

Racism and Class Discrimination in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*
and *Native Son*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

In most of his writings, Richard Wright addresses issues such as racism, discrimination, and oppression. *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are two of his canonical books that focus on the plight of black Americans in the face of racism and class discrimination. In *Black Boy*, Wright's real-life experience from childhood to adulthood is presented. In this autobiographical narrative, he discusses how he faced racism throughout his life. Wright's novel *Native Son* is about Bigger Thomas, a young black man whose accumulated rage explodes in violent ways, leading him to his downfall. In these two books, Wright exposes the hypocrisy of whites, portrays the effects of deterministic social realities on black people, and shows how racism and class discrimination works in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. This thesis aims to analyze *Black Boy* and *Native Son* through the lens of postcolonial and Marxist theories.

Keywords: racism; social determinism; white hypocrisy; class discrimination; postcolonial; Marxist

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

“It might have been that my tardiness in learning to sense white people as ‘white’ people came from the fact that many of my relatives were ‘white’-looking people. My grandmother, who was white as any ‘white’ person, had never looked ‘white’ to me.” - Richard Wright

Richard Wright was one of the most influential African American writers of the 20th century. He was born on September 4th, 1908 in Natchez, Mississippi and died on November 28th, 1968 in Paris, France. Impoverished and discriminated against, Wright was deprived of a wholesome childhood as he spent much of it in fear and shame. As an African American who grew up in poverty, he faced discrimination, oppression and violence during his lifetime. Due to his skin colour, he had to face many challenges from a young age. He saw people being treated wrongfully and without any justice. Many of his writings reflect what he observed in his real life. His works such as *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938), *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1941), and *The Outsider* (1953) focus on the themes of oppression and violence faced by black people in the white American society. *Black Boy* and *Native Son* are two of his most famous canonical works. These literary masterpieces represent the lifestyle and plight of African-Americans. In these oeuvres, Wright offers his readers a look into the relationship between class and racism.

The quote that started off this chapter is from *Black Boy*, an autobiographical narrative by Wright. The quote shows how Wright was aware of the hypocrisy of the American society and all the discrimination black people face. *Black Boy* was published in 1945. In this autobiographical narrative, Wright explores what it means to be black in America. While depicting his journey as an African American child to an adult, Wright focuses especially on issues related to racism, discrimination, segregation, and oppression that black people face on a daily basis. He shares his

struggles in life as an African American and discusses the various hardships he faced. In the 20th century, African Americans were relegated to the status of second-class citizens, so they faced various challenges and threats in society. *Black Boy* is divided into two sections. The first section depicts Wright's childhood as he grows up in the Jim Crow South, and the second section focuses on his time in Chicago as he works with the Communist party. In both sections, he encounters various dehumanizing treatment and undergo painful experiences. Overall, the story centers on his difficult childhood with a seriously ill mother and a stern and religious grandmother, his coming of age, and most importantly, his understanding of the divide between whites and blacks in the United States during the 20th century. In the book, Wright not only shows the ugly side of white people but he also depicts the good in them as well. Young Richard Wright used to be full of fear because of white people. The only wrong thing he did at that time was to be born in a white society as a black individual. For this reason, his abilities were often ignored. As an adult, he was even mocked by his colleagues. However, the mockery of white people could not take away his bravery to accomplish his goals in life. It is evident that Wright not only recounts his personal experiences in the book but he also criticizes the white American society.

Richard Wright's *Native Son* was published in 1940. The novel is about a 20-year-old Bigger Thomas and his tragic life. Wright shows how Bigger, a young man living in Chicago, had to face discrimination, poverty and various struggles to get what he want in life. The novel shows black Americans struggling for their rights even in the 1930s. It also brings the racial history of violence to the forefront. In the novel, Bigger accidentally kills Mary Dalton, his white employer's daughter. As the novel progresses, it is evident that the white characters think that black people are inferior and not on their level just because of their skin colour. White people decide what black people should get. In this way, they try to mistreat black people. Black people also end up

internalizing the belief that white people are superior. The most shocking aspect of this novel is that the blacks are so deeply manipulated by the whites that they internalize their inferiority. In a way, it can be said that they become complicit in their own oppression. As a result, they had a difficult time standing up for their rights. Furthermore, the novel demonstrates that the talent and hard work of blacks do not actually matter to the whites. Even if black people are capable of good job, whites give them lower class job. Many critics say that they could not find enough positive roles of African Americans in this novel. Bigger is a highly flawed character. As blacks were living in a white-dominated society, they used to fear being misunderstood by white people. When a black individual commits a crime, white people used to portray it as bigger crime and charge him even more. They used to blame the entire black society for a crime committed by a black individual. *Native Son* seems to argue that Bigger Thomas is a victim of circumstance, a man who has been reduced to cruelty and violence as a result of racism and systemic oppression in a white dictated world.

Through these two works *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, readers can get a glimpse into the black experience in the United States. Both books show the reality of American society in the 20th century. They demonstrate how white Americans oppress black Americans. Black people used to tolerate this injustice in silence. The purpose of the thesis is to analyze how racism, social determinism, and class system are related to white hypocrisy and how black Americans struggled and suffered in the United States, a site of extreme racial violence. Postcolonial and Marxist theories will be used to achieve this purpose.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Until the end of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, African Americans were treated very poorly in the United States, and they were denied many opportunities by white Americans. Centuries earlier, people from Africa were forcefully taken away from their homes and enslaved in the States because they were considered as inferior, uncultured and uncivilized. After the Civil War in 1865, the 13th Amendment was passed by Congress. As a result, slavery was abolished and nearly four million slaves attained freedom. During the reconstruction period, the 15th amendment seemingly guaranteed black Americans the right to vote. However, exercising that right was still extremely difficult. Although the war had ended and slavery was abolished, this was still a very depressing period for black people in the United States. They were treated as second-class citizens and were still dominated by the white supremacist society.

Starting in 1870, all the Southern states reenacted laws to ban marriage between blacks and whites. Furthermore, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Jim Crow laws were introduced in the Southern states. These laws essentially legalized racial segregation in all public spaces. For example, black Americans were not allowed to be in the same schools, colleges, restaurants, parks, bus stations, and other public facilities as white Americans. They could not even drink out of the same water fountain as white Americans. Thus, the Jim Crow laws dictated where blacks can eat, walk, rest, and so on and stated that they cannot share the same facilities as whites. African Americans had to obey the Jim Crow laws so that they can avoid being mistreated by the whites. John Lewis, a civil rights activist said “Ours is not a struggle of one day, one week or one year. Ours is the struggle of lifetime. And every generation has to do our part.” Lewis highlights how

African Americans' struggles never end. The abolishment of slavery did not immediately give them the rights that they were seeking.

