

Reading for Resistance, Resilience and Reconciliation: Identity-negotiations in Candice Montgomery's *By Any Means Necessary*

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Abstract

The Paper emphasizes the value of cultural diversity and inclusivity in literature through storytelling. One enters the world of young adults whose trials and tribulations are masterfully explored by the Seattle based Candice Montgomery as she highlights issues pertaining to self and identity; sexuality and masculinity, through the genre of Young Adult fiction. Montgomery's believable, modern characters are both accessible and captivating, especially in her 2019 novel entitled *By Any Means Necessary*. Hers is a strong and crucial voice with an important message for teenagers to consider as they navigate the challenges and pressures of adolescence and the problems they face in achieving a meaningful sense of place and identity. This is a crucial and timely message, particularly for a (White) society that has historically sought to marginalize and exclude African-Americans. Despite the obstacles and difficulties he encounters, Torrey - the protagonist - persists in his determination and negotiates with the external environment (while reconciling with his inner one) to chart his own path with resistance and resilience, refusing to be constrained by the expectations and stereotypes imposed on a (Black) teenage boy. *By Any Means...* thus tells the tale of a family, a friendship, and a period in history.

Keywords: Black masculinity; LGBTQ+; Sexuality; Young Adult (YA) fiction.

For a long time, a stigma has been attached to young adult literature. The composer contemplated an ample and minimal entity plot. Likewise, in any type of writing, some young-adult books could, in any case, be portrayed this way. Today, in any case, this is not the standard. Many books

composed by skilled creators allude to an assortment of significant issues. Unfortunately, teachers looked over these works as major “works of art.” High school instructors keep attempting to show books by Hemingway and Steinbeck, and just like the famous Bronte sisters, many researchers remain baffled when they refuse to read the books. The examination has shown that presenting young adult writing to boys further develops their adding capacity (Ballash 1994). This should not imply that those young men are attracted to these books exclusively because they are not difficult to pursue. Young males also identify with works featuring young male protagonists whose societal and romantic challenges showcase their own. In light of the reflection on the simple life, studies have proposed that pursuing juvenile writing plays a critical role in a juvenile’s enthusiasm and psychological well-being (Gill 1999). As curators and educators, we are responsible for seeking publications to help our young adult boys improve their skills. On the other hand, what literature will appeal to young adult males? One way to appeal to young adult males is to include books that feature relatable, realistic male characters. These characters should be flawed and complex, with their own struggles and challenges.

Additionally, books that address contemporary issues and themes, such as mental health, identity, and social justice, can be particularly appealing to young adult males. It is also important to consider the diversity of young adult males and to include books that represent a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Another way to appeal to young adult males is to provide them with books that are engaging and action-packed. Books that have fast-paced plots, thrilling action sequences, and a sense of adventure can be particularly appealing to young men. Additionally, books that explore science fiction, fantasy, and other genres can provide young adult males with a sense of escapism and allow them to explore new worlds and ideas. Providing young adult males with books that are written by diverse and underrepresented authors can also be a great way to appeal to them. This is because it allows them to see different perspectives and life experiences, and it also helps to diversify the literary landscape. It is important to note that, it is not only the books that we provide to young adult males that are important, but also the way we present and discuss these books. We need to make sure that we are creating a space where young adult males feel comfortable discussing literature and expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Candice Montgomery, who lives in Seattle, is a highly accomplished and talented writer in the realm of young adult literature. Her personal experiences as a teenager, including the struggles she faced, greatly shaped

and curated the themes and perspectives explored in her works. Through the medium of fiction, she expertly delves into the complexities of identity, creating realistic and contemporary characters that are both relatable and vivid. Her novels provide a valuable contribution to the literary landscape, particularly within the realm of multicultural literature. By depicting cultural diversity and the experiences of marginalized communities, her works serve to foster understanding and empathy among readers from different ethnic backgrounds. They demonstrate that race and cultural heritage are not barriers but rather contribute to the richness and beauty of the multicultural world. Through her storytelling, Montgomery provides a powerful and necessary voice in the ongoing discourse about the importance of representation and inclusivity in literature. Additionally, her writing encourages readers to question and challenge the societal norms and prejudices that perpetuate discrimination and inequality, making her a vital voice in the fight for social justice. Montgomery's writing style is particularly effective in capturing the nuances and complexities of the teenage experience. Through her novels, she provides an honest and insightful portrayal of the struggles and triumphs of adolescence. The characters in her stories are relatable and realistic, and this relatability is one of the main reasons why teen readers are drawn to her work. They can see themselves in the characters and relate to the experiences depicted in the story, which helps them understand their own experiences better. This is a crucial aspect of young adult literature, as it allows teenagers to connect with the story on a personal level and to find solace and understanding in the characters and their experiences.

