



ISSN: 1999-5601 (Print) 2663-5836 (online)

Lark Journal

Available online at: <https://lark.uowasit.edu.iq>



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Keywords: Toni Morrison,
Racism, black women, African-
American

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 Oct2024

Accepted 17 Jan 2025

Available online 1 Apr2025



A Study of Racial Conflict in Toni Morrison's the Bluest Eye

ABSTRACT

This study examines race as a social construct, the phenomenon of racial discrimination, and its normalization within American society. The researcher examines the concerns through a critical analysis of *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison, asserting that individuals construct the concept of racism to uphold white supremacy over Black individuals. Racism has become commonplace since individuals encounter it daily. The biased disposition of white individuals towards black individuals demonstrate that racism has a biological or intellectual foundation; instead, it is a self-constructed concept rooted in animosity against people of color. This research is qualitative descriptive and Mimetic theory. The researcher has determined that racism is deeply ingrained in individuals' consciousness, rendering them incapable of evading its recognition as a genuine societal threat. The characters in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) by Morrison have a prejudiced disposition towards individuals of color, as they have been indoctrinated to believe that black people are not regular human beings and, hence, do not merit equitable treatment. As a result, the quotidian experience has institutionalized racism in American society, as it is not acknowledged as a significant issue that requires adequate recognition and intervention to guarantee equality for people of color in predominantly white societies.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/lark.3901>

دراسة الصراع العنصري في رواية توني موريسون العين الأكثر زرقة

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة الفكرة الأساسية لعدم المساواة العرقية في رواية توني موريسون "العين الأكثر زرقة". ويسعى إلى التحقيق فيها في سياق تنوعاتها التاريخية وحقائقها المعاصرة، كما يتضح من أدوار النوع الاجتماعي والعنصرية. ويتناول البحث قناعة بيكولا بأن العنصرية والأنوثة مرتبطتان بالبياض ولون البشرة. وتتناول هذه الورقة بشكل نقدي تمثيل المرأة السوداء في رواية موريسون "العين الأكثر زرقة" من وجهة نظر كاتب أسود. يتم فك رموز النضال والتحديات غير المرئية التي يواجهها مجتمع النساء السود. وسيرتكز البحث على نظريات العرق والتحيز التي ستوضح مفهوم السواد. ويسلط الضوء على حقوق الإنسان والقيم التي تعزز التعايش بين الأفراد من جميع الخلفيات والأعراق.

مفاتيح الكلمات: توني موريسون , العنصرية , النساء السود , الامريكية الافريقية

1.Introduction

Afro-American writing results from a cultural clash and a desire to connect with others. Since Afro-American writers have portrayed it as a struggle between blending in and standing out, they have grappled with both their cultural heritage and newly formed identities due to moving to a new location. African American writers have created amazing works since the 1970s. These kinds of works have changed American literature. Toni Morrison is, without question, one of them. Her poetic power and visionary force bring to life an important part of American life.

Morrison is a famous African American writer who was born in 1931. Many other writers, artists, and readers look up to her. The Nobel Prize in Literature was given to her in 1993. Morrison's literary works, published in over twenty different languages at the age of 62 piqued the interest of critics and students worldwide. The Swedish Academy's Nobel Committee announced that Morrison is "a literary artist of the highest quality" and "brings to life an important part of American life." In 2019, she died in New York City, USA. (Lisa R. Rhodes, 2001, p. 8). The researcher

examines this topic through the lens of Critical Race Theory (1970), as described by Delgado and Stefancic, focusing on *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Authored by Morrison. African Americans have encountered numerous challenges related to their skin color. In American white society and globally, they have been marginalized and subjected to inequitable treatment. White individuals compelled them into servitude due to perceptions of their inferiority as human beings.

Black individuals were regarded as less conventional than white individuals overall. They posited that two primary groupings of humans are delineated by inherited physical and behavioral differences.

Through the narrative of the Breedlove family's tragic experiences in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison explores the detrimental impact of mainstream society on black individuals. The Breedloves try to develop an idealized self, but their white-dominated society is failing them, so they have nothing to project onto. Their weak efforts are all for nothing. The Breedloves find themselves with an ideal ego constantly clashing with reality, which establishes the atmosphere for their melancholic existence. (Ding, Y. & Kong, X, p. 2010).

