of their own doing. What is more, Ike admits to rely on hate to keep going: “Folks like to talk about revenge like it’s a righteous thing but it’s just hate in a nicer suit” (Cosby 315). Ultimately, he sees revenge and hate as the same thing: an infuriating feeling that asks you to do something.

Initially, Ike is reluctant to go on a quest alongside Buddy Lee for vengeance. Buddy Lee is a white ex-convict and Derek's father; he also belonged to a gang in the past. Ike's hesitancy comes from fear of becoming violent again. As it is said, old habits die hard; the narrator explains this in chapter 5: "Ike wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. He wasn't afraid to spill blood. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to stop" (Cosby 35-6). The reader can feel Ike's struggle, as he does not want to return to his criminal days and become "Riot Randolph" again. In the same chapter, Ike refuses to help Buddy Lee and claims: "You see some tattoos and all the sudden you an expert on who the fuck I am? You don't know nothing about me, man. What, you thought you'd walk in here and get the big, scary-ass Black nigga to go kill some people for you?" (Cosby 33). Buddy Lee sees Ike as the perfect accomplice because he is black and has tattoos, which reinforces his prejudice against black people being violent.

Conversely, Buddy Lee is not the only one who sees Ike as a menace. Right in the first chapter of the book, Ike receives a visit from two police officers who tell him about Isiah's death. This is what the narrator declares when Ike first sees the police at his door: "It was bad enough being a Black man in the good ol' US of A and talking to the cops. You always felt like you were on the edge of some imaginary precipice during any interaction with an officer of the law. If you were an ex-con, it felt like the precipice was covered in bacon grease" (Cosby 7). The fear of the police seems to be a universal experience for black people because of the historical police brutality against black men. In the context of the U.S., there is a constant battle between the black community and the police that tends to have fatal outcomes. Riché Richardson tackles Richard Wright's literary work in *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South from Uncle Tom to Gangsta*, and asserts that "Wright links the police brutality that young black men in urban contexts experience . . . to the history of lynching and the mythology of the black male rapist in the South. In doing so, he points to the vulnerability and invisibility of black men under the law" (35).

Ike addresses the topic of police violence against black people several times. In chapter 8, for example, one of the most important conversations in the novel takes place. Ike and Buddy Lee are talking about their different lifestyles, and Buddy Lee states that he would like to be Ike just for the sake of living in peace and not worrying about money. Ike becomes enraged and asks the following questions:

"Would you switch places with me?"

“Do I get the truck? Because if I get the truck, hell yeah, I’ll switch places with you,” Buddy Lee said. He let out a low chuckle.

“Oh, you get the truck. But you also get pulled over four or five times a month because ain’t no way your Black ass can afford a nice truck like this, right? You get the truck but you get followed around in the jewelry store because you know you probably fitting to rob the place, right? You can get the truck but you gotta deal with white ladies clutching their purses when you walk down the street because Fox News done told them you coming to steal their money and their virtue. You get the truck but then you gotta explain to some trigger-happy cop that no, Mr. Officer, you’re not resisting arrest. You get the truck but then you also get two in the back of the head because you reached for your cell phone,” Ike said. He glanced at Buddy Lee. “So, you still wanna trade places?”

Buddy Lee swallowed hard and turned his head to toward the window, but he didn’t say a word.

“That’s what I thought. Green don’t matter if it’s in a Black hand,” Ike said. (Cosby 52)

By sharing personal experiences he has had in the past as a black man, Ike explains the difficulties that African American people have to endure in the country: they are questioned by the police constantly, they are not seen as trustworthy by other people and they can even get murdered because of police brutality. Black people are not respected, even when they have money. They cannot change the color of their skin, which conditions them everywhere.

Ike spends most of the book fighting against black stereotypes, and most generalizations are verbalized by Buddy Lee. Interactions between them are perfect to showcase the differences between white and black masculinities, and the author uses their characters to display what are usually considered opposite ends of manhood. For example, before the previous quoted conversation in chapter 8, Ike and Buddy Lee are in the car and Ike turns the radio on. Gospel music starts playing and this interaction takes place:

“I don’t suppose you’re a fan of country, are you?” Buddy Lee asked.

Ike grunted. “Why, because I’m Black?”

Buddy Lee ran a hand through his wild locks. “Well, I mean, yeah. No offense or nothing. Just don’t know many of your kind that are into country.” . . .