Her writing also highlights the long-term consequences of the choices and actions that teenagers make during this formative period. Her work is a reminder that the foundation of our adult selves is laid down during our teenage years, and the choices we make during this time can have a significant impact on our future growth and development. This is an important message for teenagers to consider as they navigate the challenges and pressures of adolescence. Montgomery's novels are a valuable addition to the world of young adult literature. Her writing style is relatable and insightful, capturing the experiences of teenagers with keen observations and considerations. Her novels provide a safe and understanding space for teenagers to explore and understand their own experiences and also provide a reminder of the long-term consequences of the choices and actions that teenagers make during this formative period. She is a remarkable writer in the category of young adult writers who has made good use of her fiction to explore different perspectives on identity and the consequences of the choices teenagers make.

As a Black novelist, Montgomery's primary focus in her novels is to address the issue of racism and its impact on marginalized communities. In her works, she skillfully intertwines this theme with that of class distinction, providing a unique and powerful perspective on the reality of white racism in America. Through her writing, she emphasizes the importance of class consciousness as a crucial lens through which to view and understand the complexities of race and racism. Montgomery also sheds light on the struggles of black men to achieve a true sense of space and identity in America. Her novels convey the message that, in order to truly find a sense of belonging and fulfillment, it is necessary to embrace both Black and White cultures. This is a crucial and timely message, particularly in a society that has historically sought to marginalize and exclude African Americans. Her writing also highlights the ongoing fight for social justice and the importance of activism and community mobilization in the face of systemic oppression. In her novels, she depicts the resilience and determination of Black people to resist and overcome the injustices they face, and in so doing, she provides a powerful and necessary voice in the ongoing conversation about race and racism in America.

In young adult literature, the various authors write on a variety of topics. The selected novel is analyzed in the form of a young adult study. It facilitates the comprehension of Montgomery's ideas about young adult fiction. Sometimes the ideas are imaginary, and sometimes they involve advanced technology. Many of her contemporary writers influence her. Her sole goal in writing is to raise awareness of young adult issues in any way she can. She has written on many issues facing teens, like self-identity, first love, immature behavior, attraction to the opposite gender, comparison with other teenagers, disillusionment, the duality of mind, the minor role of parents, fear, pessimism, first love, coming of age, sexuality, care for other teenagers, an inferiority complex, etc. All these are the characteristic features found in the novel. The empowered protagonist of Montgomery finds himself in various situations. He has many pressures and suffers in these situations as a teenager. Readers enjoy the first-person narratives with lots of fun and confusion created by them in their own words.

Nodelman (2002) proposes that books for young people Further, youthful grown-ups propagate hostile generalizations about young adult men by adding to the notion that caring for others is a ladylike attribute. He claims that young adult males and men are forced to hide their more tender feelings of devotion or desire for others. To focus on others is to be aware of specific expectations for them. As per the reviewed literature, African American boys continue to struggle in school and form most of the subju-

gated population in the United States. In the South, young colored men go to schools where most of the administration officers, professors, and staff members are white and then come home to single-mother households in the afternoon. Most young Black men go through the majority of their daily lives without having Black mentors and role models. Moreover, barely any youthful African American guys have their fathers waiting for them at home or have a chance to identify with colored role models throughout the school day.

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and the media utilize hip-hop and other pop culture to stereotype Black men as people who lower their pants below their waists, sell drugs to supplement their income, and refer to one another as “niggers.” Few rappers say that “real niggas come out of the projects,” and our young Black men believe and imitate this; Hooks stated, “A biased imperialist White supremacist patriarchal mass media teaches young Black males that the street will be their only home” (p. 27). The same media teaches kids that a genuine guy can thrive by preying on others (Hooks, 2004). Because of this miseducation, a young African American boy may decide to live their life in the projects, but it is not implied that there is anything illicit about trying to live in a project. However, it is acknowledged that there is a problem when the goal or assumption is to perform ineffectively in school and end up in activities because they accept that this recognizes them as obvious African American men. A few youthful, colored folks will generally accept that being instructed indicates weakness. This misperception might clarify why many African American men prefer sports and music to characterize their masculinity. (ibid).

