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## **Sweat As A Play Of Racism: Studying The Effect of Postmodern as a method of understanding a Literary Text**

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### **Abstract**

Lynn Nottage's *Sweat* is one of the most famous plays that is regarded as Nottage's prophecy about the Donald Trump era. Nottage derives her play material from studying Reading, Pennsylvania's industrial, social and cultural background. Her interviews with the local citizens inspire her to create an exciting story of a group of childhood friends who harm their relationships because of financial problems. A rough tone of racism arises, fights occur, and then, a regretful tone hopes to repair all the broken relationships. The study follows the thematic analysis as an approach of discussion to answer the raised questions. It starts with an introduction, questions, and debate and ends with a conclusion summarising the findings.

**Keywords:** Lynn Nott age, Blue Collar, Racism, Materialism, And Disillusionment.

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"التعرق" باعتبارها مسرحية للعنصرية: دراسة تأثير ما بعد الحداثة كوسيلة لفهم النص الأدبي

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**الملخص:** تعتبر مسرحية لين نوتاج "تعرق" واحدة من أشهر المسرحيات التي تعتبر نبوءة لنوتاج حول حقبة دونالد ترامب السياسية. تستمد الكاتبة المسرحية نوتاج مادة المسرحية من دراسة القراءة، الخلفية الصناعية والاجتماعية والثقافية لمقاطعة بنسلفانيا. ألهمت مقابلاتها مع المواطنين المحليين هناك خلق قصة مثيرة لمجموعة من أصدقاء الطفولة الذين يسببون الضرر لعلاقاتهم بسبب مشاكلهم المالية. تظهر نغمة قاسية من العنصرية، وتحدث المعارك، وبعد ذلك، تأمل النغمة المؤسفة في إصلاح جميع العلاقات المحطمة. تتبع الدراسة التحليل الموضوعي كنهج مناقشة للإجابة على الأسئلة المطروحة. يبدأ البحث بمقدمة وأسئلة ومناقشة وينتهي بخاتمة تلخص النتائج. **الكلمات الدالة:** - لين نوتاج، الياقة الزرقاء، العنصرية، المادية، وخيبة الأمل.

## Introduction

On November 2, 1964, Lynn Nottage was born in the borough of Brooklyn in New York. Her mother, Ruby Nottage, was a teacher, while her father, Dr James Nottage, specialized in child psychology. She took after both of her parents in this career path. They entrusted her care to Saint Ann's. After that, she attended Fiorello H. La Guardia High School till the end of her high school career. Nottage wrote "The dark side of Verona," her first full-length play, while she was a senior in high school at the time it was produced. The story revolves around African American actors and actresses making their way to the Deep South. Wikipedia has other examples of Lynn Nottage's work (Lynn Nottage).

Lynn Nottage is a screenwriter and playwright from the United States. She made history by being the first and only woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize in drama on two separate occasions. Her work often focuses on the lives of those marginalized by society and their problems. Her present job is teaching playwriting at Columbia University, where she is on the faculty. Nottage's play "Sweat," published in 2015, was honoured with the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2017. Much like Nottage's other plays and works, Sweat has been produced several times in the United States and beyond. ([www.lynnnottage.com/about.html](http://www.lynnnottage.com/about.html)).

"It began on a very personal level, wanting to understand what was happening to friends of mine around 2011, who suddenly found themselves struggling to make ends meet, and me not understand how they could go so quickly from a situation where they were doing quite well to being in dire straits," Lynn Nottage said in an interview

regarding the inspiration for her play. "It began on a very personal level, wanting to understand what was happening to friends of mine around 2011, who suddenly found themselves struggling to make ends meet." To address this issue, I decided to research a city that I considered representative of how things are going in the United States. (<https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/lynn-nottage-sweat>).

Between the years 2000 and 2008, there were alternating patterns of rainfall. In her play, Lynn Nottage narrates a story about a group of close friends. They are working together to construct a steel factory. When the manufacturer threatened to lower their salaries and dismiss them, friends turned against one another. In this situation, it is difficult for them to keep their heads above water.

Tracey and Jessie are concerned about their ability to maintain jobs and a stable source of income as a direct consequence of Cynthia being promoted. Oscar, who worked as a bartender, seems to have betrayed his comrades by accepting a position at the plant while they are all unemployed. As a means of expressing their disapproval of Oscar's behaviour, Jason and Chris fight with him, ultimately arresting them. ([www.enotes.com/topics/sweat-Nottage](http://www.enotes.com/topics/sweat-Nottage)). A lot of people regard *Sweat* as a prophecy of the Trump age.

