

T.C.
İstanbul Üniversitesi
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı
Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

146840

**RICHARD WRIGHT : AN ANGRY VOICE OF
AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

Meltem Öztan
2501010008

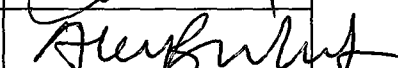
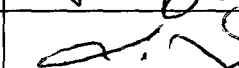
Tez Danışmanı
Prof. Dr. Ayşe Dilek Erbora

İstanbul, 2004

T.C.
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

TEZ ONAYI

AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI Bilim Dalında 2501010008 numaralı **MELTEM ÖZTAN**'ın hazırladığı “**ZENCİ TOPLUMUNUN ETNİK BİR KÜLTÜR OLARAK ÇOK SESLİ AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ İÇİNDEKİ YERİNİN EDEBİYATA YANSIMALARI**” konulu **YÜKSEK LİSANS / DOKTORA TEZİ** ile ilgili **TEZ SAVUNMA SINAVI** Lisansüstü Öğretim Yönetmeliği'nin 10. Maddesi uyarınca **11.01.2005** SALI günü saat..**13.00**'da yapılmış, sorulan sorulara alınan cevaplar sonunda adayın tezinin”ne* **OYBİRLİĞİ / OYÇOKLUĞUYLA** karar verilmiştir.

JÜRİ ÜYESİ	KANAATİ(*)	İMZA
PROF.DR.AYŞE DİLEK ERBORA	KABULÜ	
DOÇ.DR.TÜRKAN ARAZ	KABULÜ	
DOÇ.DR.ALEV BULUT	KABULÜ	
DOÇ.DR.ESRA MELİKOĞLU	KABULÜ	
YRD.DOÇ.DR.ÖZDEN SÖZALAN	KABULÜ	

Abstract

Sharing a common history of racial oppression and bitter experiences of slavery, African-American authors tend to express the theme of racial discrimination in their works. One of the most notable African-American authors, Richard Wright also aims to portray the racial plight and its negative consequences in the United States in his fiction. Growing up in the Deep South during the Jim Crow years, Wright is enraged by the injustices and discrimination he has confronted due to his racial identity. The racial hostility he has experienced results in an angry voice regarding the racial issues. Hence, his works, which are parallel to his own life and experiences, convey an angry vision. In his early career as an African-American writer, he seeks to teach white America a lesson about his race. However, the angry tone of his voice alters during the different stages of his life. Although violence is an inseparable part of this bitter, angry voice, Wright resolves to turn to different alternatives regarding racial problems and the tone of his angry voice softens in time, for he comes to the conclusion that violence is not a solution to their problems. He himself also seeks alternatives to break away from the racial confinements and finally ends up being an expatriate in France. His quest for a way out of oppression remains unfulfilled, however his angry voice is not unnoticed. Hence, he achieves a form of transcendence through his fiction.

Öz

Köleliğin acı tecrübesi ve ırkçı baskılarla dolu ortak bir tarihi paylaşan zenci yazarlar, eserlerinde ırk ayrımcılığını yansıtır. Zenci yazınının önde gelen yazarlarından Richard Wright da yapıtlarında Amerika'daki ırkçılık ve onun olumsuz sonuçlarını işlemeyi amaçlar. Jim Crow yıllarında ırkçı güneyde büyüyen Wright, karşılaştığı ayrımcılık ve kendi zenci kimliği nedeniyle uğradığı haksızlıklardan dolayı öfkeyle doludur. Yazarın tecrübesi olan ırkçılığa dayalı düşmanlık, ırkçılıkla ilgili sorunlarla ilgili kızgın bir bakış açısıyla sonuçlanır. Böylece, kendi hayatıyla ve tecrübeleriyle paralellik gösteren yapıtları kızgın bir bakış açısı ifade eder. Zenci bir yazar olarak kariyerinin ilk aşamalarında, Wright beyaz Amerika'ya zenciler hakkında bir ders verme amacını güder. Fakat yazarın sesi hayatının farklı dönemlerinde yapıtlarına değişik bir biçimde yansır. Şiddet bu kızgın, acı sesin ayrılmaz bir parçası olsa da, Wright şiddetin problemlerine bir çözüm olamayacağı sonucuna varır ve ırkçı problemlere dair farklı alternatiflere yönelmeyi seçer, ve böylece de yazarın kızgın sesi azalır. Yazar kendi hayatında da ırkçı kısıtlamalardan kaçmak için alternatifler arar ve sonunda ülkesini terkederek Fransa'ya yerleşir. Baskılardan kurtulmak için arayışı sonuçsuz kalsa da eleştirilerini sürdürür. Böylece, yazınıyla yaşamında hapsedildiği sınırların ötesine geçer .

Acknowledgements

Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to my beloved advisor Prof. Dr. Ayşe Dilek Erboru for her enthusiasm, for her kind advice and for the endless revisions of my drafts. I am much indebted to the insights of her with respect to African-American literary canon. I could not have completed this thesis without her detailed comments and suggestions in all areas of academic life. I would also like to thank my dear teachers Assoc. Prof. Dr. Türkan Araz and Dr. Özden Sözüoğlu. Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my loving parents Dr. Sait and Sevgi Öztan for their support and care in every stage of my study.



Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. <i>Black Boy</i> : Racial Problems Of American Culture	
1.1 Black Repression In The Deep South	6
1.2 Violence As A Major Factor Shaping Wright's Personality.....	12
1.3 The African-American Subject Under The White Gaze.....	20
1.3.1 Stereotypical Images Of African-Americans.....	24
Chapter 2. <i>Native Son</i> : The Failure Of The Black Hero As A Rebel	
2.1 Black Self's Reaction Against The Factors That Shape His Identity.....	39
2.1.1 Black Self Trapped In The Myth of The Rapist.....	42
2.1.2 Black Self's Futile Attempts To Establish An Identity.....	46
2.1.3 Black Self's Envy Of The White World.....	51
2.2 Black Self's Experience of Fear As A Picaresque Hero.....	52
2.3 The Media's Role In Creating Stereotypes Of African-Americans.....	78
2.4 Bigger Thomas' Coming To Terms With The Meaning Of His Existence.....	83
Chapter 3. <i>The Man Who Lived Underground</i> : Odyssey Of The Fragmentary Self	
3.1 Retreat Into The Underground.....	92
3.1.1 Journey In The Subterranean World.....	97
3.1.2 Fred Daniels In Contrast With The Social Reality.....	102
3.1.3 Fred Daniels' Final Encounter With The Aboveground.....	112
Conclusion.....	117
Bibliography.....	120

Introduction

In his works, Richard Wright mainly focuses on the issue of race and how it destroys black lives, since the very issue relates to the actual experiences of the author himself. Being a member of the African-American race, Wright is also not foreign to racist white America. He himself has encountered the injustice of racism, oppression and inequality in all facets of society. Therefore he uses his skillful writing to amplify the oppressive, racial discrimination that breeds hate, anger and fear in black victims.

In his autobiography *Black Boy : A Record of Childhood and Youth*, he explains his background and upbringing in detail which sheds light to how his style of writing and the contents of his work are influenced by his early life as a black boy in the racist South. *Black Boy* chronicles Wright's life from 1908 to 1937. In his autobiography, he writes about the economic, familial, educational and mainly racial problems he has endured.

In his early life as a black child, he leads a life full of miseries. Even as a young child, he realizes that the color of his skin limits his opportunities. At the age of five, his father deserts the family and Wright and his brother have to stay in an orphanage for a while. When his mother becomes a paralytic, they move to Jackson and then to Arkansas where they live with his maternal grandparents. Wright describes their house in Arkansas as follows:

Its skimpy yard was paved with black cinders. Nothing green ever grew in that yard. The only touch of green we could see was far away, beyond the tracks, over where the white folks lived (Wright, 1940: 3)

Apart from the social oppression he encounters, he is also subjected to familial oppression from his staunchly religious grandmother and other relatives. His grandparents are members of a very strict religious sect of Seventh-day Adventists. Hence, confronting religious oppression from his relatives creates in him a sense of rejection of religion. He fights with every religious dogma and demonstrates how these religious oppressions affect the members of his community.

Wright cannot complete his education since he needs money for his living. At the age of seventeen, after saving enough money from various jobs, he leaves for Memphis, Tennessee where he begins to read contemporary American literature and decides to be a writer.

From the early ages till the end of his life Wright is torn between his own personal impulses and the dominant culture's oppression which seeks to eradicate his individuality. He is very critical of his own black community since he thinks that the black community perpetuates the foundations of southern racism. He considers his own culture to be restrictive, constraining and confining.

In his foreword to *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*, Wright describes his black community as "... that vast tragic school that swims below the depths, against the current, silently and heavily, struggling against the waves of vicissitudes that spell a common hate." (Wright, 1941: 5). He sees African-Americans as desperate selves, struggling against the currents in a vast sea of hate. They are always pushed to the margins of their society without having any recognition by the others.