“When you or some other white boy says ‘your kind’ it’s like I’m some fucking animal that you trying to put in a cage. I don’t like that shit.” (Cosby 50-1)

This dialogue alone contains crucial information about how race is essential to understand perceptions of manhood. In this case, Buddy Lee links country music to whiteness and finds it impossible that a black man like Ike could enjoy it. The fact that Ike plays Gospel on the radio reinforces his belief. Each time Ike hears a comment on black stereotypes, he becomes infuriated and defends himself. It is his defense mechanism; although he possesses many characteristics of the stereotypical black man, he wants to be seen beyond his race and fights back when an injustice is committed right before his eyes.

Despite his efforts to change, Ike realizes that he is what everyone expects from him as a black man. Not only does he have a criminal past, but also he had a troublesome relationship with his son. Another stereotype about the black community is that their families are incomplete, as the father is perceived to be careless, absent, and unfaithful. In the introduction to *The Myth of the Missing Black Father*, Roberta L. Coles and Charles Green argue that “In their parenting role, African American men are viewed as verbs but not nouns; that is, it is frequently assumed that Black men *father* children but seldom *are* fathers” (12). Ike has never cheated on his wife, but he sure was absent when he was imprisoned, and showed his intolerance when Isiah came out as gay. However, Ike is able to develop a sense of identity and see beyond his mistakes in the past. Although it is difficult, he can change too and become more than a violent and resentful man. As he progressively accepts his son’s identity, he can let go of his toxic traits and be comfortable with his masculinity.

The main theme of the novel has to do with how men deal with their emotions and whether they show them or not. Reeser discusses the concept of a certain discourse around masculinity that “depicts masculinity as wounded, as effeminized or effeminate, as victimized, or perhaps even as queered, and consequently expresses the need to masculinize men and recreate a less effeminate form of masculinity” (33). Hence, the showing of feelings would be condemned and considered a sign of distancing from masculinity. This is where the popular saying “boys don’t cry” comes from. The title *Razorblade Tears* is a reference to Ike’s tears, which are the representation of the pain

that he goes through in the story. The first scene where Ike cries takes place in chapter 4: “Tears ran from his eyes and stung his cheeks. Tears for his son. Tears for his wife. Tears for the little girl they had to raise. Tears for who they were and what they all had lost. Each drop felt like it was slicing his face open like a razorblade” (Cosby 27). In this case, Ike’s tears hurt him because of the heavyweight that he has to carry from now on after his son’s murder. Those tears represent despair and hopelessness. The fact that the act of crying hurts also indicates that it is the first time Ike has cried in a while, which is aligned with the masculine restriction of showing emotions. The character only sheds tears when he is alone.

Ike does not cry again until the last chapter of the novel when he has accepted his son’s identity as homosexual and is more comfortable with his own masculinity. Additionally, he gets closure after Derek’s murderers have paid dearly for what they did: “The tears came again . . . This time they didn’t feel so much like razorblades. They felt like the long-awaited answer to a mournful prayer for rain” (Cosby 353). With this progression in the representation of Ike, Cosby goes against the social expectations for men and favors vulnerability, which is ultimately the main message of the story.

Finally, the presence of Ike as a black main character in *Razorblade Tears* positions the book as part of black crime fiction, a subgenre that has spread during the last decades. The presence of African-American characters in these narratives has been reinforced nowadays, usually by writers of color. Andrew Pepper discusses this topic and declares that “black crime writers utilise the codes and conventions of the genre, moulding them to their own purposes while retaining particular features or characteristics” (101). Cosby maintains certain elements of Southern noir, such as the presence of violence, gangs, and corruption, but he also adds a diverse group of characters that rarely stand out within the genre.

### **3.2. White Privilege: Buddy Lee**

The next character relevant to the analysis is Buddy Lee Jenkins. He is Derek’s father; a white man with a dark past as a member of the Rare Breed, a White nationalist biker club that traffics weapons and drugs. He served five years in Red Onion State Prison after being caught in a truck full of methamphetamine with his brother, Deak. To keep his brother’s record clean, Buddy Lee took the blame for both of them. After that, his wife Christine asked him for a divorce and started a relationship with Gerald Culpepper, a famous judge running for governor. Buddy Lee turns to alcohol to drink

his sorrow away and to deal with an overwhelming feeling of loneliness after his son's death.