To do research for her book, Nottage went to Reading, Pennsylvania. Her focus was on the development of the industrial sector. Nottage struck up a chat with the residents of the area, some of whom shared her excitement for Hillary Clinton's campaign. Nottage finds it incredibly distressing that white people have been overheard discussing themes such as racial discrimination, economic inequity, and the safety of Latinx and immigrant populations. These kinds of issues were at the centre of Trump's campaign. The book *Sweat* was primarily influenced by her interactions with people who lived there. Even though it was created during the tenure of the Obama administration, the play "Sweat" did not have its world debut until only a few days before the presidential election of 2016. (<https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/lynn-nottage-sweat>). The word "*sweat*" seems like something that might be written by Donald Trump. ([www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com))

Writer and critic Matthew Green describes *Sweat* as "a drama about what happens to individuals when their way of life is upended, and they either lose hope or go seeking for someone to blame or occasionally both." *Sweat* is a story about what happens to people when their way of life is turned upside down. Reflections on the current political situation may be seen throughout the play. There is a connection between the fear of the other, the exploitation of labour by companies, and the aspiration of the economically disadvantaged for economic opportunity. ([www.smilepolitely.com](http://www.smilepolitely.com)) In this study, the researcher investigates the following questions:

- 1- What is the significance of Hume's poem "Let America be America again" concerning *Sweat*?
- 2- Who exactly are the people who work with their hands?
- 3- Does *Sweat* make people feel more racist?

### **Discussion**

Langston Hughes penned a poem with title "*Let America be America again*," which was included in a collection of his works. An assault is made on the delusional optimism that the American ideal represents. Everyone in the middle class and below is being asked to become involved in the effort to reconstruct the United States. The term "the destitute" refers to individuals, including both Americans and the disadvantaged.

It should be no surprise that *Sweat's* characters have no agency. As a result of the decline in the manufacturing sector in the United States in the early 2000s, they were no longer able to maintain their previous level of employment or revenue. In response to the effects of the economic downturn on their homes, lives, and the community as a whole, the main characters engage in various forms of personal protest. Reading has undergone such a dramatic transformation that even those who were born and raised in the area can scarcely recognize it. It becomes more challenging due to the contraction of the industrial industry in Reading. ([www.litchart.com/sweat-theme-analysis](http://www.litchart.com/sweat-theme-analysis)).

Langston's poem "*Let America be America again*" focuses mainly on the concept of the American dream. The verse, however, switches its attention from America's genius to the country's failure due to its deeply ingrained history of discrimination and persecution. According to the poet, in the dream, there was no America. However, in practice, things are different. This point is shown by the aggressiveness of capitalists over many centuries of legally sanctioned discrimination against certain ethnicities. (<http://www.graduateway.com/langston-Hughes-let-America-be-America-again>).

Is it true that white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy are all old concepts? Is a question that is important to ask since that the supremacy of America is linked to its invasion of other countries.(Almaarof, and Alnajar, 2022, 1797-06)

Politicians and corporate owners spread this myth to increase their power and money at the cost of the working class and blue-collar workers in the United States. It wasn't until the 1920s that the term "blue-collar worker" was first used. A working-class member who engages in physical labour is referred to as a "blue-collar worker," as opposed to a "white-collar worker," who may be employed in an office setting. ([www.investopedia.com](http://www.investopedia.com)).

It was Oscar who said, "You Know What? I was a dull person.

Tracey, you weren't born in the United States, was it?

Oscar said, "Absolutely, I was."

Yeah? — Tracy. I come from a long line of people who have called the United States home. Let's be clear: we're referring to the decade of the 1920s here. They are responsible for the construction of the house that I now reside in. They are the ones that constructed this metropolis from the ground up. (Sweat, Scene Five of Act 1)