The Bluest Eye, the initial literary work by Morrison, most effectively encapsulates her viewpoint on Afro-American women and their struggles inside the dominant American society. The protagonist is Pecola, a little black child on the margins who experiences abuse from white people. White people's anti-Black conventions oppress and bind her. In his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon discovers that white-made norms create and develop black identity. At the expense of their own racial identity, those Black people identify themselves naively as part of the White mainstream culture. In this instance, Morrison seeks to make clear that Pecola's psychological collapse is more closely linked to the black community's blind connection with itself and the loss of its legacy and values than it is to the white mainstream culture's rejection of it. Morrison examines the struggle of certain Black

individuals to maintain their heritage and principles within this setting and how the tragic narrative explores hope. (Yuan, 2018, p. 104).

Bluest Eye tells stories of African American women who struggle to regain their lives and feel like they have a sense of self again. While Morrison's detailed writing never forgets how horrible and unjust it is, it often takes the reader back to time when people knew each other, and things were in order.

Due to her great writing abilities, willingness to share her books' ideas, and commitment to the literary world, Toni Morrison successfully draws attention to her works. Many literary reviewers and experts try to figure out what her work means. Scholars have regarded her writings as a reflection of the challenges a specific community faces and the universal difficulties and emotions experienced by all individuals. (Winny, 2008, p. 34).

Morrison writes about both the mental and cultural sides of the black community. Identity, family, and class strife are some of the problems she brings to light in a world where slavery seems to be a thing of the past, but it always feels like it is there. Other forms of slavery continue to expose women to enslaved individuals (Yahya, 2017, p. 630).

Toni Morrison has become a famous novelist. Her novels are "characterized by visionary force and poetic import," which "give life to an essential aspect of American reality" (Morrison, 1994).

The Oxford Dictionary defines racism as the prejudiced, discriminatory, or hostile treatment of individuals from a distinct racial background founded on the conviction that a particular race is of higher quality or importance. Racism is a deliberate effort to diminish one's self-worth and assurance by promoting different notions. (Belaid, 2017, p. 112). The French author Charles Malato initially coined the term 'racist' in 1897. Despite this, there is a widespread belief that individuals should receive different treatment due to their inherent biological variation. There must be a distinct

differentiation between European males and individuals of American Indian or African descent. Colonization primarily aimed to stimulate economic growth by employing enslaved individuals in the colonial economy. The colonialists employed the concept of the "white man's burden," which means rationalizing racism, thus enabling the subjugation of blacks and Native Americans as chattels. They transported African enslaved individuals to work on vast plantations dedicated to cotton and tobacco cultivation. At the same time, the majority of black women were responsible for taking care of white people's homes and children. Their superiors subjected them to sexual harassment and rape. Blacks faced exclusion from education, marriage, and employment opportunities due to the entrenchment of racism. Despite the colonialists' efforts to dehumanize African Americans, they continued to demand their rights and as time passed, an increasing number of people joined abolitionist campaigns. (2017, p. 13)

2.Literature review

According to Clair, "racism is an ideology of racial domination that assumes the biological or cultural superiority of one or more particular groups is used to establish a lower racial position under a higher racial group" (Clair, 2015, p. 857)

It is an ideology asserting that biological variations among human races dictate human success, positing that certain races possess the authority to govern or control those deemed inferior.

Racism persists throughout human history, especially in the present period when there is a greater comprehension of equality. In 1970, Toni Morrison released her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, set in Lorain, Ohio, her birthplace. This novel depicts African Americans' experiences with racism. It examines the negative impact it has on black girls' self-confidence due to mistreatment by white individuals. Racism is the belief that certain races have inherent superiority over others.