Buddy Lee has been a criminal since his childhood. According to his own words, he learned everything he knows from his father: "Buddy Lee had always had fast hands. His daddy had taught him how to lift wallets and watches before he taught him to ride a bike" (Cosby 200). The reader soon discovers that his violent nature comes from his family's influence, especially from his father, who was aggressive and used to beat his mother. Buddy Lee admits that he was not a good man, but still holds great esteem to his father after his death, to the point that he carries his knife everywhere as a memento of what he learned from him. In chapter 31, Buddy Lee reveals that he promised long ago not to be like his father, but that he ended up being worse. Although he never put his hands on his wife, he unleashed his rage on his son for being homosexual. He admits having beaten Derek with a belt, told him he was a pervert, and called him awful names. It is not until his murder that he starts to show remorse.

Buddy Lee is repeating patterns from his family, as the only form of dealing with problems that he has ever seen is through violence. Furthermore, as he grew older he started to traffic drugs and became part of the Rare Breed. This context only aggravates his temper, turning him into a lethal and resentful man. At one point, Buddy Lee contemplates an old photo and thinks the following about himself: "That fella was full of gunpowder and gasoline . . . The man in that picture was wild and dangerous. Always down for a fight and up to no good" (Cosby 21). Although he is older now and seems to have settled down, he recovers his bloodlust and desire to get revenge as soon as his son is killed. Buddy Lee presents himself as a vigilante who will use his skills acquired in the streets to avenge Derek's murder.

Violence inheres in both Buddy Lee and Ike's personalities. They start this quest because law enforcement is not able to resolve the crime, which is a common trope in the genre of crime fiction. Nevertheless, in this case, the figure of the detective that is supposed to resolve the crime is set aside and Cosby establishes two ex-convicts as the main characters. They are willing to take the law into their own hands, so they leverage their criminal skills to find their sons' murderer. Nonetheless, they do not fulfill the role of the detective because they place violence before ethics. Also, they occasionally stop to contemplate clues and make assumptions, they prefer to act.

From the perspective of "gendered dialogue" and "hegemonic masculinity" in contemporary U.S. society, Buddy Lee's masculinity is defined by what he is *not*

multiple times: he is not black, but white. He is not queer, but heterosexual (he emphasizes his sexuality quite often). He is not weak, but physically strong. He is not lazy, but ambitious (he is the one who talks Ike into looking for their son's murderer). He is not insecure, but sexually assertive (he even tries to flirt with a lesbian at one point, regardless of knowing about her sexuality beforehand). Moreover, during most of the narrative, Buddy Lee maintains a stoic demeanor and suppresses his feelings. Unlike Ike, he is not able to cry until the very end of the novel, when he discovers who murdered his son Derek. In most Western cultures, vulnerability or any kind of emotion are discouraged and considered signs of being weak and not masculine.

In order to analyze Buddy Lee's behavior, part of Reeser's work can help to understand the importance of race in this context. Going back to the idea of the racialized male figures (such as the hypermasculine bodybuilder or the effeminate Asian man), Reeser considers them as part of a system of race-gender codings, in which the white man would fall right in the middle. This position explains the origin of white privilege: "Ending up in the middle is a way for white masculinity to be accorded the privileges of the happy medium and to keep those privileges away from the men coded otherwise . . . [it] serves as another tool for assigning a clear and supposedly mathematical hegemony to a given racial-gender group" (Reeser 150).

From the beginning, white privilege manifests itself in Buddy Lee's attitudes, actions, and behavior toward others. For instance, in a conversation with Ike, Buddy Lee shares how he got caught and served five years in prison. The answer that Ike provides is very interesting: "You had a trunk full of meth and you only got five years? If you had looked like me, they would have put you under the jail for moving that much weight. I got friends who got three to five for holding weed" (Cosby 78). Ike, as a black man, explains what is a reality in the United States: the African American community is punished to serve higher sentences by the justice system just because of their race; this is when white privilege comes into play.

Even Buddy Lee recognizes his privilege in one scene from chapter 37. He has invaded his ex-wife's property and is trying to assault her husband with a bat. When he reaches him, two policemen arrive and ask him to stop. They even point at him with their guns, but Buddy Lee beats Gerald multiple times before he is immobilized by the deputies. Buddy Lee articulates: "Thank God for white privilege" (Cosby 295). This scene is a clear reference to police brutality towards the black community in the United States. If Buddy Lee were a black man, he would likely have been immobilized sooner,



or the police would have been more aggressive. After spending time with Ike, Buddy Lee is finally aware of how he finds fewer obstacles because of the color of his skin.