By portraying his childhood in detail, Wright not only aims to show the way out of oppression, but he also attempts to warn his community against their experience of an intellectual death due to the forces attempting to impede the black self. He also intends to demonstrate how familial and social oppressions damage the development and identity of young black children. "...Wright liked to see himself as an individual who happened to be born in a poor black Natchez family and had to carve for himself not only his own identity through rebellion but seek a chosen place – a place of freedom versus servitude, knowledge versus cultural void, action versus apathy" (Fabre, 1985: 77). He wants to reveal how his life could be an example to desolate black children. Although it is not a life of infinite possibilities, he has an ambition to prove that there is always a hope for the black self. Besides, he wants to express his anger against the white racism and feels obliged to convey the horror of racial discrimination through his writing. He explains his feelings about white racism as follows:

What could I dream of that had the barest possibility of coming true? I could think of nothing. And, slowly, it was upon exactly that nothingness that my mind began to dwell, that constant sense of wanting without having, of being hated without reason. A dim notion of what life meant to a Negro in America was coming to consciousness in me, not in terms of external events, lynchings, Jim Crowism, and the endless brutalities, but in terms of crossed-up feelings, of psyche pain. I sensed that Negro life was a sprawling land of unconscious suffering, and that there were but few Negroes who knew the meaning of their lives, who could tell their [own] story. (Wright, 1979: 7)

Wright sees himself as one of those few Negroes who know the meaning of his restricted life and resolves to tell not only his own story but also the story of his race in his works. Hence, he intends to express the feeling of being black in the United States. He claims that not many people of his race can express their agony and can stand against the oppression to which he himself and his family have been exposed.

He is reluctant to be a part of his submissive family and community since he very well knows how oppression has crippled their lives and how they have remained silent against such an abuse. He wants to fulfill his individuality by separating himself from the submissiveness of his own race. Hence, he leads an alienated life. However, this does not mean that he deliberately chooses to break his ties with his own people. As Michel Fabre insists, "...he [Wright] was heavily influenced by his environment, despite the claim of certain critics that he had always been in revolt, cut off from the masses and incapable of participation in a communal life" (Fabre, 1973: 27). Accordingly, his revolt is against the passivity and submission of his race. Therefore, Wright experiences "...a profound uneasiness among members of his own family and Southern negroes generally who allowed themselves to become subjugated by a caste system" (Margolies, 1969: 5).

In *Black Boy*, Wright "...implies that a black youth had to escape southern destitution and discrimination to become a writer, which, being black, he was not even supposed to attempt." (Fabre, 1985: 77). The humiliation and the impoverishment he has undergone shape his life. Unable to cope with the pervasive racism of the South and realizing that the South had little room for his aspirations, Wright flees the racist South. He moves to Chicago in 1927. However, the North is

also far from enabling him to achieve his goals in life. He painfully learns that racism exists in the North as well as in the South. Jean-François Gounardoo depicts the conditions of the North in those years in the following terms:

From foreign immigrants whom he does not understand because of their accent, to the poor whites who compete with him at work, the black man finds it difficult to adapt to a life he never would have suspected if he had stayed in his native South. But since he must earn a living, he must accept any job whatsoever, however degrading it may be. He is obliged to live in a ghetto, along with his fellowmen, in order not to disturb by his presence whites who want nothing to do with him. If chance decrees that he meet whites, he quickly realizes that the color of his skin forbids him from enjoying the progress that the white American majority does... The only jobs he finds are for laborers and domestics. Extremely high rents permit him only to live in a small room, a kitchenette, which he has to share with several other persons. Given this situation, it is not surprising that violence and vice are so often a part of the daily lives of inhabitants of the black ghetto (Gounardoo, 1992: 53).

The problem of adaptation, the problem of unemployment and poverty are also problems that threaten the black self in the North. Young Wright is not immune to these hard conditions of the North of his dreams. In *Native Son*, he puts forward the conditions under which blacks had to continue their lives. Neither Wright nor his protagonist Bigger Thomas is satisfied with the North. Therefore by creating a rageful, violent black individual like Bigger, Wright seems to agree that the individual is a product of the external forces.

In his life in the North he works at the post office and then he works at Michael Reese Hospital where he takes care of lab animals. His experiences in this hospital inspire Wright to write his novella *The Man Who Lived Underground*. In 1927, with the Great Depression Wright is unemployed. He joins the John Reed Club, an organization of writers and artists, where he becomes acquainted with the Communist Party. In 1937, he moves to New York. However in New York he also feels the presence of racial discrimination. In 1946 he leaves New York for Paris, where he hopes to be free from the racial oppression of the United States. When he returns to New York, he still encounters continuing racism and decides to leave his

country since he can no longer tolerate the racism he confronts. Disappointed, he returns to Paris and becomes a permanent expatriate there.

Since there is an apparent parallelism between Wright's own life and his works, I have selected three of his major works as exemplary passages to demonstrate the fact. *Black Boy*, *Native Son* and *The Man Who Lived Underground* illustrate the rebellious spirit and the angry voice of Wright. He severely criticizes the stereotypical identities of both races in his novels. All three books involve Wright's quest for a solid place where he can be free from racial oppression. However, the more the writer attempts to overcome the racial barriers the more he is stuck within the confinements of his racial identity.



Chapter 1 Black Boy: Racial Problems Of American Culture

1. 1 Black Repression In the Deep South

Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, 'Cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can't sit side by side.
Down South on the train
There's a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we're put in the back-
But there ain't no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where's the horse
For a kid that's black?¹

Richard Nathaniel Wright, the son of an illiterate sharecropper father and a pious school teacher mother, was born on a Mississippi plantation in 1908. It was a time when the impact of the institution of slavery was still profoundly felt in the Deep South. In other words, Wright grew up amid the poverty and racism of the Jim Crow South, witnessing black repression under Jim Crow laws and practices.

Immediately after the Civil War the signs of segregation in the South began to show their effects. The South's history of slavery made it especially difficult for whites to accept black emancipation. Southern people wanted to bring the "old South" back. Disturbed by the freedom of the ex-slaves, most southern states adopted new laws known as "Black Codes" and thus attempted to deprive the colored people of economic and physical freedom, confining them to the margins of the society. As Ronald L. F. Davis claims, these laws defined blacks "as inferior to whites, as members of a caste of subordinate people".² These laws were referred as "Jim Crow laws" after a crudely stereotypical character in white theater designed to degrade blacks for white entertainment:

¹ *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*, New York, ed. Alfred A. Knopf, 1959: 194

² Davis, Ronald L. F. "Creating Jim Crow",
(Çevrimiçi) <http://jimcrowhistory.org/history/creating.htm>, 02.11.2003.

The term Jim Crow originated in a song performed by Daddy Rice, a white minstrel show entertainer in the 1830s. Rice covered his face with charcoal paste or burnt cork to resemble a black man, and then sang and danced a routine in caricature of a silly black person. By the 1850s, this Jim Crow character, one of several stereotypical images of black inferiority in the nation's popular culture, was a standard act in the minstrel shows of the day.³

This Jim Crow character is identified with the brutal segregation of African-Americans. As to minstrel shows, Eric Lott remarks that "Black figures were there to be looked at, shaped to the demands of the desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest..." (Lott, 1993: 140). In the blackface minstrel shows, black characters were only the objects of mockery. The audience could manipulate them according to their own will and most of the time these interferences served to humiliate and ridicule blacks. Black figures were simply displayed for the enjoyment of whites.

Jim Crow laws segregated African-Americans in the use of facilities such as restaurants, theatres, hotels, cinemas, parks, cemeteries, public baths and even attendance to public schools. In many states interracial marriages (marriage between a colored person and a white person) were also forbidden. In brief, any kind of contact with the white world was severely banned by the laws. Those who refused to obey the segregation policies were arrested. Means of public transportation, namely trains and buses were also segregated. There even was a special car for African-Americans named the "Jim Crow Car" since they were forbidden to sit with whites.

As a child Richard Wright's first encounter with racism is in one of these coaches :

...for the first time I noticed that there were two lines of people at the ticket window, a "white" line and a "black" line. During my visit at Granny's a sense of the two races had been born in me with a sharp concreteness that would never die until I died. When I boarded the train I was aware that we Negroes were in one part of the train and the whites were in another (Wright, 2000: 44).⁴

When he is little Wright is not aware of the existence of a white race until this incident. It is only after getting on the train that he realizes the existence of the two

³ Ibid.