The physical appearance of an individual can readily distinguish between different races, according to Back & Solomos (2000). The concept of race is characterized by human groupings that share common physical characteristics, or, to put it differently, it is a confirmation of the relevance and importance of that concept. He asserts humans possess unique physical attributes, blood composition, skeletal structure, and skin. In addition, he observes that skin color, physique, hair, and facial structure are all discernible markers of race. The novel's author introduces prejudice at the outset of the narrative, illustrating the stark contrast between white and black individuals. In this novel, a consistently excellent and flawless object represents white individuals. For example, The Shirley Temple Cup primarily portrays Caucasian people in literature. According to the novel, Shirley Temple's image is replete with sweetness and beauty, enticing readers to savor it. In her novel, Toni Morrison uses some colors to differentiate between two different races.

Racist behavior harms the mental and physical well-being of the targeted individual. Prolonged exposure to racial discrimination can have a detrimental effect on the mental well-being of its victims, potentially leading to the development of mental illness. Victims may develop animosity towards those they see as being dissimilar to themselves and may even harbor self-loathing due to a loss of self-assurance, ultimately leading to depression. Solomon argued that racial prejudice not only exacerbates the interactions between persons of different races, particularly white and black individuals, but it also subjects non-white children to a system that inflicts lasting physical injury. (Solomon, 1992, p. 11).

slave owners have the right to designate names for their slaves as an indication of possession. African-Americans are prohibited from using their own names or bestowing African names upon their children, necessitating adherence to white cultural norms. As Rogahang stated, "During this institutionalized slavery, along with the dominance of white cultural values, the slaveholder assigned names to their

slaves not only a means of identifications or unwilling to be bothered to learn the African names of the person he has just bought but also a means of defining their authority in the new relationship between master and slave” (Rogahang et al., 2017). Additionally, she assigns a distinct significance to each race through the colors that she employs. According to Parrilo (1985), colors convey meanings about persons or their characteristics. It is necessary to acknowledge that the words utilized to categorize both races, white and black, typically contain positive and negative connotations. On page 316, Parrilo asserts that white represents the positive, while black represents the negative. This book portrays the white race as beautiful, using white as a defining characteristic.

Conversely, people often portray the black race as a dark color that is unattractive. Afro-American literature is a product of cultural clash and identification. The tension between adaptation and detachment defines the basic concept of Afro-American literature. In order to endure, African-American writers must uphold their cultural customs while still aligning themselves with the dominant societal norms. Since the 1970s, there has been a remarkable increase in the production of Afro-American literary works, predominantly authored by African American women writers. This has expedited the process of restructuring the American literary.

Morrison's book explores the connection between racism and beauty standards, highlighting the perception of white people as superior to black people and the societal perception of white people as beautiful and black people as ugly. Early modern European travellers, according to Camp (2015), called Africans "savages." These travellers also noticed that different African races had different skin tones and that different groups lived in different ways and looked different. The film "Camp" (2015) examines how white individuals perceive black people as unattractive and inferior within the historical framework of enslaved people in the United States. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because

they thought they were ugly (Morrison, 2007, p. 38). They have internalized their perceived beauty and blackness. They do not question their situation; they accept it. Because they perceive themselves as being of African descent and unattractive, they do not have much money. When Cholly's aunt falls ill, the women reflect on the relative importance of their race compared to others. Diamond and Morrison (2007) believe that guidance could have guided everyone's actions. They believe that the white children are superior to them. Everyone orders them because they think they are the worst. Additionally, racism is evident in the interactions between Mr. Yacobowski, Geraldine, and Pecola, as well as between Cholly and the two white men.

3. Research methodology

The researchers use qualitative research because the data are in the form of words. Mimetic theory studies the connection between text and reality, positing that literary works are imitations or reflections of human existence. The researchers have read the novel to be analyzed and then selected the theme for the study. Subsequently, choose an appropriate theory for the purpose of research. In her study, she selected the theme of racism and employed mimetic theory, which is predicated on societal occurrences. She gathered data from documents, books, journals, and online articles. This research examines words as the medium through which the facts is presented. She analyses, differentiates, and arranges appropriate data derived from multiple sources. This study concludes the underlying causes of racism and its effects on the mental health of victims. (Miles et al., 2014)

4. Discussion

The story of "The Bluest Eye" (in 1970) begins with the tragic event of Pecola, a young girl, which underscores its sexual undertones. Morrison criticizes the male patriarchy for its sexual and mental maltreatment of women.