Richard Wright's experience of dealing with oppression and violence can be found in *Black Boy*. He shows the real-life situation of the Deep South in the 20th century. As he was born in Natchez, Mississippi, one of the most racist parts of America, he was able to accomplish this. The book records the deteriorating living conditions of African Americans. Wright illustrates the schism in American culture between two distinct groups. Neighbors are divided into white and black groups according to skin color and race. In addition, the idea of how a group sees itself in relation to other groups might be revealed by its racial makeup. The superiority of whites over blacks, as well as their dominance, oppression, discrimination, and occasionally violent behavior are also portrayed. Wright also shows white hypocrisy and the idea of social determinism. The book best illustrates and describes the harsh reality of racism in post-slavery America. According to Yoshinobu Hakutani, "though not intended as such, [*Black Boy*] is a convincing sociological study. Like sociology, it not only analyses a social problem, but offers the solution of a problem it treats" (Hakutani 71). Wright shows through his work one of the major issues of America which is racism. In *Native Son*, Wright conveys quite a pessimistic view regarding the situation of African Americans in the United States. However, in *Black Boy*, there is a sense of hope. In fact, Hakutani even claims that although *Black Boy* depicts various kinds of racial oppression, what is more notable is Wright's "transcendence of that oppression" (74). In *Black Boy*, Wright is somehow able to free himself from white dominance. Thus, the book offers hope for black Americans and conveys the message that it is possible to overcome challenges engendered by racial difference. Wright not only talks about racism but also shows how black Americans can overcome challenges with dignity (Makombe, 2013).

Black Boy has often been declared as a kind of protest writing. The book shows how people who grow up in such a racist society can find the strength to fight back when they realize just how miserable their conditions are. They learn to survive in such a racist and unfair society. Adrian Weiss discusses the importance of imagination in the book. According to Weiss, “Wright endows Richard with an active and fertile imagination that gradually creates in the hero an organic awareness that life’s possibilities are not limited to the bleakness of the reality in which he lives” (Weiss 93). Although many black people have the potential to attain success, they find it difficult to achieve success because they often end up investing all their energy in surviving such a toxic and racially charged environment. In *Black Boy*, Richard faces hunger, poverty, boredom and other issues from such a young age. However, he is able to use his negative emotions derived from such issues as his weapon, allowing him to imagine and write. He does not let toxicity destroy his will power to write against the hypocrisy of American society. He manages to grow a healthy mindset in such a negative world. He learns to use his imagination as a weapon (Weiss 93).

It should be mentioned that the classification of *Black Boy* as an autobiography is quite controversial. W. E. B. Du Bois, an American sociologist and civil rights activist, asserts that the novel is “probably intended to be fiction or fictionalized biography. At any rate the reader must regard it as creative writing rather than simply a record of life” (qtd. in Hakutani, 70). Moreover, touched by Wright’s works, American writer William states, “I hope you will keep on saying it, but I hope you will say it as an artist, as in *Native Son*” (qtd. in Hakutani, 70). He praises Wright, but insinuates that Wright’s fictional works like *Native Son* is preferable to his supposedly autobiographical work. The opinion of Faulkner is that Wright wrote his autobiography in such a way that it did not seem like an autobiography.

According to Albert Vogel, “there is a sense in which the poverty of the black man results as much from his race and from the social role assigned to him by the whites, as from the incongruities from the modern society” (qtd. in Avono, 54). The Deep South was a very toxic environment in the first half of the 20th century, and very few American writers were able to successfully bring out such a dark side of American society in their writing. Wright illustrates the ugly side of society by exploring issues of “hunger, rage, family disruption, ‘crossed-up feeling,’ a claustrophobic religiosity whose grim theme of ‘cosmic annihilation’ he struggles against” (Leibowitz 72). It is evident that Wright not only focuses on racism but also on other relevant issues of 20th century in *Black Boy*. He especially highlights the intersection between the race and class. He shows how the racist Southern society “denies Blacks the fundamental rights while privileging Whites. And no matter how hard a black person works in the South, s/he can never be rich nor enjoy the fruits of his labor” (Avono 62).

Richard Wright’s *Native Son* is a social protest fiction. An examination of Wright’s fiction reveals, “he drew from personal experience and observation, the condition of the society about him, and his theoretic concerns” (Kinnamon 66). Thus, the novel was inspired by his own life experiences. He mentioned the actual situation of black Americans in racist society. Black people’s actual living situations are reflected in the novel’s descriptions of Chicago and the South Side slums. When Wright was a child, he shared a small, filthy apartment with his mother, brother, and aunt. Wright experienced the same challenging circumstances that Bigger Thomas and the other black characters experience in *Native Son*. He might have expressed his anguish as a black man in a white world through the character of Bigger Thomas. Wright, like Bigger Thomas, had previously worked for a white family. When he was fifteen, he worked for a while family in Jackson, Mississippi, and his duties included cutting wood, carrying coal, and tending the fire.

Bigger Thomas faces similar incidents and experiences in his book *Native Son*. When Wright was working at a South Side Boys' Club in his mid-thirties, he observed some young black boys and men like Bigger Thomas who were fearful, dissatisfied, restless, moody, angry, and fighting to survive in the urban jungle. Therefore, the author's personal experiences served as the inspiration for Bigger Thomas. In fact, Charles I. Glicksberg, a Polish-American writer, says that "Richard Wright is Bigger Thomas – one part of him anyway. Bigger Thomas is what Richard Wright, had circumstances worked out differently, might have become" (110).

Through the novel *Native Son*, Wright not only describes his own experiences but also illustrates the political and societal prejudice against blacks. The crime committed by the main character Bigger Thomas is connected to a 1938 rape case involving Robert Nixon and Earl Hicks. The case had already gained notoriety by the time Wright started writing this novel, and articles about it had even been published in various Chicago newspapers. In 1938, Florence Johnson, a white woman, was beaten to death with a brick by a black criminal in her apartment" (Kinnamon 68). Nixon and Hicks were both charged with the murder after the victim was killed. The Chicago Tribune incorrectly accused both of being involved in the murder despite there being no evidence of rape. Nixon had to endure far more because of his darker skin tone than Hicks. He was referred to as "sex moron," "jungle beast," "rapist slayer" and so on (Kinnamon 68). The media primarily covered his race and punished the entire black neighborhood for his crime. Bigger Thomas experiences similar issues in *Native Son*. He is also charged with raping Mary Dalton and killing her, but he did not do so. He did not sexually assault her and he did not kill her on purpose. It is merely a bogus charge. The media also portrays the black population as dangerous and threatening criminals. A claims of police violence, a convoluted chain of admissions and denials, and dramatic violent outbursts came before the trial, and Nixon was given the death penalty (Kinnamon 70).

Wright illustrates this in his work *Native Son* through the terrible end of Bigger Thomas. Thus, Wright accurately depicts the Nixon case in his book *Native Son* as well as his Mississippi childhood pains and tribulations (Kinnamon 70).

In *Native Son*, Wright manages to strike a balance between the character's descriptions and their emotions as well as the urgency of the issue. This distinguishes and elevates his writing. Wright's novel demonstrates four different voices. One is that of the storyteller, another is Bigger's slurred speech, and another one of the slanted voices in the ostensibly "objective" media, including the State's attorney Buckley, and the final one is the wise and kind words of a lawyer named Boris Max (Larsen 105). First off, when presenting the narrative of Bigger, the narrator uses a neutral tone of voice. Secondly, Bigger Thomas' voice conveys his hopes, aspirations, and sorrows. Later, Bigger's dissatisfaction and rage are also conveyed in this voice. Thirdly, the spokesperson for the media and Buckley's voices are toxic, biased, and racist. When a white man commits a crime, the media singles out that person for responsibility for the crime. Alternatively, when a black person commits a crime, the media blames the entire black community, and the entire black community is portrayed in a negative light. This displays the skewed and bigoted perspective of the media. Buckley, the state's attorney, is a prime illustration of white hypocrisy, bigotry, and oppression. He unfairly blames Bigger for committing additional offenses and killings that Bigger did not commit. Finally, the voice of Boris Max, a lawyer, is impartial and kind. He perceives Bigger's adversity and the toxicity of his surroundings. His voice illustrates that even though the majority of white people are bigoted and oppressive, some of them continue to view black people as equals and express sympathy for them. Nevertheless, these four voice types are distinct from one another. The masterful use of these voices attests to the fact that the novel is a brutally honest presentation and explanation of racism's impact. Wright describes the lives, sufferings, and impacts of racism

on blacks while utilizing a distinctive approach as having various viewpoints and impressions of white people. Wright's ability to animate the four voices is evidence of his artistic talent and literary writing prowess. As a result, this novel has established itself as a major work of modern American literature.