⁴ All quotations are taken from the 2000 version which is published by Vintage Books.

different worlds, namely the white world and the black world. As Macksey and Moorner in *Richard Wright A Collection of Critical Essays* observe "Very early in his life, Wright collided with the absolute divisions between white and black worlds" (Macksey & Moorner, 1984: 3). Feeling frustrated, he questions his mother about whites and blacks, wanting to know why these two races that live side by side never come together, and never touch except in violence, but he is constantly discouraged and rebuked by his mother. His mother's role is to teach him that the white world is dangerous and that it punishes the ones who do not obey its rules. The mother desperately clings on to the notion that passivity, staying in the dark and being a non-entity is the only way to be immune from the terrors of the daily world. That is to say that, as an oppressed member of the black society, wanting to protect her community from the white terror, his mother's mere aim is to save her son. His mother plants the seeds of fear and submission into him as a means for survival. Therefore, Horace A. Porter's observation is relevant when he suggests, "She [Wright's mother] frequently whips him because she knows that certain small gestures of self-pride and assertion would lead readily to brutality or death". (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorner, 1984: 59) .

Stephen Butterfield observes Wright's aim in writing his autobiography as follows: "The main burden of the black writer...has been to repair the damage inflicted on him by white racism, rend the veil of white definitions that misrepresent him to himself and the world, create a new identity, and turn the light of knowledge on the system that holds him down" (Butterfield, 1974: 6). Therefore, Wright feels obliged to overcome the damages of white racism by presenting his life in detail. The white race do not really see the black race as they are since they behold a stereotype. Wright wants to get rid of this negative stereotypical identity that is stamped on his face. He wants to assert his true identity and self, however first he has to erase the false representations. By portraying his own life he is determined to make their voices heard.

In his early adolescence, Wright and his gang get involved in daily fights with a gang of white boys. The white and the black gangs agree on marked points in the neighborhood so that both gangs have their own places. The ones wanting to violate the rules by passing the other side of the line, are subjected to violent encounters. The boys either from the white gang or from the black, are stoned if they

pass the marked borders. This border between the white and the black gangs is also symbolic of the concrete and untranscendable borders between the white and the black worlds. Wright points out that, even as young boys, they are aware of the fact that they are 'different' in a negative sense and therefore enemies, and this antagonism results in serious, bloody fights :

We were now large enough for the white boys to fear us and both of us, the white boys and the black boys, began to play our traditional racial roles as though we had been born to them, as though it was in our blood, as though we were being guided by instinct. All the frightful descriptions we had heard about each other, all the violent expressions of hate and hostility that had seeped into us from our surroundings, came now to the surface to guide our actions (Wright, 2000: 80-81)

In the light of the above quotation, it is possible to observe Wright's bitter stance as he denotes the racial animosity between the two races. His description of his violent interactions with the white boys reveals the pain and futility he and the other boys feel as black boys in a white racist society. It is seen that the boys grew up with the stories and the myths that they heard about each other. Actually, they do not know each other in person and they do not have any personal hatreds. Their hatred is directed at each others' races. They simply assume that the other race is the enemy to be fought. Wright carries his argument one step further in claiming that each child is born to play the traditional role imposed upon him by the society of which he is a member. Therefore they are predestined by racial prejudice. Wright also describes the feelings of each group as if instinctual, and his emphasizing the seemingly instinctive nature of the racial relations can be read as a sign of his perceiving these relations as uncontrollable, since instincts are uncontrollable and irrepressible. After a battle with the white boys, Wright is hit with a piece of a broken bottle. Since his cut is a deep one and since it keeps bleeding, he has to tell his mother that he is hurt. After taking Wright to a doctor, his mother beats him and tells him that he must never fight with white boys again and that he might be killed by them. His mother's reaction to this incident once more reminds Wright that he is living in an environment of constant dangers, and without any hesitation the whites may kill him any minute. William Grier and Price Cobbs note that:

...the black mother has a more ominous message for her child and feels more urgently the need to get the message across. The child must know that the white world is dangerous and that if he does not understand its rules it may kill him. (Grier & Cobbs, 1968 : 61).

Young Wright is once more hit by the fact that he is an outsider in a hostile world. The mother's beating is reasonable as it is previously stated that her beatings aim to protect her son whose single act of insubordinacy may seriously result in death.

As Robert Bone in his critical work *Richard Wright* claims "Instinctively the black community sought to suppress individuality, discourage competition, and restrain aggressiveness" (Bone, 1969: 17) in order to protect the self. Surviving is their fundamental concern even if it means staying in the dark without being recognized. Bone further states that:

The negro family, hoping to protect the child from violent reprisal, agrees to serve as a surrogate of the white power structure. To be an Uncle Tom⁵, in short, is to enforce the white man's discipline against your own. (Bone, 1969: 18)

In trying to protect their children, African-American families help perpetuate this cycle of dominant white power. Wright grows up among those people who are unable or unwilling to accept his personal individuality and try to suppress every individual act he makes. Wright criticizes the conformity of his own race and states that "...one's silence implies that one has surrendered one's intellectual faculties to fear, that one has voluntarily abdicated life itself, that one has gratuitously paralyzed one's possibilities of action" (Wright, 1957 : 76). He disapproves the silence of his black community, for he perceives this silence as something equal to renunciation of life itself. Wright points out that, black individuals contribute to their own oppression by keeping silent and conforming. In order not to endanger their security, the

⁵ Uncle Tom, the protagonist of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), is considered to be a key figure in constituting black subjectivity. Uncle Tom is an effective character in black representation in the nineteenth century. He represents the racial oppression and torment slaves were forced to endure. However, Stowe is severely criticized due to the fact that her novel promotes the negative stereotype of the subservient, ignorant black. While relying on a negative stereotype of the black, she robs black characters of all depth and complexity.

oppressed black society choose reservation, thus they sacrifice their freedom, dignity and humanity. Accordingly :

The self is battered by the white racial culture, and, for the most part, by a survival-oriented black culture, that counters the impulse to rebelliousness and individuality by puritanical repressiveness, escapism and base submission. That is, black culture suppressed the individual, in order to protect the group from white assault. (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 39)

Throughout his life, Wright is oppressed by the expectations of others who demand that he should always conform. Constance Webb observes that, in writing his autobiography Wright uses “himself as a symbol of all the brutality and cruelty wreaked upon the black man in the Southern environment” (Webb, 1968: 205). The geographic and historical circumstances into which Wright was born undoubtedly had an intense effect in shaping Wright’s personality. Since his early childhood, suffering was an integral part of his life. He not only suffered from poverty, hunger, and illnesses , but also endured racism and violence. James Baldwin in “Nobody Knows My Name” writes that “...in *Black Boy* , I found expressed, for the first time in my life, the sorrow, the rage, and the murderous bitterness which was eating up my life and the lives of those around me.” (Baldwin, 1961: 191). This statement demonstrates the collective nature of the experience of black suffering. It would not be wrong to claim that the traumas Wright suffered during his childhood and youth are responsible for his angry vision. Richard Macksey and Frank E. Moorer depict the conditions of the blacks in those years as follows :

The majority of blacks, willingly or not, had accepted their status as a circumscribed caste in a world stubbornly resistant to change. They would not aspire beyond the narrow limits prescribed by that society. Not so with Richard Wright, from his earlier years he sought to escape the barriers and restrictions that would consign him to the traditional role of a docile black with a future as a sharecropper or a source of cheap day labor for the landed class. (Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 1).

Wright was very well aware of the fact that, in the rural South of the early twentieth century, the possibility of the fulfillment of his dreams was indeed weak if not impossible. Therefore, it is possible to observe a long and unfinished quest for the

liberation of the mind and human spirit in Wright's life. This quest stems from his unsatisfied hunger to fulfill his integrity socially, spiritually and psychologically. Accordingly :

Wright ultimately came to the conclusion that it was almost impossible to be black and "fully human" in America simply because the society did not allow blacks the psychological space to develop and cultivate the human spirit. In the majority of his works, Wright hammers home the point that American society was designed to cripple its black citizens whether disabled by their submission or by their inarticulate anger. (Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 3).

Both the black and the white society have their own subtle ways of silencing the black individual. On the one hand the white South proclaims him to be a non-identity, on the other hand his own community cripples his life by paralyzing him with fear and terror. He is sentenced to subordination and inferiority, his freedom of movement is restricted and his ambitions are curbed. Bone, considering the deprivations Wright encountered explains that :

Wright describes himself as trapped, imprisoned, stifled, stunted, curbed, condemned. At the most elementary levels of human existence he is forbidden to touch, to look, to speak, to eat, to play, to read, to be curious, to dream, aspire, expand or grow. Ringed about with prohibitions and taboos, he is denied access to experience, the catalyst of spiritual growth. Assigned by tradition to a demeaning role, he is deprived of possibility, of what he might become. Defined by others, manipulated by means of these twisted definitions, he is robbed of personality, identity, a sense of self (Bone, 1969: 14).

