

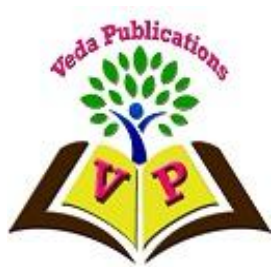


ISOLATION AND THE QUEST FOR BLACK IDENTITY IN RICHARD WRIGHT *NATIVE SON*

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ABSTRACT



The present work utilized a diagnostic investigation of Richard Wright's *Native Son* with a specific end goal to examine the circumstance of Black people in America during the twentieth century. The diverse minorities in United State confronted the issue of racism, Identity and Identity crisis. Richard Wright is more than some other novelists of his period who helps in embedding's the aware of Blacks and Whites in his *Native Son* . Racism is a problem that tackled many fields as such, the social field, political field, and the financial field. It confronted numerous issues however nobody could stop this racism. The study aims a adequately reflects on the struggle of the African American represented by Richard Wright " Native Son " through Bigger, who strive to achieve the self-definition as well as the search for identity in an unjust society does not respect their rights. The current work focus on attempt of Bigger – the protagonist – to find a better expression of his identity.

Keywords: *Racism, Identity Crisis, Struggle, Black Rage, Isolation, Determinism and Freedom.*

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of identity is one of the difficult and old problems afflicting African-American society. Whether consciously or unconsciously, has become entrenched in their minds since they were forced to leave their homeland in Africa and were enslaved in the United States. African Americans felt they were a cultural and ethnic minority, as well as strangers who were humiliated by white African society. According to this system imposed by the (white) on African society, the identity of the Negroes in an orderly manner was undermined and gradually reduced until it eventually became a "surrendered identity". Therefore, great efforts have been made recently with the support and motivation of oppressed indigenous peoples in Africa to restore their original identity, which is the source of their strength and pride through the development of a living culture rooted in African values and memories.

The term identity is vague and slippery. In fact, the term identity is used in many different contexts as well as for many different purposes, especially in recent years. There are some different assumptions about the importance of identity and the basic paradox of identity inherent in the term itself. The fundamental paradox of identity is inherent in the term itself. From the Latin root *idem*, meaning "the same," the term nevertheless implies both similarity and difference. Identity is unique to each person and is unique to us. Much of the debate over identity emerged from tensions between the two sides. I may struggle to "be myself" or to "find my true self," and there are many would-be experts and authorities who claim to be able to help me to do this.

The term identity seems not only to have pervaded the literature on the Negro revolution in the U.S.A., but also to have come to represent in India (and in other countries) something in the revolutionary psychological field of the colored races and nations who seek (try to find) inner as well as outer emancipation from colonial rule and colonial power. Social scientists sometimes attempt to make it more concrete, using such terms as "identity crisis," "self-identity" or "sexual identity." For the sake of logical or experimental maneuverability, they try to

treat these terms as matters of social roles, personal traits or conscious self-images.

According to meaning of Identity is Self-Consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness, that is to say, it only by being acknowledged or recognized. (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 1931)

The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? (Brooks, 2008, p.84)

Who I am (or say I am) is a product of these and many other factors. Erik Erikson, the psychoanalytic theorist who coined the term *identity crisis*, introduced the notion that the social, cultural, and historical context is the ground in which individual identity is embedded. Acknowledging the complexity of identity as a concept, Erikson writes.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Richard Wright was a pioneer in American Literature whose relationship with socialism helped to define him as a person and as a writer. The inspiration behind his literary accomplishments and their impact on his contemporaries can be understood by tracing two of the most important themes in his life; socialism and identity. This article describes the evolution of his relationship with socialism and Identity in order to better understand the writer and his best known works in their social and political context. This exercise can also help us to gain a clearer understanding of the cultural and social implications of socialist ideology in the United States after the First World War.

Richard Wright's 'Native Son' (1940) is a novel circling on themes about race, identity and family. In this research work, I will discuss the main plot of Bigger Thomas' story and identity crisis. Richard Wright's *Native Son* is a horrific story about a young black man who accidentally kills a young white



woman, and then pays the ultimate price. The story of Bigger Thomas, a black man who goes to work for a wealthy white family in Chicago, touches on themes such as race and family.