The author also uses the character of Buddy Lee to represent the figure of the white man who is ignorant and cracks racist jokes to feel better about himself. In one of the chapters, Buddy Lee and Ike have a conversation with LaPlata, an Asian detective who has been assigned the case of the murder. Later, Buddy Lee calls him “Detective Egg Roll” and Ike asks him about it:

“Why you call him Detective Egg Roll?”

“What? It’s just a joke. Ya know, because he’s Chinese,” Buddy Lee said.

“I don’t even think he’s Chinese. I swear you white boys got a joke for everybody, but if I said your family tree ain’t got no branches, you’d be ready to fight.”

“Shit, nah. I got an uncle who’s my cousin,” Buddy Lee said. Ike rolled his eyes.

“I’m joking. Everybody too damn sensitive these days.”

“We ain’t sensitive. Back in the day nobody could say shit or one of your uncles would’ve tried to hang ’em from a tree.” (Cosby 137-8)

With the excuse of making a joke, Buddy Lee shows his racism by assuming the detective’s ethnicity, as if every Asian person was Chinese. When confronted about it, he excuses himself by mentioning that everyone is too sensitive nowadays. Ike resorts to the history of the United States to support his point: the African American community used to be punished and murdered for speaking up. He is referring to the lynching of black people in the South of the United States during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most popular cases was the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Indiana in 1930, since a picture of them hanging from a tree was published in the newspaper. It is considered one of the early events that led to the Civil Rights Movement. Riché Richardson addresses the origin of lynching in his work, which was a reaction to the fear of black men raping white women: “An age of reaction arose by the 1890s, marked by an upsurge of lynchings and a notable increase in caricatured images of blacks in American material culture in trade cards and other media” (24). Moreover, Richardson affirms that the act of lynching “functioned as the most legible cultural practice through which black bodies were disciplined, contained, and subordinated within the white-supremacist ideology dominant in the South” (58).

Despite Ike's attempts to educate him, Buddy Lee keeps making racist comments during most of the narrative. After Ike's speech about the differences between being black and white in the South of the U.S., Buddy Lee comments that he is not racist, he just does not know a lot of black people. Ike answers with: "I never said you was. You just another white boy that don't have to worry about people like me and the shit we go through" (Cosby 51). All of these characteristics are reinforced in the first half of the novel but, as the story progresses, Cosby challenges those traits linked to "hegemonic masculinity" and white privilege and flips the narrative to show character development. Ike and Buddy Lee's friendship changes throughout the book and both of them learn from one another. Buddy Lee is not able to disguise his discrimination as jokes anymore, since Ike will call him out and put him in his place. At one point in the novel, Buddy Lee tries to justify himself and explains why his behavior can come across as racist most of the time:

I ain't trying make no excuses, but when you grow up around people—your aunts and uncles, your grandparents, your brothers and sisters, your friends—all of them saying things that you don't even think about being wrong or right, you don't put that title on yourself . . . And I used to laugh at that joke because it was my granddaddy saying it. I never thought, I never had to think how somebody like you would feel about that joke. Then when I got older I stopped thinking about it, because if that joke was fucked up, then what did that say about my granddaddy? What did that say about me that I laughed at it? (Cosby 219-20)

When Buddy Lee is coming to terms with his racism, he can recognize how his upbringing has affected his point of view. In his case, he started to imitate his (racist) family because it was the only thing he knew. But then, as Buddy Lee encounters Ike and discovers how difficult his life has been as an African American man, he acknowledges his privilege in society and learns to be empathetic.

Another change in Buddy Lee that takes place throughout the novel, as well as with Ike, is their discourse, which evolves and becomes softer. In line with dialogic masculinities, their speech changes and builds their masculinities. Although the typical colloquial language from the South is present until the end, Buddy Lee and Ike's way of speaking and expressing themselves progresses, providing some of the most deep and heart-wrenching quotes from the book. For example, Buddy Lee reflects on the afterlife

in one of the last chapters, and it is one of the few times that he presents himself as vulnerable: “You think there’s anything after this? . . . I mean, if there is, I’m pretty sure where I’m headed . . . I just wonder, I mean, do you think we’ll see the boys? Like, if we don’t make it out of this, you think we’ll pass them on our way down south?” (Cosby 331). Further, Ike delivers some emotional lines when visiting Isiah’s grave: “You know how you used to say love was love? I didn’t get it . . . But I understand now. And I’m so goddamn sorry it took all of this, but I really do get it now. A good father, a good man, loves the people that love his children” (Cosby 352).