1.2 Violence As a Major Factor Shaping Wright's Personality

In every aspect of his life Wright is exposed to violence that is inherent in racism. His autobiography starts with a burning scene, and the earliest experience he remembers is one of horror and fear, as the four year-old Wright sets his house on fire while playing with matches. The fire has connotations of both terminating and destroying the old and it also implies a rebirth. Wright burns their old house where oppressive practices and prejudices exist. Out of its ashes there emerges a new

experience. This burning image is also a horrifying image in African-American experience since it is reminiscent of slave lynchings during the times of slavery. Horace Porter also emphasizes the significance of the burning scene in *Black Boy* by asserting that "When Wright sets his father's house aflame, he also makes an eloquent statement against the world the Southern slaveholders had made" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 57). Little Wright rebels against the forces that imprison them into subhuman categories. However, after this incident his mother shows him that the consequences of being insubservient will be violence. She beats him severely with a tree limb and afterwards little Richard loses consciousness.

In parallel to his own experience Wright takes the theme of both the domestic as well as the racial violence as central to his novel. As an example of violence from which Wright suffers, Robert Bone writes :

And a violence, inflicted by his immediate family, but stemming from the larger violence of southern life. Surrounded by a latent terror, which might be called forth by any act of self-assertion, the Negro family tried to beat the dangerous assertiveness out of its wayward members. Never lacking in waywardness, Wright was severely beaten, his spirit branded with the images of violence that crowd the pages of his fiction. (Bone, 1969: 5).

Wright in his outstanding autobiographical work *Black Boy* portrays himself as being beaten or slapped on almost every occasion by the members of his family. They frequently whip him for trivial offenses. On the other hand, in his everyday life he is also abused and tormented by the members of the white community. The violence he is subjected to, both from the white and the black communities, leads to aggressive responses on the part of Wright. He becomes more and more violent each day, as he starts to perceive violence as the only way to survive and to carry on. Accordingly:

All right, I was colored. It was fine. I did not know enough to be afraid or to anticipate in a concrete manner. True, I had heard that colored people were killed or beaten, but so far it all had seemed remote. There was, of course, a vague uneasiness about it all, but I would be able to handle that when I came to it. It would be simple. If anybody tried to kill me, then I would kill them first. (Wright, 2000: 47)

He learns that he must demonstrate his violent side, his brutal force in order to stay alive. Consequently, the violence he is exposed to affects his character as well. One day Richard, hears that a black boy is severely beaten by a 'white man' in the neighborhood. Assuming that the white man is the father of the child whom he has whipped, he does not find this incident so unusual as he is used to the everyday beatings of his father. However, after learning that the man was not the boy's father, nor a relative he is quite puzzled. He cannot understand the reason why the boy was beaten and makes the decision never to let anybody beat him.

Wright grows up listening to his neighbours' stories of violent interactions with the white society. Almost everyday he hears of a brutal act of murder or beating. On hearing of the causeless lynching of the husband of a black woman by the white mob, he is both scared and at the same time he is deeply impressed by the woman's vengeance upon the white mob. He concludes that he would do the same thing if he ever faces an angry mob. He narrates :

I did not know if the story was factually true or not, but it was emotionally true because I had already grown to feel that there existed men against whom I was powerless, men who could violate my life at will. I resolved that I would emulate the black woman if I were ever faced with a white mob; I would conceal a weapon, pretend that I had been crushed by the wrong done to one of my loved ones; then, just when they thought I had accepted their cruelty as the law of my life, I would let go with my gun and kill as many of them as possible before they killed me. The story of the woman's deception gave form and meaning to confused defensive feelings that had long been sleeping in me." (Wright, 2000: 72).

On hearing the woman's tale, Wright experiences a moment of illumination. He realizes the undeniable fact that there are certain people in his life against whom he is powerless, and he is left with two alternatives in his life. Either he will accept their rules and proceed to live as an outsider, having no identity or rights other than the false identity imposed upon him or he will rebel and face death. This is the dilemma young Wright faces at an early age. He ignores the price of his rebellion and resolves to rebel. He decides not to be a passive, docile individual enduring his fate, but to respond to violence with violence when necessary.

From Wright's point of view, the white society expects the black society to internalize their subhuman position and it considers the violence to which they are subjected as natural. The whites' cruelty should be conceived and accepted as the law of the blacks' lives.

Wright is a character whose perception is shaped by the amount of violence he is exposed to. He sees life as a sort of battle that has to be won, and the only way of winning this battle is through violence. He asserts that "I knew that my life was revolving about a world that I had to encounter and fight when I grew up" (Wright, 2000: 124). He is very well aware that one day, sooner or later he will have to fight against the ones who try to oppress him. He also believes that he can only assert himself through violent, brutal acts and he has no mercy for the ones who attempt to hurt him physically. He shows that he will not bear any kind of beating when his Aunt Addie tries to beat him for she sees him as a threat to her authority. The violence he has already seen and felt takes hold of Wright and he gets a knife and defends himself against his aunt. He threatens to kill his aunt with the knife. Finally, he gets what he wants and he is not beaten. In another incident, his Uncle Tom wants to beat him, as he does not like the tone of his voice. He also wants to discipline him by beating, however Wright does not let him since he does not want to be molded into a character which does not fit his identity at all. He states that, "And now a strange uncle who felt that I was impolite was going to teach me to act as I had seen the backward boys act on the plantations, was going to teach me to grin, hang my head, and mumble apologetically when I was spoken to" (Wright, 2000: 158).

The name of his Uncle Tom is quite significant since he resembles the stereotypical Uncle Tom character of Harriet Beecher Stowe's infamous novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Wright's Uncle Tom insists on Wright's submissiveness and obviously desires to make him fit the role of humble, docile, ignorant Uncle Tom of Stowe's novel. The name Uncle Tom has become a stereotype for African-Americans who are too eager to please whites. He is strongly identified with failure and suffering. Stowe introduces Uncle Tom as "a large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindness and benevolence" (Stowe, 1995: 21) Uncle Tom demonstrates that black

figures are contented as slaves. He is simply the embodiment of weakness and submission. He is also portrayed as a very dark-skinned man in a society that regards black skin as tainted.

There is no way that Wright can accept the roles that are attributed to him either by the black or by the white society. In other words, he cannot put up with the prescribed patterns of behavior imposed upon him. He wants to act like an individual with a free-will and with his own sense of right and wrong. His uncle wants to mold Wright's identity into a submissive role. He wants Wright to learn how to grin and hang his head in subordination. However, there is one thing he ignores, which is Wright's determination not to tolerate physical violence, even if it comes from his own uncle. Wright pulls razor blades on his uncle to fight back. In this way, he shows him that he is reckless and dangerous and therefore powerful. His uncle sees that Wright cannot be intimidated. In order to gain respect and acceptance at his new school, he also demonstrates his violent power to other students and in this way he is accepted among them.

The lynchings, segregation, political disfranchisement, economic impoverishment, social humiliations were predominant black experience during the Jim Crow years. Blacks had no choice but to lead a subaltern life and to exist within the boundaries that are erected by the white society. They lived in a hostile world that offered them nothing except terror, dismay and endless suffering. As Davis asserts, "The decade of the 1880s was characterized by mob lynchings, a vicious system of convict prison farms and chain gangs, the horribly debilitating debt peonage of sharecropping, the imposition of a legal color line in race relations, and a variety of laws that blatantly discriminated against blacks"⁶ In such a threatening atmosphere, African-Americans were in a state of constant fear of the possibility of being tormented by mob terror. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall suggests that these lynchings were "... arbitrary and exemplary, aimed not at one individual but at blacks as a group" (Hall, 1993: 141). Being successful or wealthy for an African-American made him and his family prey in the hands of lynching mobs. Joel Williamson

⁶ Davis, Ronald L. F. "Creating Jim Crow",
(Çevrimiçi) <http://jimcrowhistory.org/history/creating.htm>, 02.11.2003.

regards the lynch mentality as “Symbolically, the lynching was often seen as an act against the whole black community and not merely the execution of one or more criminals” (Williamson, 1984: 187). In the Jim Crow South, having a prosperous job risked the lives of both members of the family. Wright as a young boy, witnesses the lynching of his Uncle Hoskins who had a profitable business. Since they are envious of his flourishing business, the local whites murder Hoskins. After hearing about his murder, Richard and his family are so terrorized by the fear that they are also going to be killed, they flee back to his grandmother’s house. He narrates :

Fear drowned out of grief and that night we packed clothes and dishes and loaded them into a farmer’s wagon. Before dawn, we were rolling away, fleeing for our lives. I learned afterwards that Uncle Hoskins had been killed by whites who had long coveted his flourishing liquor business. He had been threatened with death and warned many times to leave, but he had wanted to hold on a while longer to amass more money. (Wright, 2000: 52)