Tracey worked at Olsteads' factory for many years until she finally decided to retire. She asserts that her German ancestors were the ones who established the town. People in the working class, like Tracey and others like them, yearned for a simpler period when manual labour was appreciated, and skilled artisans were in great demand because of the extensive use of industrial production. The widespread use of industrial production causes this yearning. Stan, an employee at Olsteads, has grown bitter as a direct consequence of the new management that was implemented at the business. When she reached 18, Tracey's friend Jessie moved on from her wonderful job in the back-picking industry and began working in a factory instead. Residents of Reading have a feeling of purpose and identity related to their jobs in the steel industry since Reading was once a hub for steel production, and this history has left a lasting cultural mark on the city. The reduction has had a more substantial impact despite the fact that the expansion of the industry has had some influence. In addition to this, Olsteads' is the only manufacturing plant that has let its staff go without being replaced. Because of

this, they decided to give up all hope. As he continues looking for a job without success, Brucie's drug addiction and despondency both worsen. Stan's son Chris and Tracey's son Jason, who were both just fired from their jobs at Olsteads', are drinking, protesting, and making problems at the bar where Stan works. Both of their employment was terminated due to poor performance. Tracey and Jessie have reached a point in their lives when they are dissatisfied and depressed, and as a coping mechanism, they have turned to alcohol. They had spent every waking moment of their life labouring in this factory. Oscar gets attacked by Jason and Chris because of his new work at the Olsteads' because Jason and Chris have finally reached their breaking point. Unfortunately, the collision leaves Stan with some injuries. ([www.smilepolitely.com](http://www.smilepolitely.com))

The words and deeds of the protagonists in this play serve as a metaphor for the working class's disillusionment with the politicians whose assurances they trusted because of the phrases they used. People in low-paying blue-collar jobs were taken advantage of to a large extent by politicians who bribed them. The economic battle gave workers more motivation to be unreasonable, desperate, and illogical than they otherwise would have been. The social inequities and advantage gaps that exist between groups of individuals in the United States depending on their race are referred to as racial inequality, and the idea of racial inequality is used to characterize this phenomenon. It is possible that historical oppression, uneven inheritance, and institutional racism and prejudice, especially directed against minority communities, are also contributory causes. ([www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com) )

In the eight years he served as president of the United States (2009-2017), Barack Obama created history by being the first African-American ever to occupy the position of president. His age was supposed to mark the beginning of a post-racial era. On the other hand, the policies implemented by the Trump administration show the opposite. He was a prominent person in the racist organization (Birther movement in the United States). He served as a leader in a racist movement. ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com))

The United States of America has had an issue with racial inequality ever since the early days of European colonization. The term racism refers to "the attitude, conduct, or practice of treating individuals differently because of their race or ethnicity." Or it means "the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another."

(<https://www.google.com/search?q=Racisim&oq=Racisim&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i512j0i131i433i512j0i512j0i131i433i512j46i131i199i433i465i512j0i512j0i131i433i512j0i512j0i131i433i512.4428j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>)

Racism may take many forms. Although most white Americans can enjoy their rights, individuals of other minority groups in the United States may have their rights curtailed. African Americans experience the consequences of discrimination in the real world. Other peoples from the Middle East and Middle Asia are persecuted regularly, in addition to Jews, Arabs, and Iranians. ([www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/08/understanding-racism-inequality-america/?arc404=true](http://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/08/understanding-racism-inequality-america/?arc404=true))

One hundred years ago, on a beach on Lake Michigan, a group of white people watched as a black child was pushed into the water and drowned. This event sparked international anger. This subject is investigated in a wide variety of works of literature. In her paper, Lauren Christensen analyses the history of racism in the United States and the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans. She claims that the theme of race is present in every piece of literature written in the United States. ([www.nytimes.com/article/book-race-america.amp.html](http://www.nytimes.com/article/book-race-america.amp.html)).

When the researcher runs a search on racial problems in American literature using Google, there is a sheer amount of results that appear. Reading, Pennsylvania, is a Rust Belt city where the white working-class population has been affected hard by the fall of the manufacturing sector since the year 2000. The events of the play *Sweat* take place in this city. White employees in Reading have been hostile toward the town's black and Latino people due to the town's community being deeply rooted in tradition. They point the finger at their friends as the individuals who stole their employment. Tracey's co-worker Cynthia was promoted to manager at the Olsteads', but Tracey was not harming their relationship. Tracy contends that she is on par with others regarding her abilities. She insists that she is not prejudiced and requests that she be given the same chance of promotion as everyone else. ([www.enotes.com](http://www.enotes.com))

I can manoeuvre the dance floor just as well as Cynthia, if not better, said Tracey. I do. You may be confident that they intended to appeal to a numerical minority. It's not my preference; it is how things are going today. My eyes are functioning normally. They get preferential treatment in some form, such as tax benefits, and this may be the case. You are who you are; I will not judge you based on that. Everyone, including me, is ready to get started. (Scene Five of Act One.)