American literary critics Edward Margolies and Robert Bohn offer important remarks on *Native Son*. They agree that the novel's virtues transcend its flaws. However, while praising most of the novel's tales, they are quick to criticize the elements of the conclusion that are didactic. Despite its controversial structural problems and captivating aspects, *Native Son* is not the type of book that one reads once and then never pick up again. The narrative's strength is so great that it grips one back in with a guilty, dreadful interest, much like a killer visiting the crime scene. The *Native Son*'s gripping impact derives not just from its melancholic undertones but also from Wright's skill in sculpting the content (Larsen 105).

American author James Baldwin described *Native Son* as a parody of a social or political objectives. Wright discusses the precarious living conditions of black people in American society including their lack of education and employment chances. Black folks have already been accustomed to all this. Wright aims to inform white people, who are his primary audience, about the state of blacks. However, given how he portrayed blacks, many of them would not like Bigger, the book's protagonist, and might find it difficult to see past his race. As always, blackness is portrayed as threatening. Bigger stands in for the entire black community. Because of his hatred and terror of white people, this man has committed rape, murder, and other crimes. Other Black characters lack strength as well. Being under the whites' authority, they accept their mistreatment so readily. Instead of resisting racism, the black characters in the novel are silently accepting it. Black people are often stereotyped as dangerous and criminal, although that is not the case most

of the time. Baldwin claims that black people would not like such a monstrous portrayal of the main character. Although Wright is a black author, he portrays the black experience in this book in such clichéd ways. Baldwin therefore criticizes the book since it is seen as a protest book, although it is full of caricatures. In the novel, Wright paints a stereotypical picture of black people. As a result, the novel ends up reinforcing negative view towards black people, and “this is why the ‘protest novel,’ far from being disturbing, had become a ‘comforting aspect of the American scene,’ cherished by white liberals” (Mathis and Mishra).

Additionally, critics pay a close attention to the environment and how it affects Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*. The novel highlights the importance Wright attaches to the social, cultural, and economic aspects in the character growth for Bigger (Hoose 46). Consequently, numerous aspects of Bigger’s surroundings greatly aid in the development of his character and inner state of mind. It is evident that racial prejudice devastates the protagonist of this novel. Many critics have recently asserted that Bigger Thomas is a “tragic victim of implacable social forces” (Goldstein 120). The racial markers of “whiteness” and “blackness” in society impacts Bigger’s awareness and thought. Bigger must contend with racism as a black African American in a white environment. His skin colour has caused him a lot of suffering, prejudice, and discrimination. The character Bigger is constantly fashioned in a constrained manner as opposed to a useful manner. His aspirations and skills are being oppressed and criticized because of his skin tone.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Questions:

The following research questions provide a clear focus for this thesis:

- How does Richard Wright portray the issue of racism in his writings?
- Were African Americans discriminated against because of their class? If so, how?
- How do the experiences black people face in their racist society affect their behaviors?

3.2 Research Methodology:

This thesis employs a qualitative method. It explores the sufferings of blacks due to racism and class discrimination. The rights of black Americans were determined by the hypocrisy of whites. This thesis will rely on information found in secondary resources such as scholarly articles, books, and newspapers. These secondary sources include the works of well-known writers and critics such as James Baldwin, Charles Irving Glickberg, W.E.B. Du Bois, and so on. In these sources, these scholars have discussed the two primary sources in detail. In addition to relying on older content, this thesis also includes information found in more current and reliable articles. The primary sources in this thesis include Richard Wright's autobiography *Black Boy* and novel *Native Son*. The primary texts are analyzed by utilizing pertinent literature items as well as the researcher's personal interpretation.

The representation of racism in the main texts have been the subject of numerous research. Despite the fact that there are enough research papers regarding how racism and white people's hypocrisy are portrayed in the books *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, insufficient research has been done on social determinism and class discrimination, two topics that also appear in these two

works. Analysis of racism, social determinism, white hypocrisy and class prejudice are present in Richard Wright's works *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, but insufficient research has been done on social determinism and class prejudice. Thus, this thesis will set itself apart from existing research by specifically focusing on the idea of social determinism in a racist and class-based white society, and its effects on black Americans.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial and Marxist theories will be used to answer the research questions that have been set forth earlier in this chapter. Edward Said is regarded as the originator of postcolonial thought. Despite the fact that he did not mention this phrase in his book 1978 book *Orientalism*, his arguments and ideas have a structure within which the theory can be formulated. The theory explores the effects of colonialism. Colonization is the dominance of one country's social, political, and economic spheres over another country or dependent region's economic and cultural sectors. This often involves the subjugation of one race by another race. During the colonial era, the British or white people founded their colonies in other nations or regions, including Asia, Africa, and America. In addition to colonizing the locals in those areas, the white colonizers also imposed their own perspectives and beliefs upon the colonized people. They viewed Africans and people of color as being untamed, primitive, uncultured, and uncivilized. They considered themselves superior.

The colonized began to believe that their culture was not as advanced as the culture of Europe. They made an effort to accept the colonizers' claims about history. This is because the colonial country's educational and literary systems were not as advanced and enriched as those in Europe. The concept "Otherness" was introduced to non-Europeans or people of the Orient by European colonizers. When the villagers began to think that the Europeans were better, they felt

undervalued. In the colonies, people's status began to be defined by their race and class. In addition, freedom was limited to sustain the institution of slavery. In the United States, black people were enslaved from the 17th century until the end of the American Civil War in 1865. Despite the abolishment of slavery, blacks in the country continued to be mistreated especially in the first half of the 20th century. The lingering racism and discrimination in America that began during the slavery era continued to manifest themselves in various ways. White people continued to dominate and subjugate black people.

Marxism is a materialist philosophical system that discusses socioeconomic class conflict and aims to create a society without classes. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were the first to propose this theory. This theory discusses how individuals struggle and endure in a society with a class structure. This idea holds that advancement is possible by conflict between contrasting forces. The course of history moves forward and develops through social strife and class struggle. In a class-based society, there are primarily two groups of people: the upper class and the lower class. In a society with a rigid class structure, those from lower or poorer class struggle the most. They confront challenges and sufferings in order to meet the demands of the upper class. They lack access to adequate food for their survival as well as quality healthcare and education. They are forced to live in poverty since they do not have enough money. They are frequently forced to give up their goals due to their lack of resources. Additionally, they face significant challenges in trying to live up to social expectations in a racialized society.

The coming chapters will explore how Richard Wright depicts the problems faced by black community. Chapter 4 will focus on his autobiography *Black Boy* and Chapter 5 will discuss his novel *Native Son*. These chapters will apply the aforementioned theories when analyzing the primary texts.