Torrence McKenzie is the protagonist of *By Any Means...*, who is poor, dark, and gay, and he has not had it simple; his dad deserted him as a child, his mother is in a therapeutically induced coma, the uncle who raised him was shot by the police, and with no other family accessible, he has been living with his homophobic grandad. Torrey believes San Francisco State University will be a fresh start—a genuine escape miles away from Baldwin Hills. However, Torrey is scarcely moved into his dormitory when his auntie calls to disclose that the city is seizing the cherished apiary his uncle left him because of an inability to make good on charges. With engineers forcing him to leave the honeybee ranch and the deadline for dropping classes approaching, Torrey must choose between this new beginning for himself and his uncle’s fantasy. The creator breaks the fourth divider with quippy asides and shade as Torrey battles to sort out what to do; here and there, it works, and on different occasions, it is di-

verting and feels more fit for arrangements like web-based media or TV. On occasion, the arrangement of previous occasions is confounding, yet a different cast of supporting characters, including a biracial (dark and Brazilian) love interest, is a strength of the book. Through the framework of the narrative, we see Torrey's character evolve from a confused and inexperienced youth to a decisive and mature individual, shaped and tempered by the harsh realities of the world and the multifaceted nature of his identities, and with no other family accessible, he has been living with his homophobic grandad. Torrey believes San Francisco State University will be a fresh start—a genuine escape miles away from Baldwin Hills. However, Torrey is scarcely moved into his dormitory when his auntie calls to disclose that the city is seizing the cherished apiary his uncle left him because of an inability to make good on charges.

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By Any Means... tells the tale of a family, a friendship, and a period in history. It is a moving story about racism, homophobia, and the inability to move on from the past. Torrey, the protagonist, is a Black gay man who is constantly aware of how the world and his family view him. With humor and seriousness, Montgomery tackles his ethnicity and experience as the first generation in his family to attend college. *By Any Means...* is a multi-layered story concerning toxic relationships against friendship,

gentrification vs. economic injustice among people of color, and more, in addition to who Torrey is. It is also a narrative about reuniting with long-lost family and friends. Because there is such a great core of supporting characters, you will find yourself reading not only for Torrey but also for his pals. There are nearly a billion ways to get lost in *By Any Means*.... This book piqued my curiosity because of its college setting, bisexual Afro-Latinx love interest, and Black homosexual MC. The novel delves into Torrey's identity and how his blackness and sexuality intersect and affect his relationships. However, there is also a discussion on self-care, how to move on from toxic family members, and how to strike a balance between moving forward and walking away.

One of the major themes in the novel is the idea of relationships and how they shape the characters and their understanding of the world around them. Torrey has a complex and dynamic relationship with his family and friends, which serves as a lens through which he views the world. Through his interactions with his family, friends, and romantic partners, the reader is able to see how the different characters are affected by issues of race, class, and privilege. The theme of relationships is particularly important in the novel, as it highlights how these issues are not just political or ideological but also deeply personal and emotional.

Teen dreams are built on the notion that dreams are crucial to young adults' emotional and mental health. Dreams are a means to solve problems and deal with conflicting emotions and thoughts. In this way, dreams are important to young adults' mental, physical, and emotional well-being. As Edgar Cayce remarks, "Dreams are today's answers to tomorrow's questions" (quoted in DeBord 435). By pursuing their dreams, Black young adults in Montgomery's novel give hope to others who want to live their lives. They encourage readers to dream big, focus on their dreams, and strive to make them happen. Furthermore, dreaming assists young adults in dealing with intense stress. In Montgomery's novels, the paper identifies the pursuit of education and upward mobility as the twin common dreams of young Black adults. This novel is unapologetically Black, from the first word to the end. Every paragraph exudes pride in the culture but does not shy away from discussing some of the more unpleasant aspects of belonging to the community. It is a whole arc, with Torrey striving to save the apiary but not always getting the help he needs from members of his community.

However, there are still many people who are willing to assist him. Moreover, as Torrey points out in his narration, most of them are women. It

is a love letter to black women, and it does not stop with that one storyline or one generation of women. Torrey values his college friends just as much as the women he grew up with. This deep respect for all the Black women's work is threaded throughout the novel, even into Torrey's very spirit. Torrey's experiences on campus lead him to question his own beliefs about race and racism. He becomes involved in a student group that is dedicated to fighting for social justice and equality, and as he becomes more involved, he begins to see the ways in which different groups are affected by issues of racialized persecution. Torrey's growing awareness of these issues leads him to question his own beliefs and to take a more active role in fighting against racism and oppression. The theme of differential radicalization is an important one, as it highlights the fact that different groups are radicalized in different ways and for different reasons, and that this is often a result of systemic and institutionalized racism and discrimination. He does not just end there with his societal consciousness. The book openly criticized white people for all the small (and large) ways we display racism daily. I very much appreciated that. It was also always suited for the topic at hand. One of the book's key themes is gentrification, which is essentially a critique of white, western civilization. The book demonstrates how this "trend" devastates entire communities while simultaneously stating, "Hey, you can fight back."