By the end of the novel, Buddy Lee succumbs to cancer and dies right after avenging the murder of his son. As opposed to most traditional endings, it is the white man who dies and the black man who survives and enjoys the rest of his life peacefully. This ending is a kind of reward for Ike: after suffering, he can finally put the past behind him. However, it is a reward for Buddy Lee too: he can rest now.

### **3.3. LGBTQ+ Representations: Isiah, Derek and Tangerine**

Turning now to queer representation, Cosby presents multiple characters who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, but he focuses on three of them: Isiah Randolph, Derek Jenkins and Tangerine Fredrickson. Isiah and Derek are already dead when the novel starts, but Tangerine becomes a fundamental piece in the story and, by the end, she is one of the main characters that the reader is rooting for.

Isiah and Derek are the perfect couple. Isiah is a journalist for *The Rainbow Review* newspaper, Derek is a chef, and they have a 3-year-old daughter named Arianna. And yet, both have the same problem: their parents do not accept their sexuality, not even when they marry and start a family. At the beginning of the novel, the reader learns at the same time as Ike that both Isiah and Derek have been victims of a hate crime: they were gunned down in a drive-by. Resulting from this, their daughter Arianna is orphaned and Ike and his wife become her legal guardians.

Neither of them had an easy life. On the one hand, Isiah Randolph is both black and homosexual, a combination that is usually not well accepted in the South. It is the exact opposite of the cultural figure of the (white) Southern gentleman, which would be represented by the character of Gerald Culpepper. When Ike and Buddy Lee visit a bar in their search for Tangerine, the girl that was friends with Derek and Isiah and the current target of the Rare Breed, they meet a bartender who talks about a friend’s experience: “He said some Black people hate gay people more than they hate racists. He

told me growing up Black and gay in a small town out in the country was like being trapped between a lion and an alligator. Rednecks on one side and homophobic Black folk on the other” (Cosby 158). It seems like Isiah’s experience is not unique, and many black homosexual men are forced to leave their houses and towns because of intolerance and, in some cases, harassment. Another man in the bar declares: “I’m just saying we still in the South. Unless you straight and white you gotta watch your back” (Cosby 156).

Isiah’s coming out was traumatic: he arrived with Derek at a family barbecue and presented him as his boyfriend. Ike responded the only way he knew: he flew into a fit of rage, flipped the grill and one piece of coal fell in Isiah’s arm, leaving him a light mark forever. Years later, after learning Isiah and Derek are going to get married, Ike expresses his disappointment by asking what would people think, to which Isiah answers the following: “That’s the first thing that comes to your mind when I tell you I’m marrying the love of my life? . . . I’ve dealt with what people have to say ever since I had to explain that my father was a jailbird” (Cosby 26). On top of his race and sexuality, Isiah has to struggle with having a criminal father as well. Although the reader never gets to meet him, Cosby introduces his torment via his father’s memories. In any case, the character is an excuse for the author to criticize the homophobia and hatred towards queer people in the South.

In addition, other prejudices against homosexuality within the black community are addressed several times in the novel. One of them takes place when Ike visits the barbershop. As it has been previously discussed, this place serves as a haven for black men like Ike, who feel judged by white people. However, as soon as Ike pays attention to a conversation that a few black men are having, he realizes that the barbershop might not be as welcoming as he thought. While they are getting their haircut, they discuss a commercial on TV about a drag show: “For real, though, them boys up there, they the result of the government splitting up Black families. Made welfare more attainable than living on one income. Made women think they didn’t need no king in they life. That’s how you get niggas in wigs and makeup prancing around like goddamn Tinkerbells” (Cosby 208). The barbershop’s regulars maintain that being queer is a weakening process, a kind of experiment conducted by external forces to destroy the image of the hypervirile black man. In addition, the register is very colloquial. The author uses colloquial language as a tool to represent a certain community’s unique way of speaking, in this case, the African American community.

During this interaction, Ike remains silent and reflects on how he used to be like them and how ashamed he feels now. Furthermore, the conversation progresses and each customer starts sharing his opinion on the matter: “Let my boys come home talking about that gay shit. They gone be living in a cardboard box down by the river. Nah, bump that, I’m a beat that shit out of them. Any man let his son grow up gay, he done failed” (Cosby 208). These people also consider that having a queer child is the result of being a failure as a parent, as if sexuality relied on one’s upbringing. One of them does not even feel ashamed when stating that he would hit his kid if he turned out to be gay. Ike notices that this is another side of the barbershop that he always ignored: conversations pervaded with narrow-mindedness and homophobia. He recognizes that he would have laughed with them a few months ago, but now that his son is dead and he is opening his mind to queerness, he cannot tolerate their behavior. He calls them out before exiting the barbershop, proof of his development as a round character.

