

**Blood Rules: Racial Passing and the Commodification of Difference in Victoria Aveyard's
*The Red Queen***

The juxtaposition of racial ambiguity, racial oppression and upward mobility in Victoria Aveyard's YA dystopian fantasy, *The Red Queen*, positions this text as a window into the complex, unstable, and often contradictory meaning of race in America, particularly in this present era of late capitalism. In this essay, I argue that *The Red Queen* perpetuates colonial discourses of biological determinism that have long since fuelled racial anxieties and justified state-sanctioned racial terror. Simultaneously, the text works with the concept of race and particularly racial rebellion through the depoliticizing language of capitalist modernity that offers racial minorities the promise of inclusion through their ideological and emotional investment in consumption. Theorizing how this contradictory framing of race works to reinforce ontological discourses while offering readers a commodified racial 'experience' might help us understand why, in this present moment of YA popularity, Katniss's tale of rebellion can find mainstream success at the box office at the same time that Ferguson protestors are denounced by the mainstream as dangerous threats to social order.¹ My hope in raising these critical concerns is not to criticize the text *per se*, but to complicate discussions of diversity in Young Adult fiction. Whereas campaigns like #WeNeedDiverseBooks are preoccupied with the inclusion of racial difference in Young Adult fiction, we also need to be aware of the violent, historical and contemporary power relations that belie the mass market and consumer demand for stories, in any genre, of race and racial oppression.

¹ Joshua Berlinger and Ray Sanchez, "Protestors Disrupt Black Friday Shopping after Ferguson Comes Together," *CNN* 28 November 2014, 22 February 2015 <<http://www.cnn.com>>.