The public-school curriculum does not portray African American men in a better light than the media. This is very well portrayed in this novel. African American males are primarily depicted as enslaved people in history textbooks, giving them a negative identity. There is truth to the thought that race interweaves with governmental issues and other methods of getting educational plans; be that as it may, it is essential to see how race remains solitary at the point when people attempt to get an educational program. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined the primary race hypothesis as "a group of activists and researchers interested in investigating and changing the relationship between race, prejudice, and force" (p. 3). Stovall (2005) depicted the primary race hypothesis as an "instructive dissent," just as Grant expected it to give new understanding and freedom to "instructive praxis" (p. 197).

The two perspectives of the essential race hypothesis center around the chance for change, with race being the point of convergence. The primary race hypothesis and colored dissent thoughts are significant in conversations about the issues African American adolescent guys consistently face. The primary race hypothesis gives us the focal point to look at the circumstances and ponder the issues among African American adolescent guys.

Dark dissent thinking can assist us in dealing with issues fundamentally framed by the primary race hypothesis.

Following the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, researchers such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado realized that new ideas and procedures were required to extend the Social Liberties Movement's gains (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Basic race theory was one of the new hypotheses and techniques that exploded in popularity throughout the 1970s (ibid). In Watkins's 2005 book, *Black Protest Thought and Education*, Stovall (2005) depicted the primary race hypothesis as "instructive dissent, just as Grant expected to give new understanding and freedom to instructive praxis" (197). Generally, primary-race scholars accept that prejudice is ordinary. They think being white comes with certain advantages. They also accept that developed races rely on friendly thoughts, relationships, and differential racialization. Researchers who support the primary race hypothesis accept that mistreated bunches have a novel voice (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). The primary race hypothesis no longer applies only to African Americans and Whites. Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos have been lumped together under the fundamental race hypothesis since the twenty-first century (ibid). The primary race hypothesis likewise stretches across sexual orientation lines (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000). An oppressed group of young Black men found a voice in race theory.

The goal of Black dissent was to manage African Americans' shifting status in the twentieth century (Meier et al.). Although Black dissent thought has advanced over time, the overarching goals have remained to eliminate separation and isolation (Meier et al.). Dark dissent thought differs greatly from that of those who have participated in these fight drills. He accomplished this through his works on education and Black protest thought. Watkins (2005) expressed, "Mistreatment and dissent are inseparably connected" (1). This assertion cements the reality that dissent and progress go hand in hand during the time spent freeing a mistreated brain. The primary race hypothesis and Black dissent are thought to need further investigation because these philosophies unite hypothesis and activity. If our goal requires our young African American men to be all that can be expected, one without distinction emerges as a reason.

Both critical race theory and Black protest merit further investigation since they combine theory and praxis. If our goal is to drive our young African American boys to be the best they can be, one without the other is meaningless. Individuals who have been a part of either of these two groups

have not made the error that Freire (2009) warned us about, which is that the oppressed becomes liberated and then becomes the oppressor. I've seen that when some African American males achieve prosperity, they soon forget to give back. I cannot determine if this is purposeful or unintended; yet it appears to occur. Critical racial theory prevents this inflated mentality from occurring, and Black protest thought urges us to act now.

The primary race hypothesis can work on educational improvement for African American male understudies from numerous points of view. Exploration has demonstrated that one of the most successful approaches to building understudy accomplishment is building positive connections between the instructor and the understudies. African Americans' manliness is characterized by looking at it against whiteness (Gause, 2005). When identifying themselves as Black American, African American, Colored, or Negro, many colored men are unsure if they are Black American, African American, Colored, or Negro (Harper, 1996). That does not make any difference; it is commendable enough for African American guys to comprehend the basis of the multitude of different types of distinguishing pieces of proof. Without working out a long portrayal of each specific word, any reasonable person would agree that the entirety of the different names for minorities exists with the end goal of building confidence (*ibid*). The unfortunate truth is that when people look at the actual color of their skin, some perception is apparent. Martin Sánchez-Jankowski, who has taught at Berkeley since 1984 and is the Chair of both the Center for Ethnographic Research and the Joseph A. Meyers Center for Research on Native American Issues, discusses how civic subcultures emerge as a result of a history of racial exclusion in which African-American participation in politics was prohibited at worst and discouraged at best. This political history has an impact on how African-Americans participate as citizens in society, as well as how contemporary prejudice replicates earlier racial exclusion, further distancing African-Americans from traditional sociopolitical processes.