DISCUSSION

Richard Wright's *Native Son* views the issue of racial isolation as lying at the base of criminalization of a whole race on the premise of face esteem. In *Native Son*, being born a black is getting consequently marked as a potential criminal – a heartbreaking truth which Wright appears through the difficulty of his hero, Bigger Thomas. This disturbing novel projects beyond doubt how the ghettoization of the blacks in unhygienic and inhuman conditions remains one of the most powerful factors behind their indulgence in criminal activities. Without even the base of sustenance, the blacks are either pushed into humble occupations or into insignificant violations like robbing and taking. Even with such social truth, the little demonstrations of philanthropy and social change lose their esteem, for they show up as simple wage doled out in return for the prejudicial treatment dispensed to the blacks in a society ruled by the whites. Richard Wright appears in *Native Son* – the fearsome actuality that if the white American society continues turning a visually impaired eye to its deceptive procedure of making Bigger Thomases, at that point the society itself ought to be prepared to confront them in not so distant future; and the staggering inquiry that can the American society truly face such a situation?

Native Son thus represents Richard Wright's essential alert that if American social and financial realities did not change, the oppressed masses would soon ascend in rage against those in authority. In the expressions of an outstanding critic:

If a black man were to be seen with a white woman (let alone discovered in a white woman's bedroom) in the United States in Bigger Thomas's time (around 1940), he faced violent racism. He might be subject to a horrific end similar to that which Emmett Till endured several years later. .. His murderers, the husband of the white woman and his half-brother, were acquitted of their crime but later openly confessed to the murder (www.shmoop.com/native-son/, Web).

Richard Wright left Chicago for New York and brought with him the belief system that had turned into a supplement to his identity as a black man and as an author. His advantage now lay in refining from the Garveyist and Black Nationalist developments a program for black solidarity that was guided by the standards and goals of communism. It was considering these worries that he set himself to write *Native Son*.

Native Son delineates a period and place in which the possibility of a significant socialist presence in American politics was genuine. The moment was brief yet its outcomes characterized the eventual fate of the development for racial uniformity in the U.S. In it, Wright introduces the racial separation in the U.S. as a contention with outcomes of national magnitude. The future of the nation, Wright fights, would be characterized in extensive part by its capacity to recognize its biracial identity. In "How Bigger Was Born", an address given by Wright at Columbia University in March of 1940, he clarifies the introduction of *Native Son's* hero through a geopolitical crystal that incorporates the contention in Europe and a considerable lot of the inquiries that Fascism raised. He discloses to us that Bigger, as a seized and excluded man with no positive feeling of self, "... carried in him the potentialities of either communism or fascism." and that he (Wright) came to comprehend the mind-sets and driving forces of blacks in Chicago by finding out about Russian life under the Czars (Wright, 1993, p. 521, 518).

In *Native Son* it is the refusal of identity and alienation that young black boy (to state nothing of the ladies who are quite often more regrettable off) face that hastens disaster. Wright saw this feeling of prohibition as a threat to them and to any other individual who risked to be near. Bigger Thomas, similar to the author, is sometimes seen all in all person. All through the novel he is quartered and typified by the whites in control and reacts by substituting between times of down and out barrenness and anger. Wright clarifies Bigger's distance through the prism of persuasive realism so the novel's social dissent is established on the communist hypothetical builds with which Wright was familiar. Inside this worldview, white people, who speak to the oppositional force that Bigger sees



as the most perilous to him, manifest their power over him through material forms (Gomez, 2015)

Native Son portrays the life and looming death of Bigger Thomas. The novel opens with the jostling sound of a wake up timer. The family's morning custom is hindered by a rodent, which Bigger insanely executes. This demonstration denotes the primary case of the dread and anger that invade the novel. The arranged theft of Blum's store also elicits fear and rage. Blum is white, and Bigger and his group are accustomed to going after other African Americans. He battles with Gus, an individual from his posse, and cancels the theft. Bigger gets a position as the Daltons' escort. His first task is to take Mary Dalton to the college. She, be that as it may, needs to meet her beau, Jan. Each of the three wind up at Ernie's Kitchen Shack on the South Side of Chicago, and they get alcoholic. Mary is drunk to the point that Bigger needs to convey her to her room. As he puts her in bed, the ghost like Mrs. Dalton enters. Hysterical, Bigger chokes out Mary with her pad. He beholds her with the goal that her body will fit into the bursting heater and returns home to sleep.