On the other hand, Derek Jenkins does not have to worry about his race, since he is white, but he suffers from homophobia nonetheless. The first time he kissed a boy, his father Buddy Lee caught them in the middle of the act and beat him with a belt. After the divorce and his father’s imprisonment, Derek moves in with his mother Christine and Gerald Culpepper, his stepfather. Things do not get better, though. Christine kicks him out of the house because she cannot tolerate his homosexuality, and Derek is forced to live in the streets for a while. Buddy Lee cannot help him even if he wants to: he is behind bars. However, Derek moves on and overcomes his problems without his parents’ aid, which increases his rancor towards them. Sadly, Christine does not even attend his funeral and continues to criticize his sexuality after his death, justifying her actions by stating that Derek’s homosexuality would smear her husband’s reputation: “Our son dedicated himself to an immoral lifestyle. An abhorrent, sacrilegious life that neither my husband nor I could abide in our home” (Cosby 106-7). Her behavior showcases her intolerance in contraposition with Buddy Lee, who develops a sense of empathy for his son as the novel progresses.

Despite grappling with homophobia, Buddy Lee did not behave as a good father while Derek was alive. The last conversation they have before Derek’s murder takes place over the phone when he shares the news that he is marrying Isiah. Buddy Lee makes one of his jokes (“Which one of y’all gonna be the wife?”) and complains that he does not have to “rub in his face” (Cosby 144) that he is gay. Derek is very hurt, as he

remains hopeful that his father will be happy for him. Neither Buddy Lee nor Ike attends the wedding.

Both Isiah and Derek are despised by their fathers, and that may be one of the reasons why they connected in the first place. They have to endure their fathers' hostility even after they become adults, and the hatred does not stop when they die. In chapter 7, Ike discovers that their tombstones have been vandalized: "DEAD FAGGOT NIGGER. DEAD NIGGER FAGGOT LOVER was sprayed on the two halves of the stone in neon-green spray paint. They had also sprayed it on the grass over each grave" (Cosby 44). This event is decisive for Ike: he decides to avenge his son's murder, who still cannot rest. Both parents realize that the case will not have a big impact because of their sons' sexuality: "I ain't shocked it went inactive. They ain't making a priority out of two ... out of two men like Isiah and Derek" (Cosby 31). The author's criticism is evident: if you are queer and live in the South, this is a possibility. What is more, if you try to do the right thing and be an advocate of justice, you might find yourself underground.

Isiah and Derek's murder is committed by the Rare Breed, the gang that Buddy Lee was part of. However, they are following the instructions of Gerald Culpepper, Christine's husband. This is intentional: Cosby reverses the cultural masculine roles and presents the black man as the victim and the white Southern gentleman as the villain. Gerald is a corrupted judge who has enough money to cover any mess he is involved in, and that is what he does with Isiah and Derek. Isiah was going to write a piece on him that could have ruined his career, so Gerald decided to have them both killed.

Isiah and Derek challenge normative expectations, not only because of their sexuality but due to their non-hegemonic masculinities as well. For instance, after Ike's release from prison, he enjoyed boxing with Isiah and wanted him to join a professional team in the hope that they would bond over sports. Conversely, Ike refused and stated: "I'm not like you. I don't like hurting people" (Cosby 25). In contrast to his father, Isiah rejects violence and goes against the stereotype of the hypermasculine black man. Likewise, Buddy Lee ponders over how his son seemed to be his polar opposite: "Derek was different. Whatever rot that lived in the roots of the Jenkins family tree had bypassed Derek . . . He had accomplished more in his twenty-seven years than most of the entire Jenkins bloodline had in a generation" (Cosby 21). Contrary to his father and ancestors, Derek does not become a criminal, which demonstrates that people can

overcome the trauma that is passed down in their families and choose their own path in life.