Uncle Hoskins is murdered since he violates the South’s racial codes. In the Jim Crow South, many whites do not hesitate a bit about punishing insubordination with severe violence not only against the offender but also against his relatives and the ones that are close to him. The uncle is simply killed by whites who want to take over his business and property. These whites have also threatened to kill his family, therefore young Wright and his family have to flee without looking back. They are not even able to claim Hoskins’ body or his assets. Wright remembers this bitter experience as follows :

There was no funeral. There was no music. There was no period of mourning. There were only silence, quiet weeping, whispers and fear. I did not know when or where Uncle Hoskins was buried. Aunt Maggie was not even allowed to see his body nor she was able to claim any of his assets. Uncle Hoskins had simply been plucked from our midst and we, figuratively had fallen on our faces to avoid looking into that white-hot face of terror that we knew loomed somewhere above us. This was as close as white terror had ever come to me and my mind reeled. Why had we not fought back, I asked my mother, and the fear that was in her made her slap me into silence. (Wright 2000: 52-53)

In the above excerpt, it is possible to reflect upon the fear that is an inevitable part of the lives of African-Americans. They are silenced in their response to the inequalities and violence imposed by the Jim Crow laws and by lynching mobs. They cannot even bury the dead Hoskins in peace and they are even careful in their mourning. Wright comes to realize that there is an uncontrollable white power “looming” above them. Fearing that her son can also be a target for the white terror, his mother beats him to stop asking questions about whites .

Another violent incident that makes Wright contemplate on the pervasiveness of white oppression is the sudden death of a friend. One morning he learns that Bob, the brother of one of his classmates, is killed by a white mob, after he was thought to have consorted with a white prostitute. On hearing of Bob’s murder Wright feels :

Inside of me my world crashed and my body felt heavy. I stood looking down the quiet, sun-filled street. Bob had been caught by the white death, the threat of which hung over every black male in the South. (Wright, 2000: 172-173)

The only reason behind Bob’s murder is a gossip about his flirtation with a white prostitute. Wright recognizes that every male in the South is under the threat of white brutality. Sooner or later one of them could be a target for this reckless white mob. No black can escape from it. Their attempts to avoid the “white death” is futile as they have no power against whites. Wright agonizes over the futility of their lives. He cannot see any hope or a way out of this oppression. After learning about Bob’s murder for such a trivial thing, he meditates on the meaning of his life and cannot find any meaning at all :

I did not search for a job that day ; I returned home and sat on my porch too, and stared. What I had heard altered the look of the world, induced in me a temporary paralysis of will and impulse. The penalty of death awaited me if I made a false move and I wondered if it was worth-while to make any move at all. The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly; I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew. The actual experience would have let me see the realistic outlines of what was really happening, but as long as it remained something terrible and yet remote, something whose horror

and blood might descend upon me at any moment, I was compelled to give my entire imagination over to it, an act which blocked the springs of thought and feeling in me, creating a sense of distance between me and the world in which I lived. (Wright, 2000: 173)

Thus Wright yields to a temporary state of paralysis. He lucidly sees that by being black in the Jim Crow South he is a prey in the hands of whites. He thinks about the injustices that stem from the mere fact of being black in a white dominated world. In order to live the life he wants he has to overcome these barriers, cross over the color line, yet his primary aim seems to be his survival in this cruel world, as he cannot focus on his future, education and aspirations. He is immobilized by the white terror. He acts according to how the whites respond and this is a threat to his imagination and feelings. He has to concentrate on survival not on his individual goals and dreams. His consciousness is very much disturbed by these nightmarish thoughts and dangers which may befall him any minute. Even though he has not directly or physically undergone such experiences of violent encounters, he is paralyzed by the mere thoughts of them. He is reluctant to act as he knows the futility of his actions beforehand. The white brutality controls his behavior and crowds his thoughts and he is very well aware of the fact that his blackness constitutes a major obstacle in his life. His life is externally conditioned and he is expected to accede to its demands. Hence, Wright feels more and more alienated from the world in which he lives. In the excerpt below Wright contemplates on the meaning of being an African-American and he is also critical of his black community since he laments their passivity:

... the problem of living as a Negro was cold and hard. What was it that made the hate of whites for blacks so steady, seemingly so woven into the texture of things? What kind of life was possible under that hate? How had this hate come to be? Nothing about the problems of Negroes was ever taught in the classrooms at school; and whenever I would raise these questions with the boys, they would either remain silent or turn the subject into a joke. They were vocal about the petty individual wrongs they suffered, but they possessed no desire for a knowledge of the picture as a whole (Wright, 2000: 165)

Wright is more and more frustrated with the feelings of humility and submission and the white assertion of its superiority to the black race. He tries to understand the reasons for the inherent hate of whites against blacks. Being unable to

find answers to his questions, he sorrowfully accepts his condition which is one of solitude.

1.3 The African-American Subject Under The White Gaze

In order not to confront the white rage, African-Americans have tried to avoid any possible engagement with whites. They have to accept “invisibility” by being pushed to the margins of the society. As Dickson D. Bruce Jr. in *W.E.B Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness* analyzes, there is an “internal conflict in the African American individual, between what is “African” and what is “American””. (Bruce, 1992 : 301) As Bruce suggests, African-Americans possess a divided self and this experience of twoness is a paralyzing one. They are torn between two disparate identities and images of blackness. They cannot reconcile their American and Negro identities.

As Frantz Fanon declares:

Without a Negro past, without a Negro Future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned” (Fanon, 1967: 138)

Fanon’s black man no longer fully belongs to his African identity because he has lost his connection with his African roots, yet he is not a white man as whites refuse to see him as one of them. Therefore Fanon describes the black man’s condition as “damned”. African-Americans are neither assimilated to the dominant white American culture, nor to their African culture. They are neither inside nor outside, they are in between. Wright explains that “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, 2000: 35). According to the black intellectual Du Bois, African-Americans were forced to live behind “the veil” in the terror of Jim Crow so as to survive.

Du Bois’ veil metaphor is an illuminating one in apprehending the condition of the black during the Post-Slavery years. As Du Bois explains :

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1994: 2)

African-Americans are born with a "veil", that is to say that their lives are preconditioned and even their vision, sight is limited. This veil is imposed upon them by the dominant white culture. Their individuality is defined and shaped by the myths of whites. As long as they are behind this veil, they are both invisible to the rest of the world and also the world is invisible to them. Hence, their invisibility is two-sided. Therefore, they are not only limited in their perception, but also they are simply deprived of recognition by the others who considers them as invisible having a selfless existence.

James Weldon Johnson considers this twoness of the black experience as follows :

"... dwarfing, warping influence which operates on each and every colored man in the United States... He is forced to take his outlook on all things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man, or even a human being, but from the viewpoint of a colored man." (Johnson, 1990: 14).

Blacks are only offered the vision of a colored man, they do not have any other viewpoint than that of a black man, which means that their ability to see the world is limited to only one narrow perception.

Another famous intellectual and novelist James Baldwin in his book *Notes Of A Native Son* also comments on the agonizing effects of being a Negro as "I learned in New Jersey that to be a Negro meant, precisely, that one was never looked at but was simply at the mercy of the reflexes the color of one's skin caused in other people" (Baldwin, 1963: 83). Baldwin resents the fact that he, as a black man, is never looked at, but solely evaluated by the color of his skin. The observers are not interested in him as a person, their only concern is his color. The color of his skin

determines everything about him. Baldwin reflects upon the reactions of whites regarding his color and states that the color of skin creates a reflection in white people and it is this reflection which decides his destiny. It is possible to sense Baldwin's reproachful view on being misrecognized by the white. There is no doubt that this misrecognition of whites who refuse to acknowledge the humanity of blacks has traumatizing effects on the psyche of blacks.

In this respect, Fanon claims that "I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex" (Fanon, 1967: 12). As a result of the juxtaposition of the white and black races, blacks find themselves in an agonizing dilemma according to Fanon. The two races are irreconcilable. In other words, both the black and the white races exist in the same world but there are borders that separate these two races. African-Americans are incessantly being viewed as non-entities. They are foreigners in their own land. Furthermore, they encounter this misrecognition on a daily basis. In their every action they encounter the negative sentiments of whites. Fanon, in *Black Skins White Masks* conceives that :

... I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro! (Fanon, 1967: 116)

In this quotation Fanon shows how blacks are constructed externally as a fixed and unchanging identity. He also observes the white gaze as the only real gaze which the blacks are conditioned by. Fanon's insistence is how the gaze of the whites disregard the African-American individuality. The white eyes, that are considered to be the only real eyes, never cease to segregate blacks. Due to their distorted vision in the eyes of the white society, African-Americans cannot even objectively see themselves. They see and define themselves in relation to the white gaze. The black gaze has no value.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel asserts that "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel, 1977: 111). According to Hegel, each of us derives

his or her sense of self through interaction with other human beings, through coming to view our individual selves as others see us, and the refusal of others to acknowledge our humanity or existence may trigger in us a sense of apprehension or anguish. Only through the recognition of other people, human beings become self-conscious. Fanon also underlines the significance of the feeling of the sense of recognition in individuals, when he asserts that:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed.(Fanon, 1967: 217).