Because of the state of the economy, blue-collar workers' morale is at an all-time low, and they are under a lot of stress. It might result in increased tensions between white and minority groups, as well as an increase in racism. Racial tension is at an all-time high. Tracey, a middle-aged white lady, believes that her ancestors were the ones who invented Reading. The fact that her friend Oscar, a Colombian American bartender, has secured a job at Olsteads makes her very enraged. "Olsteads isn't for you!" she informs him in a frank manner. She doesn't care if Oscar is from the same nation as her or if they are related. Her style gives the impression that she believes Latin speakers are not welcome in Reading, especially at Olsteads'. When you read or watch the play, it becomes clear that Oscar is ignored by everyone in the bar except his colleague Stan. Cynthia has been Tracey's best friend for a long time, yet she has a long-standing grudge towards her (a black woman). They have improved Cynthia's standing in the organization. This promotion is one that she has earned through her hard work. Tracey could become angry about the rise, and she might express her dislike of it. Unfortunately, she cannot get her brain around it. Their preconceived notions are swirling about here. They zeroed up on Tracy as their target since they were interested in forming a small group. They are eligible for a special tax break or advantage. Tracy excludes her pal from consideration due to the hue of her skin. Cynthia has a tremendous sense of grief. ([www.litchart.com](http://www.litchart.com)).

I don't deserve what you've been saying to me, Cynthia; please stop. You've always given off an air of cool detachment and composure. You should feel your anger, but you shouldn't let it consume you. Tracey, look at what I'm saying; you want to avoid proceeding in that direction; there's too much history between us (she says, pointing to the flesh on her hand). You will be required to brief me on the problem you are now dealing with. (the sixth scene of Act 1.)

Tracey's unreasonable bias towards one of her closest friends is utterly inexcusable, even though we can easily understand her dissatisfaction with the current quo and Cynthia's position as a manager. Oscar, who had just started working at

Olsteads', became the target of hostility from Jason and Chris when they were sacked from their jobs there. As a direct consequence of the misunderstanding, Stan sustains injuries, and Jason and Chris are sentenced to eight years of incarceration. Antagonism between people of colour and white descent in the working class has surfaced as a result of the convergence of several economic, social, and political variables.

Alabassi and almaarroof quoted many opinions regarding racism that, "The Race Is A Category Of Individuals That Differs From Other Races, According To Horton And Hunt(60:1991). The Other Side Also Pointed To The Socially Used Definition. It Is Because Of The Different Physical Or Psychological, Scientific Anthropology That Social Distinctions Are Added To Geographical, Physical, For Instance, It Is In The Colour Of Eyes, Skin Colour, Hair Colour, Head Shape, And Racial Concept Evolution. (Narwoko And Suyanto, 2004:176). (Alabassi and Almaarroof. 2021: 4103-4115)

In this sense, it's not that the researcher is attempting to justify this conclusion or make a justification for racism; instead, she\he is interested in having a conversation about the cultural influences that contribute to the pessimistic perspective of reality. The blood and sweat of working-class people, regardless of their race or ethnicity, draws the reader's or spectator's attention. The results provide a reason for hope for increasing people's sensitivity to these groups, as the findings offer optimism. ([www.litchart.com](http://www.litchart.com)).

Here, there is a look at how the decline in manufacturing in the United States has affected the working class. Those individuals will be forced to deal with the challenges of joblessness and poverty due to the loss of their jobs to automation. They are going through a difficult time since nobody can see them. These movements in monetary and economic power generate hostility between groups of people of different races. People who engage in it are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. (Césaire, 2000). You'll have better racial awareness if you ignore the fact that they were pals in the past. The fact that Jason and Chris managed to make amends with Oscar and Stan eight years after Jason and Chris were released from prison is perhaps the most striking sign that this influence was at work. It exemplifies how a shift in the state of the economy may bring out the worst in certain people when they are already predisposed to bad behaviour. People in the Sweat are a clear mirror of human nature; they are neither good nor wicked, and when they make a mistake, they often end up harming themselves more than anybody else. The leap in years from 2000 to 2008 is meant to represent the sense of regret and sorrow that follows from one's own mistakes. The corrosive effect of guilt and humiliation is the novel's primary focus. A further lesson that may be learned from Sweat is that forgiveness can ease the discomfort caused by feelings such as these. Jason and Chris, who have been closest friends for eight years, begin to sweat at the same moment they are freed from prison. The audience or the reader gets a sense of inspiration from the mystery crime as the driving force. In 2000, Jason and Chris fought with Oscar about racial and economic issues, and no one found out what occurred until the very end. Stan suffered serious brain damage as a direct consequence of their taunts as well as their following physical attack. ([www.enotes.com](http://www.enotes.com))