Chapter 4

Analysis of *Black Boy*

4.1 Racism

When persons of different races are treated differently and given fewer opportunities, this is known as racism. Seeing as how Richard Wright belongs to the black community, he has dealt with racism since he was young. He has often been abused, neglected, and victimized by whites. His experiences are illustrated in his autobiographical narrative *Black Boy*. The book presents the life of Wright and more importantly his interactions with the whites as well as his own family during the Jim Crow Era.

When the narrative begins, Richard Wright is a little boy living with his family. Because of his young age, he is unaware of divide between blacks and whites. The white men and women he encounters are people, he tells himself. He also never thinks twice about how he is different from them. When Richard witnesses a white man abusing a black youngster, he assumes that the former is the latter's father. As a result, he thinks that the white man has the right to beat up his black son if he wants to. His mum, Ella, though, sets him straight by saying "The white man was not the father of the black boy" (Wright, *Black Boy* 27). This has left Richard perplexed. His mother refuses to answer any of his queries once he comes to the conclusion that the white man was not the black boy's father. This example shows that Richard is too young at this point to comprehend what exactly racism is. He can only watch in confusion and despair as black people are mistreated by whites. This incident causes him to wonder about the whites' unfair treatment of blacks. In this way, Richard's perspective of white people develops from his childhood.

There is another instance in the book where a black individual is threatened by white community in American South. When Richard is in Arkansas, white ruffians murder Richard's

uncle Mr. Hoskins, a man who owns a profitable saloon business. The whites kill his uncle for personal gain. Following his passing, the entire family is uprooted from their home and taken as refugees to Grandma's ancestral mansion. They flee the town without even retrieving Mr. Hoskin's body. As a result, "There was no funeral. There was no music. There was no period of mourning. There were no flowers. There were only silence, quiet weeping, whispers, and fear. I did not know when or where Uncle Hoskins was buried" (Wright, *Black Boy* 51).

Richard turns to his mum and asks why they do not fight back, but his scared mother keeps him from speaking. The law has rendered them impotent. White supremacy is the order of the day, and black people must deal with the consequences and struggle for fair treatment. A black family has lost its sole source of income because of prejudice, but they lack the nerve to advocate for themselves. This is because they are too terrified of white people to speak up when they see wrongdoings or witness painful sights. Because of the colour of their skin, they have no legal standing to demand fair treatment. If Richard and his family had stayed in the town after his uncle's death, they could have ended up in the same position as Laura and her 12-year-old son L.D. Nelson. On May 25, 1911, the African American mother and son were brutally murdered close to Okemah, Okfuskee country, Oklahoma. The murder of Deputy Sheriff George H. Loney was allegedly committed by the two, so Laura and her son were put behind bars. Nelson allegedly shot and killed Loney when the latter was searching for a stolen cow on Nelson's farm. Laura was blamed for the murder as well because she was the one who picked up the weapon first. Austin, her husband, also admitted guilt for robbery and he was sent to the more secure state penitentiary at McAlester. Laura and Nelson were taken prisoner on May 24. They were kidnapped from their cells by a mob of dozens of armed white men and were badly beaten. Their bodies were hung from a bridge above the North Canadian River. The press alleged that Laura was raped by the white kidnappers. This

demonstrates how black people may be put to death before their trials even begin if they were accused of a crime (Clark). This is why Richard and his entire family had to leave their home.

At one point, Richard sees that there are black soldiers in training for World War I. On the one hand, this instance makes it seem as though racism is not a huge problem in the United States and perhaps the United States is a relatively black-friendly country if there are blacks who readily volunteer to defend their nation at any cost. However, soon after, Richard sees a chain gang that consists of many black men. He asks his mother why these black men do not fight. His mother tells him that they cannot fight because the whites are too well-armed. This discourse points to anti-black racism. It also shows the irony of blacks' impending fight for their country against adversaries. Both black and white men want to protect their country from external threats. They are gearing up for battle against potentially adversarial nations. Black Americans are looked down upon in their own country only because of the color of their skin, but they will still fight for their country. Interestingly, this instance in the book characterizes the racism in American society and the plight of black Americans. Although blacks are discriminated against based on their race, they do nothing to stop it and instead watch in silence. White men have more authority than they do, as symbolized by guns. The white men possess "firearms, but black men generally do not" (Wright 55).

Richard has been concerned about racial injustice since he was a kid. As a youngster, he thinks it odd that black people are not afforded the same rights as white people in the country where they were born. Richard, having endured so much at such a little age, personifies the dread and loathing of individuals of European descent. This prevents him from selling his dog Betsy to a white woman, something he desperately wants to do. Because of his hunger, he wants to sell the dog to buy food, but the buyer is white and he is scared of her. "I didn't want to sell her to

white folks,” he explains (Wright, *Black Boy* 75). Because of his past bitterness, he does not want to give his pet to a white person. The white lady now calls him “the craziest nigger boy” (Wright, *Black Boy* 75). This demonstrates how, like her mother and grandmother, he develops a phobia of white people.

After World War I finally ends, he finds out how “a white woman had slapped a black woman, a white man had killed a black man” in his neighborhood (Wright, *Black Boy* 77). He was overwhelmed with curiosity and anxiety as a result of this. This demonstrates how young Richard knows that white people are dangerous and he grows to fear them. Black people are at risk of being harmed by the general public. Terror and dread permeate the effects of white supremacy and prejudice towards black people. There are places where black people are a majority, but they still do not have full access to the same rights as whites. Richard does not have the money to attend college when he first begins his academic pursuits. To supplement his meager allowance (or lack thereof), he decides to sell newspapers like one of his classmates. Still, he never examines it as a whole. A black client uncovers some discriminatory practices in the newspaper he is selling to him one day. It says, “The only dream of a nigger is to be president and to sleep with white women! Americans, do we want this in our fair land? Organize and save white womanhood!” (Wright, *Black Boy* 124). This exemplifies the stereotypical depiction of black men as a threat to white society, especially to white women. The act of including such content in the newspaper is racist in and of itself. Newspapers are propagating bigotry and racism against black people. In this way, black people are seen as a danger to white women since they are considered low-class and barbaric. Currently, newspapers are spreading the rhetoric of the murderous white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan. Richard, by selling this publication, is enabling white people to do even more harm to black people.

4.2 White Hypocrisy and Social Determinism

Social determinism is the idea that societal forces ultimately shape the behaviors of individuals. A person's behaviour is determined by their experiences in the society they live in. This means that norms and rights for individuals are ultimately determined by the collective. Many examples of this can be found in *Black Boy*. The treatment of blacks and their entitlements are both matters of white consensus and how the rest of society ought to treat them. That is why they set up racial segregation laws. This exemplifies the double standard of the individuals of European descent. After escaping from the orphanage, Richard Wright travels to his aunt Maggie's house throughout his formative years at home with his mom, Ella. They are at a train station since they are going to arrive in Elaine, Arkansas and notice that the town has established distinct areas for white and black tourists. He even notices segregated seating for whites and blacks as they board the train to their destination. Sitting in a train car, he reports, "I saw two lines forming at the ticket booth, a 'white' line and a 'black line'... When I boarded the train I was aware that we Negroes were in one part of the train and that the whites were in another" (Wright, *Black Boy* 45). This is a symbol of the divide between the races. It is a metaphor for social determinism as well. The white majority unilaterally decides that blacks need separate treatment in every area of society. The Jim Crow laws were segregation laws implemented between 1876 and 1964. This legislation legalized segregation and discrimination against African Americans in several different states, and the use of the phrase "Jim Crow" was believed to be a racist slur. In the southern states, the Jim Crow laws were being forced upon the inhabitants. The black community was treated very harshly during those times. Blacks were separated from the whites in all areas of life. Separate entrances and restrooms were provided for blacks and whites. Blacks were not allowed to be in the same space as whites. All of these regulations were put in place to limit African Americans' movement

and to maintain white supremacy in the United States. Thus, the blacks were forced to live in a deterministic environment that denied them the same rights as whites. This caused them to fear the whites and to be careful when being surrounded by whites.