One can see all these reflections in the characters of the teens in the novel, and we witness them struggling with feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression as a result of their experiences with racism and discrimination. This is particularly relevant to Torrey, who struggles with feelings of anger and helplessness as he becomes more involved in the struggle for social justice, and it emphasizes the emotional and psychological toll that racism and discrimination can take on individuals and how it can be a barrier to political participation. as Torrey and the other characters struggle to find a place in a society that is dominated by white, wealthy, and privileged

individuals. They are constantly aware of the ways in which their race and class exclude them from certain opportunities and experiences, and this is particularly relevant to Torrey's experiences in college. Despite these barriers, Torrey and the other characters are determined to participate in the political process and to fight for their rights and the rights of others.

Romance is crucial to the plot, but only because it is central. It is not the tiresome "will they, won't they?" game—quite the reverse. Torrey and Gabriel meet early in the book, and their love motivates Torrey to keep going. Romance is vital to Torrey because it serves as an anchor for him. It is central because it is an essential element of Torrey's life and helps him focus. It is never the miraculous solution to all his issues, and it even causes some of them, but it is the anchor. It has been depicted as the intricate entity that it is. Through the lens of the characters Torrey and Silva, readers delve into the complexities of being both Black and homosexual in a predominantly white community. The novel sheds light on the paradoxical characterization of Black masculinity, which has been traditionally portrayed as both unmanly and dependent on the one hand and hyper-masculine and sexually insatiable on the other. This paradox serves to highlight the ongoing discriminatory power structures and prejudices that exist in contemporary society, particularly for Black men who also identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Despite these challenges, the characters of Torrey and Silva in the novel serve to challenge and transcend traditional constructions of Black masculinity, instead embodying a multifaceted and complex identity. Through their experiences, the novel illustrates the ways in which sexuality and gender in Black communities can contribute to more extreme homophobic displays. These conclusions, drawn from the examination of this particular work, can be applied more broadly to other communities of color, as similar issues of gender and sexuality in the modern world come into play, and can serve as a valuable tool for understanding the complexities and nuances of these issues in contemporary society.

The undercurrents of social hierarchies run throughout the novel, as Torrey is constantly aware of his position as an outsider on a college campus that is dominated by wealthy and privileged students. This theme is also present in the way that Torrey's relationships with his family, friends, and romantic partners are affected by issues of race, class, and privilege. Torrey's experiences and understanding of social hierarchies are shaped by his growing awareness of the ways in which different groups are affected by issues of economic marginalization and racialized persecution. Torrey and many of the characters come from low-income and working-class

backgrounds, and they struggle to make ends meet and to access the resources and opportunities that are necessary for success in college. This aspect is particularly relevant to Torrey as he tries to navigate the world of higher education, which is often seen as a symbol of class mobility and upward mobility. The novel emphasizes how poverty and economic inequality are intertwined with issues of race and class and how they contribute to larger oppressive systems.

The novel also shares similarities with other young adult novels that explore similar themes, such as *The House on Mango Street*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and *The Sun is also a Star*, all of which depict the struggles and triumphs of young people as they navigate the complexities of growing up and finding their place in the world. Like Torrey, the protagonists of these novels are also facing challenges related to family, identity, personal growth, and social justice. Montgomery captures the complexities of growing up and the importance of finding one's place in the world. It is a story that will resonate with readers of all ages and backgrounds, and it is a testament to the author's skill in crafting compelling and thought-provoking narratives.

Furthermore, these novels also share common ground in their representation of marginalized communities and the unique challenges and experiences they face. *The House on...* and *The Absolutely True Diary...* both depict the experiences of Latino and Native American communities, respectively, while *The Sun is...* explores the struggles of immigrants and the immigrant experience. Each of these novels also examines the importance of cultural heritage and the role it plays in shaping one's identity and understanding of the world. These novels also share the theme of resistance and resilience in the face of adversity. The protagonists of these novels, like Torrey, refuse to be defined by the limiting expectations and stereotypes imposed on them by society and instead strive to forge their own paths. They share common themes of family, identity, personal growth, social justice, and representation of marginalized communities. These novels also share a common thread of resistance and resilience in the face of adversity and the importance of cultural heritage in shaping one's identity. The skillful and thought-provoking storytelling in these novels resonates with readers of all ages and backgrounds and is a testament to the authors' ability to craft compelling narratives.

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