Nottage paints a picture of both Jason and Chris, 21 years old, as clever and productive friends who like spending time together. Many young men in their twenties are probably engaged in illegal activities or are sleeping in a hostel because they are having trouble making ends meet. She has high expectations that her message would convince people that even the most despicable people may have something to apologize for. Everyone on earth is susceptible to making mistakes. In the year 2008, Jason and

Chris both experienced feelings of shame and disgrace. When Jason needs to block off memories, he turns to narcotics. Chris feels guilt and worry because he believes he has let down his family. (<http://www.bookrags/studyguide-sweat-play/>)

Chris: Within the next few minutes, everything between you and I will have changed completely. Lost forever. Okay, so let's say. Only if. Just imagine. Because I can't seem to stop thinking about it, I've been up the whole night. (The first scene of Act One)

They strive to get established in the neighbourhood and the workforce, but they need help. Despite how evident it is, shame motivates individuals to ruin themselves. Additionally, Chris' mother, Cynthia, may be found at this location. She had previously held the position of assistant manager at Olsteads' before being promoted to manager in 2000. Because of her pride, her co-workers, who are also her closest friends, treat her with contempt. It causes her to feel terrible about being proud. During their conversation, she asks Cynthia, "Do you know what it feels like to declare to the persons you've worked with for years that they are not welcome anymore?" Stan is the one she is conversing with. I last got a decent night's sleep over a week ago!

Cynthia feels guilty about betraying her pals since she needed more additional income from her promotion than they did. The lesson to be drawn from the play written by Nottage is that it does not matter how good someone's intentions are; they may still make errors. In 2008, Cynthia concluded that she had erred in accepting the promotion. After Chris was eventually able to get away, she went to apologize to him. The unfortunate Cynthia is all by herself. She is currently employed and earning the minimum salary. On the other hand, the play should be commended for its positive temperament. The last statement makes a positive point, namely that people are not condemned for all of eternity by the choices they have made in the past. They can break free from the shackles of regret and remorse. ([www.litchart.com](http://www.litchart.com))

At the end of the play, Evan tells his friends Jason and Chris that shame is not a productive emotion. Shame, not guilt or wrath, is what gets us in the end, contrary to what the majority of people think, and I know that shame is the actual murderer. Where do you plan to go from here, and what do you intend to do about the situation? During the seventh and last scene of Act Two. Evan's speech is the principal vehicle via which Sweat delivers its message. It's inevitable that we will all make blunders and have moments of embarrassment, but we must overcome this. It would seem like Jason and Chris will accept Evan's offer. They need a method for articulating the shame they are feeling. They need to make things right with Oscar, so they go to the pub. Despite being burdened with remorse, Jason and Chris make a considerable stride in forgiving themselves and sharing their optimism with Oscar and Stan. The objective of Nottage's work is to depict reality as accurately as possible; she has no intention of justifying the actions of any of the characters in the show. It is important to remember that life should not be halted because of regret. It is up to us to take the first step into the path of life. If we want to seek and accept forgiveness from others properly, it is imperative that we first forgive ourselves.

### **Conclusion**

Sweat refers to the blood and Sweat that people who engage in physically demanding work create for them. Politicians and businesspeople have been utilizing them for a very long time. The expectations of workers in the blue-collar working class affect their personal life and relationships and the stress they face while doing their jobs. Other factors with deep roots in American culture also impact American society and the American economy, financial system, and political system.



To sum up, Huger's poem is seen by many as a satirical critique of the United States of America as it exists. The blue-collar, hard-working class is being mistreated for the sake of a fictitious ideal of what it is to be an American. The history of racism is deeply ingrained in the culture of the United States. It is not something that can be hidden from view. Even among those who are the closest of friends, difficult circumstances may bring forth racial sensitivity. People living in *Sweat* have feelings of shame and regret. The realization that, even though difficult circumstances amplify one's flaws, one still can change is what gives regret its meaning. The hope for a better life is the candle that extinguishes the darkness.

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