Black Boy demonstrates the hypocrisy of the white characters. Richard is a kid who cannot wait to observe the white people around him. He explains, “Naïvely I wanted to go and see how the whites looked while sitting in their part of the train” (Wright, *Black Boy* 45). This once again shows his lack of experience with or awareness of racism on the part of either blacks or whites. However, each time he says something about the interactions or divisions blacks and whites, his mother, Ella, becomes uncomfortable. For these reasons, he is interested in the issue of racism because he is puzzled by the fact that he has never seen a white person or a black person in the same way. They do not have any way to communicate with one another. Richard states, “Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it” (Wright, *Black Boy* 38). This is where he makes his remarks concerning African-Americans in the United States, that they exist within white civilization without ever feeling fully a part of it. White people in the past often enslaved black people. They saw black people as barbaric, primitive, and unrefined, unlike them in quality. They thought black people were inferior, so they civilised them to make them cultured individuals. Even after the colonial era ended, these concepts persisted. They were so engrained that, even after all this time, white people cannot help but dwell on laws and regulations based on these false, prejudiced, and stereotyped notions of black people.

The white men in racist society then make the statement that black men pose a threat to white females. The blacks, they say, are worried about getting caught having intercourse with white people. In addition, the black people who are believed to be having sexual relations with

white people are more likely to be the victims of racial discrimination and violent crimes. Moreover, the white men in the community often beat, torture, and even kill the women who engage in sexual relationships with black men although this is illegal and totally unacceptable in the eyes of the law. This is how black men were prevented from forming romantic bonds with white women. This demonstrates both white hypocrisy and the concept of social determinism. The murder of Bob, brother of Richard Wright's classmate Ned, is an excellent example of these ideas. Bob has been shot dead by white folks because of rumors that he was sleeping with a white prostitute. The whites thought that Bob was a spy having a one-night stand with a white prostitute at the hotel he used to work at. This demonstrates the brutal nature of truth about the prejudiced world in the 20th century. White people say that every black man fantasizes about white women. The sin that Bob committed is so serious that it cannot be overlooked until he sacrifices his life to atone. After hearing about Bob's passing, Richard fears the whites even more. He was afraid of "being caught by the white death" like Bob (Wright, *Black Boy* 158). The incident causes him to become aware of the truth of white supremacy over black people. This is how white men threaten black men and try to stifle their masculinity in American society. Despite the dangers and misunderstandings that may arise, some black men continue to date white women. As punishment for his supposed wrongdoing, such black man will be whipped, castrated, and possibly shot. This further demonstrates that white people establish every rule and make no exceptions for black people. The legislation has been designed by white people to target and penalize black people. Wright implicitly condemns this in his writings.

During one particular summer, Richard worked as a hallboy in the hotel where Ned's brother lost his life. Majority of the maids at the hotel were African-American girls and women. One day, a white security guard acts rudely toward a black girl, slapping her on the buttocks.

Inappropriate behavior like this can be commonly seen in the hotel. The white security guard becomes enraged by Richard's negative reaction to the occurrence and draws his weapon in an intimidating gesture. In an angry tone, he states, "Nigger, you look like you don't like what I did" (Wright, *Black Boy* 180). This means that even if a white man mistreats a black lady, the black man still has no recourse to claim to sacrifice for her. Bob's demise and this incident at the hotel demonstrate double standard. According to the whites, black men cannot engage in sexual intercourse with white women, even a white prostitute, without their knowledge or permission. If they uncover proof of such deviance, they will execute the suspect akin to Bob. However, when a white man inappropriately touches a black woman, it is not viewed as a wrongdoing, and no black person has the right to object to this. The decisions of society are made by white people and their preconceived notions of what is right and wrong. This demonstrates the white's hypocrisy and the ways in which they are employing social determinism as a tool to accomplish their malevolent goals.

The black community, like many others, is denied the opportunity to prosper economically and educationally. Whites unilaterally decide that black people do not require formal education, library use, and decent employment opportunities. This is symbolic of the idea of social determinism and the dishonesty of white people. Because of this, black folks are not even granted access to any Southern library. This is another form of discrimination based on race, and it is something that has been implemented due to the Jim Crow laws. There is a large library close to the waterfront, but Richard is not allowed to visit there. After visiting the library to get books for working white men, Richard has been forbidden to return. As a person of colour, he is prohibited from checking out books from the library. Richard approaches Mr. Falk, a white Irish Catholic worker at an optical shop, and asks him for assistance. Richard tells him, "I want to read. I can't

get books from the library. I wonder if you'd let me use your card?" (Wright, *Black Boy* 218). Mr. Falk is white, but he is not an anti-black person. This allows Richard to seek help from him. Although Mr. Falk is hesitant, in the end, he agrees to assist Richard in acquiring the books of H.L. Mencken. Additionally, he tells Richard, "It's good of you to want to read" (Wright, *Black Boy* 218). Richard must put pen to paper in the name of the white man and compose a note on his behalf to show the librarian. Otherwise, he would be denied access to the library. When he requests the books from the library, the white librarian first doubts his innocence. She asks him, "You're not reading from these books?" (Wright, *Black Boy* 219). She thinks that it would be strange for African-Americans to be interested in reading. Racist whites make the call that black people should not have the privilege of reading literature simply because they are black. This librarian, who is white, is a symbol of the entire white racist society. In the end, she accepts his word and presents him with two books. Now that "the race question had gone out of her mind," Richard is relieved (Wright, *Black Boy* 219). This example shows that a person of African descent does not have the right to educate themselves further by reading books and attaining knowledge. After this incident, Richard begins to make more frequent library visits in search of fresh reading material. In a way, it can be argued that this racist society that he lives in is allowing to become a curious and ambitious individual who seeks to attain knowledge.

In the autobiographical narrative, Richard states "I did not feel that I was a threat to anybody" (233). Although he sees himself as harmless and innocent, white people continue to view him and others who look like him as dangerous. The effects of social determinism can be seen in this case. Whites in the United States decide what blacks should have and how they should live. In this scenario, white people employ hypocrisy, whereas black people are forced to suffer their prejudice, contempt, and abuse. The whites just do not understand that the blacks, too, are human

beings. In addition, he says that racism and bigotry towards black people are innate to the white cultural experience. They make blacks miserable with their unending, baseless hatred. In addition, he claims, “Like any other American, I dreamed of going into business and making money; I dreamed of working for a firm that would allow me to advance until I reached an important position; I even dreamed of organizing secret groups of blacks to fight all whites” (Wright, *Black Boy* 234). Just like the whites, Richard wants to make something of his life. However, he believes that he will never be able to achieve his goals because the white people will not let him. For the simple reason that he is black, the society as a whole has concluded that he cannot be successful. The thought of why he gave in to his mind’s wild fantasies only makes him despise himself more.