Pecola believes that acquiring a set of blue eyes will enable her to evade the harsh treatment inflicted upon her by her parents, her neighbours' indifference, her friends' derision, and the community's and societal neglect. As a result, she attributes her unpleasantness to the absence of these eyes.

The Bluest Eye is a poignant narrative depicting a Pecola who believes would make her attractive and, thus, valued in society. The story's central concept revolves around the subjugation of black individuals by the prevailing American ideals of beauty, characterized by blue eyes, blond hair, and white skin. It portrays the individuals with honesty and sensitivity. It depicts the unfortunate state of African Americans in a racially discriminatory United States. Morrison candidly expressed her intentions for composing The Bluest Eye.

The novel portrays three distinct family stories: an idealistic white family (the Geraldines), a loving black family (the M'Dears), and a self-sacrificing lower-class family (the Breedloves). These scenarios accurately depict the various family models existing in society. (Tamu Lewis & Rice, 1999, p. 541). Morrison's critique of white mainstream culture is the transformation from an idealized state to a lower state. This critique focuses on the division within the black community, where some individuals unthinkingly assimilate into white mainstream society, abandoning their traditions, while others maintain their own culture and identity. According to Edward, Blight, & Gooding-Williams (1997), black folks are born with a metaphorical barrier and can perceive things beyond the ordinary in American society. They perceive themselves from the viewpoint of the prevailing ethnic groups. Unfortunately, this is the underlying reason for Pecola's misfortune and the subsequent misidentification.

Claudia MacTeer is characterized by her strong aversion to white individuals and anything associated with white supremacy.

"We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that, wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car, we will beat her up; make red marks on her white skin" (Morrison, 2007, p. 1).

Claudia's identity shows how strong black people can be in the face of racism. The comment above suggests that she harbored anger towards the haughty demeanor of those of Caucasian descent. Racism can lead to animosity towards individuals of Caucasian descent. The passage above depicts an occasion in which a Caucasian girl of the same age as Claudia was ostentatiously consuming dairy products in front of Claudia and Frieda. During this period, we categorize black individuals as impoverished and white as affluent. Consequently, black youngsters had to endure mockery from their white counterparts.

Pecola and Frieda's admiration for Shirley Temple and her Christmas gift experience further stoke Claudia's animosity towards white people.

"I had not arrived at the turning point on the development of my psyche which would allow me to love her. What i felt that time was unsullied hatred" (Morrison, 2007, p. 19).

"I destroyed white baby dolls. But the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls" (Morrison, 2007, p. 14).

Claudia defied white norms because she disliked constantly being compared to others. When comparing white girls to others, adults often seem unaware of their feelings of superiority. Claudia refuses to acknowledge the beauty of Shirley Temple. Adults' strong dislike stems from their perceived preference for white girls over black ones. Furthermore, accompanying her Christmas gift was a white doll, depicted in an image. However, she discarded the doll because she disapproved of

adults assimilating racist beliefs by embracing white people's ideals of beauty and presenting it to Claudia without considering her preferences.

Racism not only incites animosity towards individuals of Caucasian descent. Racism can lead to a decline in self-assurance and foster self-hatred among its victims. Pecola, an African American girl, encounters various manifestations of racism because of her race, which ultimately leads to her developing a deep dislike and loss of self-worth. She attributes all of her life's challenges and disasters to her unattractiveness. Consequently, she desired to vanish to escape from all her difficulties.

"Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. . . . Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left" (Morrison, 2007, p. 45).

Pecola consistently implores God to shift her sight, firmly convinced that her entreaty will eventually be fulfilled, regardless of the time it may take.

"Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year, she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time" (Morrison, 2007, p. 47).

Pecola successfully obtains her desires. The eyes are not only blue but also the most intense blue. She exhibits a refusal to acknowledge reality and has divergent beliefs. Her cravings transform into fixations and delusions, resulting in a loss of awareness. The taunts, rejection, and his father's actions utterly devastated Pecola. She exhibits signs of insanity, as she frequently engages in solitary walks on the outskirts of the town, having conversations with her imaginary companion. All her generation's children feared her, and everyone deliberately avoided her.