Having considered homosexuality, special attention must be directed to Tangerine. Even though she first appears in the middle of the novel, she is a central piece in the plot. She is Gerald's mistress, and as soon as Derek finds out his stepfather is cheating on her mother, he convinces Isiah to write a piece on him to uncover the truth. Gerald Culpepper knows that having an extramarital relationship will ruin his reputation, but there is another secret that is worth killing for: Tangerine is a transgender woman. Derek cannot believe that the same man who has kicked him out of the house for being gay is having an affair with a transgender woman, so he wants to expose his hypocrisy to the general public. Unfortunately, Gerald acts quicker.

Tangerine Fredrickson is a mixed raced young woman who is defined by other characters as "a free spirit" and "a diva." The reader can tell she is not constrained by anything in life as soon as Buddy Lee and Ike meet her. She does not want to get involved in their quest for vengeance, even when she learns about the murder of Isiah and Derek, who were her friends. Nonetheless, her behavior is the result of enduring abuse for many years. She could not explore her identity safely in her home because of her father, who is the origin of all of her problems. She addresses her childhood memories and opens up with Ike after losing her mother in front of him and Buddy Lee: "My daddy was half Black, half Mexican. All man, like my mama used to say. He caught me wearing my mama's high heels one time. He punched me in my chest so hard I spit blood for three days" (Cosby 265). Like many transgender children, all Tangerine knew growing up was hatred and misunderstanding. Her father is presented as a villainous figure that imposes conventional masculinity on her, using violence when she displays any signs of femininity. Her mother does not support her either: Tangerine explains how she still calls her by her dead name at present, although she knows she is a transgender woman.

Tangerine recognizes his father's attack the moment she realized she was transgender: "That was when I really knew . . . That they got it wrong when I was born. That I was always a girl. It was the people around me that wouldn't accept it. All that shit he did to me and all I could think about was one day I'd find some heels that fit" (Cosby 265). She instantly knew she was a girl and fought for her identity as she grew older, which explains why she is a carefree person in the present. Even so, Tangerine falls in love with Gerald, and from the beginning, he knows that she is transgender and

has not undergone gender-reassignment surgery. By sharing this with him, she signs her death sentence. They start a secret relationship and their encounters are always in private places, but Tangerine falls for him despite knowing he would never get near her in public. Gerald seems to have a sexual fetish for transgender women, but he claims he is in love with Tangerine. He justifies their private encounters by declaring that his life is very public and his family would never understand their relationship. This is a common experience for queer people: being someone else's secret.

Even though Ike and Buddy Lee know that Tangerine has an affair with a man, they do not know his identity. They try to convince her to tell them since they know whoever it is, he is responsible for the murder of their sons. Ike attempts to persuade her to confess by asking the following: "He talks real nice, but has he ever taken you anywhere besides a motel? . . . Do you even have a picture together?" (Cosby 267). Despite being told that her lover is a murderer, Tangerine refuses to reveal his identity, convincing herself that he is not responsible. As a queer person that was repudiated by her own family, she is holding on to the only shred of love she has ever known.

The reason why Ike and Buddy Lee find Tangerine in the first place is because Gerald and the gang are searching for her too. The original plan was to murder Isiah, Derek and Tangerine, so no one could expose Gerald. Nevertheless, Tangerine manages to escape and is sheltered in her mother's house, where Ike and Buddy Lee find her. Suddenly, the gang appears and gunfire breaks out, killing Tangerine's mother and injuring her too. They take her to Ike's house and Mya, Ike's wife, understands that Tangerine would be in great danger if she falls into the wrong hands. She remarks: "Wherever you take her they need to be an ally. You don't need to take her to somebody that's gonna kick her out in the street if they find out" (Cosby 255-6).

The importance of forging alliances between queer and straight people is emphasized by the author, especially towards the end of the novel. Derek and Isiah's murder is not the only event that leads Ike and Buddy Lee to open their minds. Meeting Tangerine and learning about her situation as a mixed raced transgender woman in the U.S. helps them to sympathize with queer people as well. Nonetheless, Ike and Buddy Lee cannot forget their bloodlust. At the end, they accomplish their role as anti-heroes and murder Gerald, who tries to persuade them not to kill him by saying that he is sick and needs professional help because of his relationship with Tangerine. Even at his dying moment, he is not able to accept his queerness. At last, the villain is defeated and justice is served.



By the end of the novel, Buddy Lee passes away and Ike revisits their sons' graves. The final scene is very powerful: a black man kneeling to talk to his dead queer son. In the monologue, Ike reveals that Tangerine has been introduced to Arianna as her aunt, which seals their bond as a family. In addition, he promises to be a caring grandfather since he was not a loving father. The final message is hopeful: hate can be overcome, people can change, wounds can heal, and most importantly: your identity is something no one can deprive you of.