4.3 Class Discrimination

The hypocritical whites in this case employ social determinism to put black people at an even greater disadvantage in racist America. In the book, Wright explores the issue of disparity based on socioeconomic status. Judging others based on their socioeconomic background is a form of discrimination known as class discrimination. Low-income individuals bear the brunt of a class-based society. Because of financial constraints, low-income families often have to make difficult choices and they have a hard time getting the things they need, such as adequate nutrition, an adequate education, and a safe place to live. As a result, discrimination based on socioeconomic status causes stress and anger among the poor. In his autobiographical work, Wright shows the plight of African Americans in white-dominated American culture because of inadequate infrastructure, subpar schools, and unsatisfactory employment opportunities.

In the book, Richard’s father cheats on his wife and abandons the family. As a result of his father’s departure, Richard learns the hard way that his father has a bitter connection to hunger. His father was the breadwinner, so when he leaves, Richard’s mother, Ella, goes through a terrible

adjustment period of economic turmoil. The family needs to work very hard just to put food on the table. During this time, whenever Richard asks for food, his mother is in such a pathetic state that she cannot provide it to him. Thus, the book depicts a low-income family's arduous efforts to meet its most fundamental requirements. In light of this, Wright initially titled his autobiography *American Hunger*.

Moreover, because of racism and discrimination, Richard has to keep switching occupations. In certain instances, the hypocritical whites push him to leave his jobs. He finds himself in a difficult predicament throughout the book. When his mother, aunt, and brother are sick, he loses his employment. He must join an insurance company to cover the costs even though he does not want to because the company often exploits blacks. In fact, Richard finds out that a lot of the men working for the corrupt insurance company accept sex from housewives as a form of payment. Thus, the novel depicts the deplorable state of the housewives who must spend the night with insurance employees to pay off their debts. Businesses take advantage of their clients. Richard ends up doing the same thing as his coworkers by beginning a sexual relationship with one of his clients, a single mother. At one point, this single mother tries to read a book upside down, and Richard realizes that she is illiterate. This reflects her poverty and her lack of education. It should be noted that Richard is disgusted by her illiteracy, but he becomes even more disgusted at himself for judging her and looking down on her.

Wright depicts the suffering of the underprivileged and their fight to survive in poverty during the modern era. *Black Boy* embraces a Marxist framework. This is shown by the depiction of poverty-related challenges in a class-based society. Wright illustrates it in this book by means of several characters. He depicts how hard his mother had to work to support her family expenses. He then discusses his struggles to make enough money to support his family.

Chapter 5

Analysis of Native Son

Native Son is a work of African-American literature and a social protest novel. The story centers on Bigger Thomas, a 20-year-old black man from a poor, illiterate family. The novel takes place in Chicago in the 1930s. It primarily focuses on how black people are treated by white people, their situation, pain, and methods of surviving racism, injustice and bigotry in American culture. The idea of social determinism and the hypocrisy of white people are also demonstrated throughout this novel. The novel also depicts the class conflict experienced by persons in poverty like Bigger Thomas. Wright illustrates how racism operates in society and how it affects black people. The novel is a classic because it exposes the harsh realities of American society and its political system.

5.1 Racism

Richard Wright depicts the deplorable plight of black people as a result of racism and white discrimination. Bigger Thomas, the protagonist, is raised in a hostile and racist environment. Racism and discrimination cause great harm to the environment and his family. He is annoyed with the treatment of the blacks by the racist whites. Bigger has a plan to use his gang to loot a white man's store at some point in the novel. However, they are forced to abandon their plan because they are afraid of the whites. This shows the dominance of the "white world" (Wright, *Native Son* 23). Black businesspeople work hard to make money, but Bigger and his friends would rather rob them than whites. This is because of their fear of whites. Due to white people's power over them and their perception, Bigger and his friends eventually abandon the plan out of dread of robbing a white man. Bigger is angry and appalled by the bigotry, prejudice, and oppression of white people. Since he has experienced all of this since childhood, he is unable to lead a better life.

He has aspirations to fly and wants to become a pilot. However, he is denied the opportunity to realize his dream since white people do not want the blacks to work with them and hold any high-class positions. Instead, Bigger becomes the driver of a white man named Mr. Dalton. Given that he is aware that he will never be a pilot, he accepts his fate as a white man's chauffeur when given the opportunity. This displays how blacks often end up with low-paying jobs despite being ambitious and talented. When he first starts working for the Daltons, Bigger is hopeful about his proximity to such successful people and seeks to find out how they achieved their success. However, his optimism is short-lived. His desire to transcend the constraints of the Jim Crow laws is not realized in the novel.

On his first day on the job, he has to bring the inebriated Mary Dalton, his employer's daughter, safely back to her bedroom. When her blind mother enters the bedroom, Bigger panics. His fear of being caught in a wealthy white woman's bedroom causes him to smother Mary with a pillow, accidentally killing her. He tries to conceal the body in the furnace after realizing his wrongdoing. Later, Bessie, his lover, learns the truth. She then informs him that the white society will accuse him of raping and killing Mary. When a black man murders a white person by accident, he does not receive justice but rather is held accountable for wrongdoing. When the bones of Mary's body are found in the furnace, Bigger realizes that it is only a matter of time before he gets caught. Bigger and Bessie take cover in an abandoned building as they run. He later loses mental control, causing him to rape and kill Bessie because he thinks that she will turn him in and betray him. The superior conflict in this book is the devastation that blacks face as a result of fear, hatred, despair, and rage. Bigger completely destroys his own life and identity, leaving him without control. He becomes hostile and uses violence to vent out his emotions. In the mind of the whites,

he becomes the cruel, unhinged predator that white supremacists have believed black Americans to be.

Bigger discusses legal issues with his attorney Boris Max. Max is shocked to learn of Bigger's bigoted upbringing and realizes that his exposure to racism compels him to engage in specific acts of violence. Thus, Max makes an effort to persuade the judge that Bigger's lifelong suffering is what motivated him to commit such aggressive and brutal crimes. Additionally, the fact is that Bigger did not intend to murder Mary. It was a mishap. Thus, Max asks the judge to give Bigger a second chance to make amends. He asks the judge to give Bigger a life sentence in jail rather than the death penalty. However, the judge does not express any pity and gives Bigger a death verdict. The judge here favors the white side, and thus he gives Bigger the harshest penalty without even attempting to comprehend Bigger's issue and without showing him any mercy. This systematic failure of the law contribute to the hypocrisy of whites towards blacks.

Postcolonial theory can be applied when studying *Native Son*. A fundamental concept of postcolonial studies expounds how there is a power dynamic that exists as a fantasy about the colonized, within the mind of the colonizer. The whites in the novel hold the blacks in check because they believe that the blacks are beneath them. Wright illustrates how the lives of the black characters in the novel are impacted by colonialism's consequences. Young black people like Bigger have experienced racism since a young age. His family lives in extremely poor circumstances. He is not given an opportunity to apply for a desirable employment. Blacks are not permitted to work at the same level as whites. Blacks cannot even make their own decisions; rather, whites decide for them. This demonstrates the power of whites over blacks. The worst part is that most black folks accept this. Additionally, during the colonial era, the colonizers used to manipulate the thoughts of the colonized. Consequently, the colonized locals also began to believe

that they are inferior to the white intruders. Bigger is suspected of raping and intentionally killing Mary, but none of those things happened. Bigger's reluctance to rob the whites is evidence of this. As demonstrated here, even in the 20th century, the concept of colonialism is still present in people's imaginations.