"The damage done was total. She spent her days, her tendrils, sap-green days, walking up and down, up and down, her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear." (Morrison, 2007, p. 204).

Pecola's tragic circumstances, including her loveless upbringing, constant rejection by others, and eventual loss of identity, are predetermined from the beginning. The Breedloves, Pecola's family, firmly believed in their ugliness, considering it a distinctive and unchangeable trait. Consequently, they resigned themselves to this belief without any doubt or resistance. " Moreover, Pecola "hid behind hers" while they "took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it." She remains hidden, covered, and obscured, emerging from her concealment only rarely, and even then, she longs for the restoration of her disguise. (Morrison, 1970, p. 34-35). Unfortunately, Pecola's tragic story extends beyond its effects on her and her family, acting as a symbol of the broader tragedy affecting the black community. This tragedy arises from the efforts of many black individuals to detach themselves physically and mentally from anything that reminds them of their African heritage and shapes their African identity.

Racial categorization influences Pecola's inherent understanding of beauty. She was disadvantaged from the beginning. Because of her mother's complete focus on her work, she has absorbed the belief that black is unattractive and white is beautiful. This caused her to perceive Pecola as an unattractive black hair mass at birth. She and Cholly have provided Pecola with minimal affection or sustenance. Their dispute's intensity consumes them to the point where they are unaware of its profound effect on their child. Morrison uses these two families as a narrative and subplot, much like Shakespeare's King Lear. The MacTeers' situation is less severe than the Breed's. While the parents appear to be struggling with poverty, they remain steadfastly committed to their house. Mr. Macteer believes his responsibility is to care for his family and raise his girls according to current moral values. There is no

text provided. Both parents lack the time and mental capacity to raise their daughters. They perceive Claudia and Frieda as mere objects, troublesome yet significant enough to require attention. Mrs. Macteer treats them with severity, yet she still demonstrates concern. She dispenses punishment capriciously and expeditiously, without concern for their bodily or moral well-being. She ceases her abusive behavior towards them as a means of alleviating her accumulated anxieties. (McKay, 1988, p. 45) Pecola, a young African American girl, is fatigued by the promotion of whiteness as the ultimate standard of beauty. This societal expectation profoundly disturbs her, leading her to pray for blue eyes every day fervently. The main character fervently and resolutely prayed every night to be blessed with blue eyes. Son (2007). She believes how others see her might change if she had blue eyes.

Furthermore, if Pecola had blue eyes, her perception of the universe would be distinct. She believes that having aesthetically pleasing eyes would transform her entire being. She believes possessing blue eyes will resolve her wretched destitution and unattractiveness. Her possession of blue eyes causes her to anticipate that others in society, including her classmates and family members, will form distinct perceptions of her. Her beautiful blue eyes compel them to refrain from misbehaving in her presence. Maureen's arrival unequivocally substantiates this opinion, as the boys on the street ceased their quarrelling and ill-behaviour towards Pecola upon her arrival. "Maureen approached me from behind, and the boys seemed hesitant to proceed further due to her eyes, which were wide with curiosity and reminiscent of springtime energy," Diamond & Morrison (2007) said. They feign indifference towards the females and depart. Indeed, they have no desire to engage in misconduct or commit heinous acts in Maureen's presence who has a fair understanding.

Toni Morrison elucidates that Pecola harbours a longing for blue eyes. However, she desires to acquire diverse perspectives and images, as if altering her eye colour will alter the nature of truth. Pecola has lately witnessed a disagreement between her

parents, which has caused her to feel passive sorrow. In order to ease this anguish, she believes that witnessing something different is the only option. She believed having blue eyes would lead others to exhibit beautiful and benevolent behaviour due to their attractiveness. Pecola's desire is well-reasoned, yet it requires further consideration and wisdom. She asserts that an individual's skin and eye colour influence their treatment and the experiences they encounter.