Every individual comes to existence in relation to others, for he sees and acknowledges himself in the eyes of the others. In brief, individuals are defined by how they are seen, and concerning African-Americans, their definition is through the color of their skin which indicates their self-negation.

As Fanon denotes:

However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white (Fanon, 1967: 10).

Therefore, the perception of whites is crucial for blacks. They are under the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype. It should be noted that this self-negation and the distorted self-consciousness of blacks lead to psychic disorders as well as an experience of trauma. In brief, blacks are very much disturbed and traumatized by the contemptuous ideas that the white world has of them as they can only define themselves when they recognize their relation to the other, namely the white. Everything the white culture offers is designed to reinforce the sense of inferiority of African-Americans. Therefore they feel that they are inferior to whites indeed. As Fanon declares:

If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process:

-primarily economic;
-subsequently, the internalization-or, better, the epidermalization-
of this inferiority (Fanon, 1967: 11)

As one's self-image derives in large part from how one is viewed by the others, the negative gaze of whites, which is internalized by many of blacks, causes an inferiority complex, and in many cases that results in self-hatred. African-Americans in Fanon's standpoint, internalize the negative traits imposed upon them by whites and judging themselves from the eyes of whites, they experience an inferiority complex. Apart from the economic reason for this inferiority complex, there is one more reason which perpetuates these feelings of inferiority, that is the internalization, in Fanon's emphasis "epidermalization" of this sense of inferiority. Under these conditions, the black man is necessarily alienated from himself, as cultural values are internalized, or "epidermalized" into his consciousness and this creates a disjuncture between his consciousness and his body. Fanon believes that racism generates harmful psychological constructs that both blind the black man to his subjection to a universalized white norm and alienate his consciousness.

1.3.1 Stereotypical Images of African-Americans

The stereotyping of African-Americans is an indispensable necessity for the white society. The white world thinks in terms of Manichean dualism and in the European way of thinking the black is the other, the different, the periphery. As Fanon observes in the *Wretched of the Earth* "the colonial world is a Manichean world" (Fanon, 1968: 41), "...a world divided into compartments" (Fanon, 1968: 84). In Western culture, in the binary opposition of the white and the black, the white is privileged over the black and consequently it leads to the formation of the "other". In the mindset of the white, the white are the central and the black are the marginalized other, repressed, ignored, pushed to the margins. Fanon goes on to assert that:

At times, this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the

native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man's reptilian motions, of the stink of the antive quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary (Fanon, 1968: 42)

Non-whites are referred to as beasts. White society constructs negative values of blackness; they are presented as savages, natives, primitives. Baldwin declares that "The white American regards his darker brother through the distorting screen created by a lifetime of conditioning". (Baldwin, 1963: 105). Baldwin here talks about the distorted views of blacks in the eyes of the white. It is the white who constructs the negativity of blackness. The white culture both constructs and helps to perpetuate this vicious cycle of degradation. In their minds, there is the prevailing belief that African-Americans are not only illiterate and unprogressive, but also mentally and socially inferior. Non-whites are portrayed by colonial society as completely lacking in values, knowledge, beauty, dignity and humanity. Fanon expresses the negative portrayals of natives as follows :

The settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values... The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces" (Fanon, 1968: 41).

In this excerpt Fanon represents the stereotypical image of blacks as savages or beasts. Natives are defined in opposition to good values in society. They are not only the opposite, the negative of ethics, but also the rejection of these. They are presented as the "absolute evil" they are responsible for every sin and guilt in this world. Hence, blackness is identified with evil and sin. Again to quote Fanon:

A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of nonexistence. Sin is Negro as virtue is white (Fanon, 1967: 139)

Blacks are associated with sin and guilt, on the other hand whites are associated with virtue. Being “different”, being a Negro is more than a feeling of inferiority, it is a feeling of nonexistence. The oppressive white society grants them feelings of nonexistence. Blacks are portrayed and treated as animals economically, socially and politically. Jean Paul Sartre in the preface of Frantz Fanon’s influential work *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that the people of African descent is “... neither man nor animal” in the eyes of the white. He goes on to depict the condition of those “natives” as he puts it, as “beaten, undernourished, ill, terrified – but only up to a certain point – he has...always the same traits of character: he’s a sly-boots, a lazybones, and a thief, who lives on nothing, and who understands only violence.” (qtd. in. Fanon , 1968: 16)

Fanon connects this unfavorable myth of African-Americans with Carl Jung’s psychological theory of the archetypes and the collective unconscious. Jung’s collective unconscious consists of archetypes. Jung also called them dominants, imagos, mythological or primordial images. According to Jung, an archetype is an unlearned tendency to experience things in a certain way. Jung also defines archetypes as “categories of the imagination” in the case of the collective unconscious which comprises these archetypes (qtd. in. Adams, 1996: 44). Jung links the archetypes to heredity and regards them as instinctual. He denotes that the archetypes “are existing forms of priori, or biological norms of psychic activity” (Jung & Kerenyi, 1949: 219). There are some basic archetypes which exist at the collective unconscious level and Fanon asserts that “The myth of the bad nigger is part of the collective unconscious” (Fanon, 1967: 92). However, at the center of Fanon’s perception of the myths of blacks, there is his belief that these myths are constructed by whites and are merely the “white man’s artifact”. Fanon likens these myths, stereotypes and prototypes to Jung’s archetypes and claims that these prejudices are the products of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is the “psychic inheritance” of human beings. It is the reservoir of our experiences as species. It influences human’s experiences and behavior. Fanon describes his understanding of Jungian Psychology as follows :

European civilization is characterized by the presence, at the heart of what Jung calls the collective unconscious, of an archetype: an expression of the bad instincts, of the darkness inherent in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, the Negro who slumbers in every white man" (Fanon, 1967: 187)

Fanon's objective in establishing the connection of stereotypes of blacks and Jung's archetypes is to show that these prejudices are solely social constructs, not biological ones. This is the point that Fanon criticizes Jung, for Jung claims that these prejudices, archetypes are inherent. Fanon finds Jung's theories relevant in apprehending the condition of blackness, as these myths are collective. However, he disagrees with Jung by drawing a sharp distinction between habits and instincts. He also claims that instincts and habits are totally different in the sense that instincts are innate but habits are merely social constructs. He criticizes Jung by stating :

Jung locates the collective unconscious in the inherited cerebral matter. But the collective unconscious, without our having to fall back on the genes, is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group (Fanon, 1967: 188)

In this quotation Fanon apparently talks about the white race. He objects to Jung's view of the collective unconscious as instinctual, for he sees the collective unconscious as a product of culture, "... in fact the collective unconscious is cultural, which means acquired" (Fanon, 1967: 188). These myths, prejudices are mental and more strikingly cultural constructs, they are not inborn tendencies. In other words, they are cultural impositions.

Like Fanon, Michael Vannoy Adams draws attention to another aspect of the collective unconscious. "There are two dimensions, not just one, to the collective: an archetypal (a natural – that is, a transhistorical, transcultural, transethnic) dimension and a stereotypical (a historical, cultural, ethnic) dimension." (Adams, 1996: 46).

As regards to Fanon's view of archetypes, his following statement should be considered:

In Europe, that is to say, in every civilized and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The archetype of the lowest values is represented by the Negro...How else is one to explain for

example, that the unconscious representing the base and inferior traits is colored black? (Fanon, 1967: 189)

Fanon explains the negative traits ascribed upon blacks as the archetypes of the collective unconscious. In his point of view, African-Americans are viewed as being the archetype of the lowest values. They are the source of evil and sin. It is according to these images and archetypes that certain ways of perception and apprehension are shaped. The perception of whites is formed by these pre-existent prejudiced opinions, therefore they associate blackness with inferiority and they act according to these specific modes of behavior. Fanon goes on to explain that :

In Europe the Negro has one function: that of symbolizing the lower emotions, the baser inclinations, the dark side of the soul. In the collective unconscious of *homo occidentalis*, the Negro-or, if one prefers, the color black-symbolizes evil, sin, wretchedness, death, war, famine (Fanon, 1967: 190-191).