5.2 White Hypocrisy and Social Determinism

Richard Wright depicts social determinism and the oppression of the blacks by whites in *Native Son*. The prejudiced white community controls the black community. The whites determine how individuals should conduct themselves, how they should be treated, and what rights and benefits they will enjoy in American culture. They give black people less favorable treatment because of their darker skin colour. They believe that black people are inferior and less civilized, giving them less advantage. They believe that black people should only be allowed to work low-paying jobs. Thus, they expect blacks to work as their servants, like drivers and housekeepers. Because of this, black people have to endure great suffering. All of these issues are presented in *Native Son*. The protagonist, Bigger, reveals to his friend Gus one day that he wants to become a pilot. However, he knows that such a dream is very challenging for blacks to achieve. He says "I could fly one of them things if I had a chance" (Wright, *Native Son* 25). Despite the fact that Bigger desires to become a pilot, he is aware that black people cannot hold high-class positions. The white folks do not want black people working alongside them as coworkers. Black people are aware of this. Gus tells Bigger, "if you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you to go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane" (Wright, *Native Son* 25). Black people cannot enroll in aviation schools or obtain high-paying occupations. Hence, no matter how talented a black person is, they must still work in lower-class positions among bigoted whites. This has already been decided by the white society. When black people join the military, they are still assigned to

mundane tasks like cleaning dishes or digging ditches. Thus, blacks always remain in the lower place. Because of this, black people are forced to live in poverty.

In *Native Son*, Wright demonstrates that Bigger is doomed because of the social, political, and economic forces that he cannot control. Bigger is a product of the racist oppressive society that he lives in, and this society has denied him opportunities because of the colour of his skin. Struggling with these forces that he cannot control, Bigger drowns in his own fear and anger, causing him to react with violence. This ultimately leads him to his downfall. In a way, he is a victim of social determinism and class struggle. The bourgeoisie, represented by the white Daltons, represents an overwhelming force that destroys Bigger. Because of his lower-class status, Bigger abandons his dream since he is certain that the white people will never permit him to realize it. He accepts the unpleasant truth. This demonstrates how cynical white people are. Mr. Dalton is also a perfect illustration of white hypocrisy and social determinism in Chicago's racial South. He tries to treat black people with kindness and respect, but his true motives are disclosed when trial lawyer Max grills him. Mr. Dalton receives additional funds as rent from black individuals for modest apartments. Then he gives employment and contributes millions of dollars to black schools to black lads like Bigger, who are poor and shy. He pretends to be a decent and charitable person by doing all of this. He has a great deal of concern for black people, and thus, he thinks that they should be grateful to him. Whites have misled black people into believing they are good and caring, that they genuinely care about the blacks, so blacks should respect and submit to them for their own betterment. The hypocrisy of white people is displayed through Mr. Dalton's persona. Renting apartments is not even permitted for black people outside of the South Side neighborhood in the white neighborhood. This illustrates how black people are subject to prejudice and discrimination. Racist white people forbid them from living in certain areas because they do not view blacks as

human beings. Mr. Dalton declines to rent homes to black people in the area. When Max inquires as to the cause, he responds, “Well, it’s an old custom” (Wright, *Native Son* 258). Thus, white society has already opted to treat blacks in a racist and discriminatory manner. Mr. Dalton is renting apartments in an abusive manner to black people. This illustrates the idea of social determinism. In order to dodge the reality, Mr. Dalton gives justifications like, “Well, I think Negroes are happier when they’re together” (258). Consequently, Wright demonstrates how societal prejudice and the determinism of the system cause black people to suffer.

The rich will do anything for the poor but get off their backs. “Colonialism and slavery were the foundations of capitalism” (Angela Davis).

Black people have no choice but to accept the white society as it is. Wright demonstrates how white people employ political strategies to blame, humiliate and punish black people. Thus, although Bigger is just a victim of his circumstance, he is seen as a perpetrator by the whites. Bigger knows the whites will not pardon him if he is caught, so he tries to conceal his guilt. Mary’s unintentional murder case has become a tool for whites to paint all black people as dangerous criminals. Once Bigger tells the truth, he is taken into custody by the police. Newspaper headlines center on the revelation that Bigger killed Mary and characterize him as a sex offender. He is erroneously charged with rape. This exposes the white society’s hypocrisy. Prior to being taken into custody by the police, Bigger himself sees such hypocrisy in the newspaper. He finds a tall black headline in a newspaper that reads, “HUNT BLACK IN GIRL’S DEATH” (Wright, *Native Son* 198). He also reads “REPORTERS FIND DALTON GIRL’S BONES IN FURNACE. NEGRO CHAUFFEUR DISAPPEARS. FIVE THOUSAND POLICE SURROUND BLACK

BELT. AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME” (Wright, *Native Son* 199). The entire black community is portrayed as being hostile and violent in this instance. This depicts the social rigidity and dishonesty of the white society. When a white man commits a crime, the media reports what he did as well as his name. This implies putting the blame on that specific person rather than the white community as a whole. In contrast, when a black individual commits a serious crime, he is referred to as Black or Negro, like Bigger Thomas. This alludes to the black community as a whole. Bigger is referred to as “a black sonofabitch” and “a black ape” by whites (Wright, *Native Son* 216). He did not rape her and he did not purposefully kill her, but the publication exaggerates his wrongdoing while simultaneously blaming the entire black community for it. Furthermore, the blacks also hold Bigger accountable for giving whites a free pass. They believe that Bigger provided the whites justification for the oppression of the whole black community, including its members. This exhibits Bigger’s state of helplessness.

White people’s hypocrisy is exposed by their ability to punish a black person and they act without deliberating over whether what they are doing is right or wrong. Bigger requests a newspaper after being arrested because it has been a while since he last read one. After he looks at a newspaper, he notices the heading “NEGRO RAPIST FAINTS AT INQUEST” (Wright, *Native Son* 221). Then there are more lines that state:

Though the Negro killer’s body does not seem compactly built, he gives the impression of possessing abnormal physical strength. He is about five feet, nine inches tall and his skin is exceedingly black. His lower jaw protrudes obnoxiously, reminding one of a jungle beast. His arms are long, hanging in a dangling fashion to his knees...His shoulders are huge and muscular, and he keeps them hunched, as if about to spring upon you at any moment. He looks at the world with a strange, sullen, fixed-from-under stare,

as though defying all efforts of compassion. All in all, he seems a beast utterly untouched by the softening influences of modern civilization. In speech and manner he lacks the charm of the average, harmless, genial, grinning southern darky so beloved by the American people. (221–222).

Here, Bigger Thomas is portrayed as an apish rapist and jungle beast. He is characterized as an unstable man who raped Mary to gratify his distorted sexual impulses. He then intentionally killed her and discarded her body. However, none of these accusations are accurate. Therefore, the white people falsely accuses him and employs hypocrisy.