The MacTeer household exemplifies the prevalent African-American households in Lorain, Ohio, during the period in which the fictional work is set. The majority of African Americans were living in poverty. Consequently, they made an effort to adhere to the standards of decency. The mistreatment of children was commonplace. However, the violation of their innocence was carried out through ideological means rather than physical ones. The breed-loving family exemplifies African-American society's shortcomings. Morrison deliberately crafts her narrative.

Of course, the novel is about more than just Pecola's sorrow. The story follows three prostitutes named "Poland," "China," and "Maginot Line," who express true affection for Pecola and take on responsibility for black society. Morrison portrays a collective of African Americans through three prostitutes who preserve their cultural heritage and sense of self while enduring hardships, showcasing a hopeful outlook on the future of the black community. Morrison stated in an interview that her works are motivated by hope, not frustration, and aim to identify useful and unhelpful ancient occasions that can offer food, as stated by Jones (1997), p. 161. Pecola frequently seeks comfort and affection in the dwellings of the three sex workers.

Morrison has expressed her preference for reading the previously mentioned novel. However, she admitted to writing *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* (Bloom, 2007, p. 17). Morrison's writings address the systematic racism that African-American women in society face. Her writings have given African American women the confidence to

stand up for their rights, ask for parity in treatment with white women, and demand equal opportunities. *Beloved*, *Sula* and *The Bluest Eye* are just a few books the author has written about how racism has harmed and destroyed women. Morrison draws inspiration for Pecola Breedlove, [the central figure of *The Bluest Eye*, from a little girl he encounters at eleven. She and the other girl engage in a discussion on the existence of God. Morrison holds that viewpoint, but the young girl of African descent has a contrasting opinion, a stark contrast that adds tension to their conversation. The tiny girl desires blue eyes, yet her genuine longing remains unfulfilled. Morrison vividly remembers her response. She fervently prayed to acquire her desired blue eyes for two years.]

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison intends to question the prevailing Western ideals of beauty and illustrate that the notion of beauty is intricately tied to societal norms. Her focus is mostly on the ethnic and racial aspects rather than aesthetics. Morrison asserts that the dominant social group's promotion of its ideals of attractiveness during the formative years undermines the African individual's self-perception. The Breedlove family, in particular, plays a significant role in this, as they employ the dominant group's reasoning to convince themselves of their unattractiveness, thereby perpetuating these societal norms. Mbalia, (2004).

In contrast to other individuals of African descent within the society, the three prostitutes do not perceive Pecola as unattractive or unclean. They have a sincere disposition and openly display disdain for authority figures and men. Furthermore, they opt to lead their own lives without concern for the judgments of others. They engage in joviality, consume beverages, and use profanity. The town's upstanding citizens shun these individuals, yet they are the ones who offer genuine affection to Pecola. Their affectionate mother's concern for Pecola is evident in the nicknames she gives her, such as *Dumplin*, *Puddin*, *Chicken*, and *Honey*. Pecola finds comfort and abundant laughter in their house rather than in her home. Undoubtedly, in a

predominantly black society where many black individuals are in denial of their background and have distanced themselves from it, the three prostitutes symbolize and affirm the significance of black culture and legacy.

5.Conclusion

Morrison effectively portrays the misery and hurt experienced by African American ladies in the novel "The Bluest Eye." The African main character in this book, Pecola, tries to keep up with violence, racism, sexual abuse, and discrimination. Morrison's book discusses the pain and suffering black women go through in a society dominated by white people. White individuals discriminate against Black individuals due to their skin colour. People perceive them as inanimate objects devoid of emotions. In Morrison's books, several African women uncover their true selves and navigate the challenging landscape of racial society. Pecola thinks she has her blue eyes by the end of the book. However, she remains desirous of additional things.

Consequently, the principles governing aesthetic appeal will always remain incomprehensible, even for those of Caucasian descent. The Bluest Eye centres around African Americans, as the protagonist belongs to this racial group. Ultimately, "the bluest eye" does not just mean Pecola's wish. One could interpret "eye" as the subject and the presence of the bluest eye in her deep African American heritage. If she thought that getting the bluest eye would fix her, the author thinks that social and other relationships would bring out her whole new personality.

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