#### **4. Conclusions**

*Razorblade Tears* is a compelling and gut-wrenching story that explores how multiple characters navigate their hard lives in the South of the United States. Diversity is the very heart of the narrative, as the author is not afraid to give voice to the outcasts. The reader can find characters from different backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations that lead the narrative, which is rather uncommon in crime fiction. By doing this, Cosby crafts an intriguing narrative that reflects the current U.S. society. The novel includes diverse representations and discusses relevant themes while still being enjoyable and fast-paced.

Throughout this paper, attention has been paid to the representation of race, gender, and sexuality, emphasizing how these elements shape the characters' behaviors, personalities, and actions. Theories from the field of masculinities have been used to carry out this analysis, such as "hegemonic masculinity" and "gendered dialogue". Race is addressed as well, focusing on the representation of blackness in crime fiction alongside its social constructs that persist today, such as the hypermasculine black man or the figure of the "gangsta." Moreover, queer studies are also present, with an approach to sex and gender that considers how black queer identities challenge manhood. Special attention is paid to the representation in literature of non-normative sexualities, such as homosexuality, and non-standard identities, like transsexuality.

Throughout the novel hegemonic masculinities are challenged by the actions and behaviors of different characters. Southern intolerance and narrow-mindedness are condemned by the author, as well as toxic masculinity and racist prejudices that are rooted in Richmond, Virginia. Although many characters are based on certain social stereotypes, such as Ike as the hypervirile black man or Gerald as the Southern white gentleman, these stereotypes are questioned as the novel progresses and the characters manifest complex and layered personalities that enrich their character arcs, such as Ike,

Buddy Lee and Tangerine. Throughout the narrative, Cosby aims to expose these matters and offers visibility, hoping that the novel is part of social change.

## Works Cited

- Baker, Paul, and Giuseppe Balirano. *Queering Masculinities in Language and Culture*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018.
- Briger, Sam. "Crime Writer S.A. Cosby Loves the South - and Is Haunted by It." *NPR*, 25 July 2023, [www.npr.org/2023/07/25/1189276661/s-a-cosby-all-the-sinners-bleed-south-confederacy](http://www.npr.org/2023/07/25/1189276661/s-a-cosby-all-the-sinners-bleed-south-confederacy). Accessed 24 April 2024.
- Coles, Roberta L., and Charles Green. *The Myth of the Missing Black Father*. Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed., University of California Press, 2005.
- Cosby, S. A. *Razorblade Tears*. Flatiron Books, 2021.
- Garner, Dwight. "S.A. Cosby, a Writer of Violent Noirs, Claims the Rural South as His Own". *The New York Times*, 5 Sept. 2021, [www.nytimes.com/2021/09/05/books/s-a-cosby-razorblade-tears-crime-novelist.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.qk0.T4GM.ie0a9tOie2Eg&smid=url-share](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/05/books/s-a-cosby-razorblade-tears-crime-novelist.html?unlocked_article_code=1.qk0.T4GM.ie0a9tOie2Eg&smid=url-share). Accessed 11 May 2024.
- Ghadiali, Ashish. "SA Cosby: 'The holy trinity of southern fiction is race, class and sex.'" *The Guardian*, 17 Jan. 2022, [www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jul/31/sa-cosby-the-holy-trinity-of-southern-fiction-is-race-class-and-sex](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jul/31/sa-cosby-the-holy-trinity-of-southern-fiction-is-race-class-and-sex). Accessed 26 March 2024.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2004.
- hooks, bell. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. Routledge, 2004.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Lemelle, Anthony J. Jr. *Black Masculinity and Sexual Politics*. Routledge, 2010.
- Peele, Thomas. *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Pepper, Andrew. *The Contemporary American Crime Novel: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- Reeser, Todd W. *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Richardson, Riché. *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South from Uncle Tom to Gangsta*. University of Georgia Press, 2007.
- Ruane, Michael E. "Virginia Is the Birthplace of American Slavery and Segregation — and It Still Can't Escape That Legacy." *Washington Post*, 6 Feb. 2019,

[www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/02/06/virginia-is-birthplace-american-slavery-segregation-it-still-cant-escape-that-legacy](https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/02/06/virginia-is-birthplace-american-slavery-segregation-it-still-cant-escape-that-legacy/). Accessed 24 April 2024.  
West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Anniversary ed., Beacon Press, 2017.