It should be noted that white people do not want to know how Bigger killed Bessie, so there are no inquiries about why he raped and murdered a black teen. Bigger is aware that any punishment he receives will be for what he did to Mary but not for what he did to Bessie. Additionally, Buckley, the prosecuting attorney, questions Bigger about whether he killed other white women. Buckley tells Bigger: “Two women swore complaints against you. One was the sister of the woman you killed last fall, Mrs. Clinton. The other woman, Miss Ashton, says you attacked her last summer” (Wright, *Native Son* 239). Bigger responds that he is not familiar with either of these women. Bigger is surprised by Buckey’s queries and accusations. The white civilization is attempting to force further unresolved rape cases here without truly knowing whether Bigger was responsible for any of it. Bigger claims that aside from Mary and Bessie, he did not murder any other women. This is a perfect illustration of black people being the target of hypocrisy, which has been established by racist white culture. When white people catch any black person doing wrong, they want to make that person suffer even more. Regardless of whether he was the one who did it or not, the whites keep heaping on extra blame on the blacks. Bigger Thomas, as he has no other choice, confesses to all the murders. The whites do not even

bother to consider the state in which a black criminal is. The concept of social determinism is used in this context to establish the racist hypocrisy of the white community and its harassment of black people.

Racism and homophobia are real conditions of all our lives in this place and time. I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any different that lives there. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices. (Audre Lorde)

5.3 Class Discrimination

Richard Wright illustrates class prejudice in the manner of living and the circumstances of Bigger and his family residing in abject poverty in a seedy neighborhood in the south of Chicago. In the novel, he also shows how the wealthy class takes advantage of the lower classes by obtaining more cash from them. The upper class in this novel is represented by the character Mr. Dalton. Additionally, he demonstrates how those who live in poverty do not always have the chance to realize their dreams. They give up their will only to get by in the harsh society. Wright highlights how black people experience racism not only in a racist white society but also in a class-based society which blames the poor. Bigger's room is described in the beginning of the novel. Bigger, his mother, sister and brother reside in a compact one-room flat. In the same room, they all live, eat, and sleep. "Turn your heads so I can dress," Bigger's mother commands her kids (Wright, *Native Son* 15). This shows that there is no privacy in this small space. Here, Wright properly

describes the family's destitution. There is a small amount of empty space in this room, indicating that they are so impoverished that they cannot afford a place big enough for them to live. An absolute lack of privacy exists for them. In order to allow the other family members to undress, family members must close their eyes. In this manner, Wright argues that poverty is more complex than merely a lack of resources or access to enough nutritious meals. Lack of room and privacy for one is just as bad as not having enough to eat or clothes to wear. This the novel depicts the circumstance of a destitute African American family from the outset and demonstrates that family's struggle to survive in a discriminatory world.

The book centers on the south side of Chicago in the 1930s, a time when racism and segregation ran rampant in society. Black people are denied the rights that they deserve. Additionally, given the racist and class-based society, they must work extremely hard to do well in life. African American households must pay expensive rent to Mr. Dalton, the property's owner, for a studio flat. This demonstrates the lifestyles of the wealthy taking advantage of the substandard quality of life of the lower classes. This is how wealthy people behave. The rich becomes richer, while the poor continues to lose ground. The vast majority of Africans American citizens must endure terrible poverty. They are forced to live in such substandard conditions without receiving suitable facilities. They are prohibited from having high-paying jobs. Black families who live in poverty struggle greatly to meet their necessities on meager incomes. They make less money and must pay more to maintain such small apartments. This exhibits class discrimination in the class-based society of the United States. For financial gain, Bigger and his friends Gus, Jack, and others are all involved in crimes including stealing goods from numerous black-owned businesses. This demonstrates how those in poverty engage in such criminal activity to get by in the harsh society.

Bigger and his friends believe that it is simpler and safer to plunder other blacks. They never rob any white individuals. Thus, to improve their situation, they are looting their own people.

Additionally, Bigger does not receive an education or a comfortable lifestyle due to his poverty. Despite having the desire to become a pilot, he is unable to realize his ambition. Wealthy people do not have to work hard to obtain their goals. However, achieving one's goals can be challenging for those who are poor. When people do not have enough money or do not receive what they want, they sometimes have to compromise their will. Thus, Bigger becomes Mr. Dalton's driver. This causes him to become angry and frustrated, leading to his downfall. The novel portrays the depressing existence of poor people who must work really hard to survive in a class-based society. Marxist theory and criticism are supported in the book *Native Son*. Marxist philosophy is concerned with the struggle of poor people as a result of class structure in society. Because he is a member of a lower class, Bigger faces a lot of hardship within American culture. His family's financial situation and living situations only make his life harder. Small one-room flats cost a lot to rent. High-class jobs are unavailable to blacks. This is how the wealthy genuinely take advantage of the underprivileged. As a result, the lower classes are being denied here. In contrast, people who are wealthy can enjoy a high standard of living, strong employment, and social standing. In the 1930s, there was a conflict between top and lower-class whites and blacks, and the novel successfully reflects this issue.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Black Boy and *Native Son* both depict the effects of racism and class discrimination. They also reveal the most repulsive aspects of racist white society's treatment of black Americans as well as the challenges of the impoverished in the 20th century. Wright is one of the first African American writers to bravely depict the toxic reality of the black and white divide. Richard and Bigger, the main characters in these two works, are subjected to racism, discrimination, injustice, and oppression as a result of their ethnicity and skin colour. White people do not regard them as equal.

Richard Wright illustrates the effects of societal issues including racism and class inequality in today's culture in both the books *Black Boy* and *Native Son*. Additionally, he highlights the worst traits of racist white Americans toward black Americans as well as the problems of the poor in a class-based society during the 20th century. He is the first to bravely depict the toxic reality of white people. Both the main characters in these two works, *Black Boy* and Bigger Thomas, as well as other black characters, must deal with racism, discrimination, injustice, and oppression on account of their race and skin color by white people. because white people do not regard them as being equal. They rule and oppress them as a result. Sometimes they lose sight of their humanity and look for an opportunity to treat them brutally, degrade them by labeling them as terrorists, dangerous, and savages for little matters or for no cause at all. This demonstrates their hypocrisy. Additionally, white males portray black men as dangerous and detrimental to white women, and they enact laws and regulations to prohibit them from having relationships with any white women. Additionally, the author uses the idea of social determinism to illustrate the hypocrisy of white people, which gives these two works a more realistic feel. The prejudiced white society makes decisions on what black people should receive and how to treat them. Jim Crow laws are being enforced in order to keep black people apart from white people in all spheres of daily life and to demonstrate that black people cannot be a part of the racist white society. Because of this, even if they are capable of doing so, black people are denied access to high-paying employment, better housing, and other privileges they are due. So, in order to survive in the harsh world, black people must work at low-paying occupations and live in poverty. But it shouldn't take place. A person should be evaluated on the basis of his or her skills, talents, and personality rather than by their ethnicity, culture, or religion. Last but not least, author Richard Wright is successful as a protest writer because he faithfully depicts the contemporary struggle of black people in the racist

American culture. He is still regarded as one of the most important authors in African American literature, despite the racist whites' criticism of him for exercising guts. Because of this, writers like William Faulkner and James Baldwin commend him for his achievement. Despite the disparity in their plots, both novels share a strong feeling of protest in how they portray racism, class prejudice, social determinism, and the hypocrisy of white people. Also in my paper I will show that how Richard Wright's has shown the manipulation of white society over black people to control over them. Also through *Native Son* I will show how fear can control people's life. How black people lives were in south America will be shown in the paper. Black people life was full of racist in American society. Also how our writer was just disgusted about the idea of being in racism.

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