BLACK RAGE

Bigger Thomas is furious. we initially observe him in conflict with his mom and sister. Later he hands over rage on one of his closest friends, Gus. Jan and Mary likewise irritate him. He regularly considers "scratching out" the people around him. What's more, some of his snapshots of most noteworthy elation happen when he vents his antagonistic vibe in violence.

Bigger's anger is by all accounts firmly associated with his feeling of racial identity. He is frequently irate at different blacks for their aloof reactions to the restrictions set on their lives by whites. Also, he is as often as possible goaded at whites for influencing him to feel embarrassed and hesitant. Does Wright share and support of Bigger's wrath or does he exhibit it as a tragedy? Your response to this inquiry will rely upon whose perspectives you think Wright shares. By portraying the novel from Bigger's perspective, Wright draws you into sensitivity for Bigger. You can likewise contend, in any case, that Wright distinguishes more with Boris Max, who appears to be stunned and steamed at Bigger's attitude toward violence.

DETERMINISM AND FREEDOM

Bigger feels more joyful and more liberated after he kills Mary. His violence against a white lady gives him a feeling of energy. Toward the finish of *Native Son*, he even suggests that his killings communicated his most profound self. You could contend that through his fierce resistance, Bigger has risen above or transcended the resignation of the other black characters. Starting here of view, Bigger's violence is an assertion of his freedom and a rebellion against society's constraints.

In any case, Bigger's legal advisor Boris Max proposes that Bigger is just a latent result of his society. Bigger's savagery, he says, is a reflex made by the severe states of his life. From this perspective, Bigger is at least as blind, passive, and self-destructive as the novel's other black characters, and perhaps even more so.

THEME OF IDENTITY IN *NATIVE SON*

In Book Three, the topic of identity is developed mostly in the scenes where Bigger gets ready to confront his death in the hot seat. In these last minutes, Bigger must struggle to "come to terms" with what he has done and what he has progressed toward becoming. In such manner, Bigger's identity crisis is all the more a struggle to isolate his own particular impressions from the projections of the bigot society around him. Indeed, even as Bigger must acknowledge duty regarding his violations, he confronts the mind boggling assignment of declaring his own particular worth even as he can't overlook his wrongdoing. When Bigger is involved in the process of asserting his own worth, he finds that he is in a trap because he has been unable to act upon all of the dreams that he has. Bigger needs to characterize himself as a pilot or even as the pioneer of his posse, yet these are for the most part at last false. One imperative thing to note is that Wright's treatment of the identity topic looks like the philosophies expounded in several existentialist works. In particular, the prison scenes toward the finish of the novel are proposed to notice back to works by Wright's favorite writer, Dostoevsky. Particularly after his dismissal of set up religion, Bigger has the existentialist weight of hunting down importance in existence without the conventional emotionally supportive networks offered by the



congregation or other social structures. Before the finish of *Native Son*, it appears that Bigger is exclusive who is bound to battle against the apparatus of an unfriendly world (Burton, John, 2000).

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW IDENTITY

In the works that Wright published after *Native Son*, he endeavored to build up this new worldview, one that tries to connect the racial past with a communist future (Kinnamon, 1990, p. 3). One case of this came in 1941 when Wright and the photographer Edwin Roskam published *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk Story of the Negro in the U.S.* In it, Wright characterizes white power in the U.S. in financial terms by discussing "The Lords of the Lands" and "The Bosses of the Buildings" (Wright, 2003, p. 49). He portrays the Jim Crow south as a place where racial persecution is yet a limb of a vaster and, in many regards, more merciless and impersonal item benefit machine (Wright, 1993, p. 515). His disassociation from the Party did not imply that he was additionally revoking Marxism or drawing nearer to American free enterprise. He kept on composing against racial domination and government both at home and abroad. In essays like "I Bite the Hand That Feeds Me", "Blueprint for Negro Writing", and "White Man Listen" he adapts literary techniques in order to produce works of social and political protest.