In the collective unconscious the color black is strongly identified with simply what is most unwanted and what is avoided. He also points out the function of the Negro as the embodiment of the dark side of the human soul. He exemplifies his view by giving striking contrasts between the connotations of whiteness and blackness :

The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black- whether one is thinking physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness...Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth, abysmal depths, blacken someone's reputation; and; on the other side, the birth look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical, heavenly light (Fanon, 1967: 189)

On one hand there is the blackness, which is associated with sin, darkness, devilry, wickedness, maleficence, and on the other there is the whiteness with its brightness, clearness and innocence. The definite lines between the two separate worlds are drawn meticulously by the white culture according to Fanon. These portrayals, stereotypes are so effective that they even distort the self-image of Negroes.

As Fanon argues "White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro" (Fanon, 1967: 14). Since Negroes perceive

themselves from the eyes of whites, this deviation is inevitable. Their perceptions, even their self-image is determined by a completely hostile race, this even leads to the questioning of one's own existence. Even their sense of existence is distorted. In a way, blacks are forced to internalize the negative ideas imposed upon them by the white race and hence they act stereotypically. They are forced into an acceptance of being illiterate, docile servants. They feel that they are safe as long as they are willing to live within the boundaries ascribed upon them.

To break out of the confines of these boundaries calls for rebellion, which results in fatal reactions from a white dominated society. On that account, African-Americans have to continue their lives wearing an invisible, stereotypical mask as a way of surviving. The stereotypes and expectations of a racist society compel blacks to behave only in certain ways, never allowing them to act accordingly to their own will. This stereotypical mask is forced upon them, and to shed away this mask and reveal themselves mean death. For long years African-Americans had to wear this "mask of accommodation" which had denied them self-expression.

Wright's classmate Griggs is an example of the stereotypical black figure that the white society wants to mold Wright and the others into. Griggs keeps telling Wright that he has to be submissive and must smile in the presence of whites. He advises Wright to think before he acts and to think before he speaks when he is in front of white people. He criticizes Wright about acting around white people as if he does not know that they are white. He advises Wright to show the whites that he remembers that they are white and act accordingly. He explains that what whites want is deference; they want to be shown that blacks know that they are white and apparently different than and superior to them. However, Wright wants to act as a decent individual, just like others, but in time he learns

"... to be servile and obsequious, to say "sir" to drunken and contemptible white men, to conceal his thoughts and emotions beneath a mask of humble good humor and deference. Not to do so, to forget the "sir" or the "mister", to aspire to learn a skilled trade, to show resentment of sneers, condescension and abuse, was to invite "trouble". And trouble could mean death. (qtd. in. Butler, 1995: 63-64).

Wright learns to wear the mask of obsequiousness which will ensure his survival. His friend Griggs also acts under the guise of this servile black boy mask, but in fact he has a profound hatred towards white people. As to the invisible masks which blacks have to wear in the presence of whites, Johnson explains that "I have often watched with interest and sometimes amazement even ignorant colored men under cover of broad grins and minstrel antics maintain this dualism in the presence of white men." (Johnson, 1990: 14). The dualism Johnsons mentions refers to Du Bois' concept of the double consciousness of black experience. In order to sustain this dual experience of being a black individual on one hand and being an American citizen on the other, blacks wear this mask of subordination. Therefore, this twoness, this duality bestows black individuals "a sort of dual personality" (Johnson, 1990: 14). Griggs tells Wright that he has to obey the rules and to hide his real self or he might be a target for whites. He explains to Richard his true feelings about whites as follows:

...You may think I'm an Uncle Tom, but I'm not. I hate these white people, hate'em with all my heart. But I can't show it; if I did, they'd kill me (Wright, 2000: 187)

Another example of whites' humiliating perception of blackness is Wright's co-worker Shorty. Shorty one day needs a quarter for lunch, and to get it, he allows a white man kick him in exchange for it. Through the characters of Griggs and Shorty the roles that blacks play for whites become very evident to Wright. He is very much disillusioned about his friends' submission to white order. Bone talks about the disillusionment of Wright after witnessing "the Southern Negro's complicity in his own abasement" (Bone, 1969: 18). Wright is further alienated from the black community after seeing their surrender to such degrading images of themselves. His disappointment is due to the slavish obedience of his own race.

Wright marvels at the willingness of Southern Negroes to police themselves; to curb their natural impulses, their speech and gestures, aspirations, hopes, and dreams. Here is the ultimate betrayal : the collusion of self in its own annihilation. (Bone, 1969: 18).

Although they have lost their individuality and self-esteem, African-Americans still submit to racial oppression. Concerning the stereotypical roles of blacks, it is possible to perceive that Wright's co-worker, Shorty is willing to "act the clown" in the presence of whites. Bone's observation is appropriate when he denotes that "The archetype of self-annihilation is the Sambo figure, the Negro who approximates in his behavior the clownish role assigned him by the whites." (Bone, 1969: 18). It can be said that, Shorty is the embodiment of this Sambo figure in the book. This Sambo image that is ascribed to African-Americans represents the obedient, good slave.

Stanley M. Elkins describes the Sambo stereotype as "...docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing" (Elkins, 1959: 82). This Sambo image is very suitable to the role of shuffling, lazy, nonsense-talking Negroes that are presented in minstrel shows. This bumbling, illiterate, shiftless, scheming Negro very much fits the character of Shorty, since he is ready to be manipulated as a Sambo doll which moves when its strings are pulled.

According to Bone, Shorty is a symbol of "psychic nothingness". He further claims that Shorty's self is "the inauthentic self that Wright repudiates, the role that he would rather die than play, the void from which he flees to establish an identity". (Bone, 1969: 18-19). It is possible to say that, Shorty has lost his dignity and humanity for the sake of getting money as well as securing his safety. He knows that whites want blacks to behave in certain manners, and as he is fit to their stereotypical views, they do not see him as a threat to their race. Bone conceives that this fitting into the stereotypical image is the "ultimate betrayal" to one's self. Bone shows that erasing your own individuality and acting stereotypically leads to self-annihilation and this is what Wright finds unbearable. He has no tolerance for such characters and he is disgusted by their actions. As Bone reinforces "Wright's response to the self-limiting tendencies in Negro life was a profound disgust" (Bone, 1969: 19). Therefore, he not only grieves for the obvious passivity of his own community but also loathes them intensely. In one of the memorable parts of the autobiography he wonders bitterly:

...how smoothly the black boys acted out the roles that the white race had mapped out for them. Most of them were not conscious of living a special separate, stunted way of life. Yet I knew that in some period of their growing up – a period that they had no doubt forgotten – there had been developed in them a delicate, sensitive controlling mechanism that shut off their minds and emotions from all that the white race has said was taboo. Although they lived in an America where in theory there existed equality of opportunity, they knew unerringly what to aspire to and what not to aspire to. (Wright, 2000: 198-199).

Since the actualization of their dreams is very weak, in fact impossible, African-Americans have a way of dealing with these practices, which is to develop a controlling mechanism. This controlling mechanism enables them to lead a safe existence. Although they resent the facts of their lives, they adapt themselves to this world so as not to be hurt. In time, they get used to their separate way of living. Apart from the black characters who are eager to play the role of the stereotypical compliant servant, there are numerous white characters who demand that Wright know his place as a black boy. In their own ways, they warn him not to go beyond the limitations of his stunted life. As Fanon contends:

The native is a being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits (Fanon, 1968: 52).

Even though they exist in a world of seemingly equal opportunities, African-Americans are aware of the fact that they have a limited life and that they should never want to go beyond the predetermined patterns. In other words, from the very early ages of their lives they are taught to submit and yield to the white dominant culture.

Wright's white employers wanted to mold him into humiliating stereotypes. To fulfill his yearning to read, Wright starts working as a paper boy, selling newspapers that are meant to circulate among rural, white Protestant readers. He never reads the newspaper, but its magazine supplement. One day, a friend of the family calls him and asks him the reason for selling these papers. Then he shows Wright a cartoon in the newspaper:

... I looked at the picture of a huge black man with a greasy, sweaty face, thick lips, flat nose, golden teeth, sitting at a polished, wide-topped desk in a swivel chair. The man had on a pair of gleaming yellow shoes and his feet were propped upon the desk. His thick lips nursed a big, black cigar that held white ashes an inch long. In the man's red-dotted tie was a dazzling horseshoe stickpin, glaring conspicuously. The man wore red suspenders and his shirt was striped silk and there were huge diamond rings on his fat black fingers. A chain of gold girded his belly and from the fob of his watch a rabbit's foot dangled. On the floor at the side of the desk was a spittoon overflowing with mucus. Across the wall of the room in which the man sat was a big sign, reading :THE WHITE HOUSE... My eyes went to the top of the cartoon and I read :

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, 2000: 129-130).