In 1941 he wedded a communist coordinator from Brooklyn named Ellen Poplar even as his association with the Party deteriorated to an irreparable state and it approved activities against him. Additionally in that year, Wright turned into the subject of an examination by J. Edgar Hoover who got directions to this impact by Secretary of War Henry Stimson upon the last's survey of *Twelve Million Black Voices*. Wright was again a man against powers that saw his convictions as threatening. We see this subject of one against a narrow minded society in his next published work, the short story titled: "The Man Who Lived Underground" (1942). Its hero, Fred Daniels, is a man in defiance to a society of cash trade and utilization. Like Bigger (and Wright), he is a black man who is the protest of a police manhunt since he is viewed as a threat to the group. The story is an augmentation of Wright's communist position and incorporates topics of segregation and the look

for a steady identity that Wright would give a more entire introduction to in the novel that denotes the start of his existentialist stage, *The Outsider* (1953).

A Spiritual Identity: In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas conceives that the religion of his mom and Bessie's whiskey are sedatives that placate the black difficulty. And afterward, they are wrong routes in which they handle their mistreatment. They incidentally get away from their black disaster. It might be said, drinking and rehearsing religion are simply diversions with no intrinsic valuable significance. It is simply for overlooking the social hindrances of misuse and alienation. Harold Bloom, in this circumstance, accounts:

"His mother escapes in religion; Bessie escapes in alcohol. Both give their autonomy over for temporary comfort. Bigger rejects both." (Bloom's Guides: *Native Son* 40/1)

Bigger is left with no feeling of mystical identity. In any case, he perceives his selfhood just through his frightening violent crime. James Baldwin keeps up that:

"with the sun melting away the differences. "He craves a sense of union, identity, wholeness, which had been denied to him all his life. He wants to live now not escape paying for his crime but live in order to find out, to see if it were true." (James Baldwin ,1963: 22)

Spiritually speaking, Bigger Thomas does not compare his mother. Mrs. Thomas (the mother) vigorously depends on Christianity as a wellspring of energy to reinforce her back in showdown of her social miseries. Thomas is wary towards religion and winds up in a fragile circumstance. He is constrained, against the chances, to acknowledge asking, when he gives a guarantee to his mom. This definitely does not originate from his very own profound conviction. It, in no way, shape or form, gives a concordant reaction from a steady religious identity. Thomas is humiliated by his mom's request, and, therefore, he incidentally disposes of his unyielding quality to recapture it a while later. His position to Biblical lecturing and religious precepts is clearly depicted by means of his brutal criticisms towards the black minister. Thomas' refusal of religion can be clarified



on the premise that religion influences man to recognize his blame, and Bigger never needs to do as such. David Peck, accounting on *Native Son*, states:

Bigger's mother relies on religion [. . .] but toughness is Bigger's code. He is embarrassed by his mother's self-abasement, and although he agrees to pray simply to end his discomfort, his attitude toward religion is shown when he throws away a cross a minister has given him and throws a cup of coffee in a priest's face. In his view, they want only to avoid the world and to force him to accept guilt without responsibility. (Peck, David, 2000: 1117)

Wright significantly utilizes the Biblical symbolism in his *Native Son*. Certainly, he influences utilization of name to pass on some religious hidden messages. He welcomes the readers to disentangle them and get their profound structure.

Bigger Thomas saw his quest for spiritual identity as a method for escaping their existential outcast. Be that as it may, their incomplete mission was obviously contorted by social imperatives. His perpetrator of violence, and so are the victims and products of their environments. As a production of these conditions, he aimed in an unalterable will to be somebody. He had of an irate vitality, angry potential, an assurance to change over to Jesus way. Be that as it may, the social conditions set them following the trail of tears and blood. The identity crisis is one of the most frequently discussed themes in the last or coming hundreds of years. For a person to hone the identity, or make it as a wellspring of pride, the identity must be built up in a sound and in place social condition. At the point when society bears reasonable conditions, the profound identity will manage the cost of confidence, social peacefulness, and security. Thus, society's individuals will work to create and advance the country. In a sense, there is a reciprocal relationship between society and religious identity. The latter gives society just as society provides creative circumstances.

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