In the light of the above quotation, Wright's criticism of the submissive Negro is apparent. His elderly friend shows him that the newspaper he is selling is produced by Ku Klux Klan sympathizers. Wright is shaken by this grave mistake. The excerpt reinforces the stereotypical view of African-Americans as uncivilized beasts. The man's depiction of the Negro is striking in the sense that he possesses almost all the negative characteristics imposed upon African-Americans. Even his physical description evokes a sense of disgust. He has thick lips and a flat nose which are common physical features of African-Americans. Furthermore, his clothing is described as uncouth, clownish, lacking all grace. On the floor, a spittoon is filled with mucus to the point of running over, indicating that this filthy 'nigger' always spits. This cartoon further reinforces the disbelief that all African-Americans have a dream of being the President of the United States one day. Another dream which the cartoon illustrates is the desire of the black male to sleep with a white woman. Finally, the cartoon advises the whites to organize against blacks so as to protect white womanhood. An African-American male's desire to sleep with white women, that is "This sexual myth - the quest for white flesh..." (Fanon, 1967: 81) is created and perpetuated by the white society and circulated by the press. Wright's friend also "... read aloud a long article in which lynching was passionately advocated as a solution for the problem of the Negro. (Wright, 2000: 131) from the same

newspaper. Wright is so disturbed that he immediately throws the newspapers into a ditch and quits selling them.

Wright's white employers and co-workers have preferred that he act out the roles of stereotypical 'niggers'. With the help of Griggs, he finds a job in an optical company. His white boss, Mr. Crane, is a very friendly man and he instructs the other white employees to teach Wright the optical trade. His boss wants Wright to be given a chance to learn the trade. However, two employees, Pease and Reynolds are extremely racist characters and they constantly humiliate Wright. The following conversation between Wright and Pease and Reynolds illustrates the degradation he is subjected to on a daily basis :

"Nigger, you think you're white don't you?"

"No, sir."

"You're acting mighty like it", he said

"I was only doing what the boss told me to do", I said. Pease shook his fist in my face.

"This is a *white* man's work around here", he said.

"Nigger, you think you'll ever amount to anything?" he asked in a slow, sadistic voice.

"I don't know, sir" I said, my head still averted.

"If I was a nigger, I'd kill myself", he said.

I said nothing. I was angry.

"You know why?" he asked.

I still said nothing.

"But I don't reckon niggers mind being niggers," he said suddenly and laughed. (Wright, 2000: 190)

Pease and Reynolds incessantly threaten Wright, and finally he reluctantly leaves his job. He feels deeply wounded, he feels as if he had been "slapped out of the human race" (Wright, 2000: 192). His humanity is very much shattered after this incident and he soon resolves to leave the South for a better living.

In order to earn enough money to flee the South, young Wright is involved in criminal acts. He violates the law by bootlegging liquor to the white prostitutes who work at the hotel, where he works as a bellboy. When he gets another job in a movie house he steals money. Considering Wright's crimes and his defiance of the

law, Bone claims that the protagonist of *Black Boy*, namely Richard Wright, is a picaresque⁷ hero. He also defines the picaresque hero as a:

rootless man, a wanderer. No longer an organic part of a stable social order, he undertakes a symbolic journey, whose aim is the emancipation of the self. On the open road, he has a series of adventures which test his capacity for improvisation...His society is closed against him; it drives him out; it threatens him with spiritual death. To survive, he becomes a hustler, a confidence man, an outlaw, a criminal (Bone, 1969: 16).

Wright not only struggles against the white dominant world, but also he is in conflict with the black community. Due to these conflicts, both with his own community and with the white Southern world, he feels uprooted. This alienation endangers him with the possibility of spiritual death. He is estranged from the outer world in every sense. As a means to escape from the barriers entrapping him, he commits crimes. Since he is completely disillusioned with the stable social order, he engages in illegal acts. He is in utter defiance of the ones who enforce those laws. To survive, he becomes an outlaw, as Bone has previously stated. Wright explains his disappointment with the law as follows :

I had know seen at close quarters the haughty white men who made the laws; I had seen how they acted, how they regarded black people, how they regarded me; and I no longer felt bound by the laws which white and black were supposed to obey in common. I was outside those laws; the white people had told me so (Wright, 2000 : 203).

According to Wright, he is immune from everything in this world, and thus he should also be immune from the legal system. After several encounters with the white world and witnessing how whites treated him, he becomes a criminal. Resulting from the humiliations he has witnessed throughout his life, his moral sense gives way to criminal acts. Wright notes that "My inability to adjust myself to the white world had already shattered apart of the structure of my personality and had broken down

⁷ The term "picaresque" is a Spanish word for "rogue" or "rascal". The picaresque novel was a popular style of novel that flourished in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The picaresque novel deals with an episodic recounting of the adventures of an antihero on the road. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* (1957) and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye* (1951) are considered to be successful examples of the novel picaresque.

the inner barriers to crime” (Wright, 2000: 203). In such an early age, he decides to be a criminal, an outlaw, as all the legal and ethical values of the white world are meaningless to him. Because of the fact that the white do not acknowledge his individuality, their laws do not appeal to him.

In one of the most brutal scenes of the book, a white co-worker called Mr. Olin, makes two black youngsters, Wright and Harrison, beat each other by planting seeds of mortal fear. Under the pretense of protecting Wright, he deceives him by convincing him that his black friend Harrison is planning to kill him because of jealousy. Wright neither trusts Mr. Olin, nor Harrison, having witnessed extreme betrayals from both of the races. He cannot decide who his true friend is. Mr. Olin tells Harrison that Wright has a knife and that he would cut him when the opportunity comes, then he goes to Wright and tells him the same lie, to force them into a fight just for the sake of sport. By chance, Wright and Harrison get to speak, and then they decide that “...it’s fun for white men to see niggers fight” (Wright, 2000: 239). The death of one of the ‘niggers’ does not make any sense for whites. They only want to have some fun, even it costs the life of one person. “To white men we [blacks] are like dogs or cocks” (Wright, 2000: 239). However, the whites do not stop, they keep disturbing and provoking Harrison and Wright by making them suspicious of each other’s murderous intentions. Mr. Olin gives Wright a knife to protect himself with, but Wright wants to point it at his chest. Harrison is also given a knife. They both “felt the same shame, felt how foolish and weak we were in the face of the domination of the whites” (Wright, 2000: 241). Seeing that they cannot make them kill each other, Mr. Olin and a group of white men offer some money. Wright and Harrison finally decide to fake a fight so as to get rid of endless annoyances of the whites and to earn some money. However, things do not end up as they have calculated. In the fighting scene:

The shame and anger we felt for having allowed ourselves to be duped crept into our blows and blood ran into our eyes, half blinding us. The hate we felt for the men whom we had tried to cheat went into the blows we threw at each other. (Wright, 2000: 245)

As they fear the whites and are unable to fake a fight, they beat each other and are severely injured after the fight. However, what hurts them most are not the physical wounds they get after the fight, but the deep shame and self-hatred they feel after such humiliation. Another significant point to be emphasized in the fighting scene is the roles of Harrison and Wright as pugilists; the stereotype of the African-American man as a primitive fighter.

Towards the end of the book, Wright adapts himself to the codes of the racial world since he observes the futility of his rebellious acts. In order to reach his goal of fleeing the South, he sees submissiveness as necessary and acts according to the rules of the white. He can now easily fit in the stereotypical roles as apparent in his statement "I answered with false heartiness, falling quickly into that nigger-being-a-good-natured-boy-in-the-presence-of-white-man pattern, a pattern into which I could now slide easily..." (Wright, 2000: 236).

One of the most commonly believed stereotypical traits of African-Americans is their tendency to violence. They are viewed as potential murderers or simply law-breakers. As the criminal propensities of African-Americans are considered to be at the peak, the dominant white culture thinks that the "alien" presence, namely Negroes, pose a threat to their civilization. Consequently, the common belief of the white is that the violent savages can only be tamed through violence. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, focuses on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and asserts that the relationship between the two was born in violence, perpetuated by violence, and dissolved by violence.

The violence they are exposed to, has no doubt an undeniable influence on African-Americans. While some of them choose to lead an existence of passivity, some others are very much incited by the white violence that is directed towards them. As Wright writes:

... under all our talk floated a latent sense of violence; the whites had drawn a line over which we dared not to step and we accepted that line because our bread was at stake. But within our boundaries we, too, drew a line that included our right to bread regardless of the indignities or degradations involved in getting it. If a white man had sought to keep us from obtaining a job, or enjoying the rights of citizenship, we would have bowed silently to his power. But if he had sought to deprive us of a dime, blood might have been spilt.

Hence our daily lives were so bound up with trivial objectives that to capitulate when challenged was tantamount to surrendering the right to life itself. Our anger was like the anger of children, passing quickly from one petty grievance to another, from the memory of one slight wrong to another (Wright, 2000: 231).

Blacks are muted against their deprivation of the equal rights, however regarding money, they turn into bombs that are ready to explode. They have no seeming opposition to the boundary lines that separate them from the white world, as they are accustomed to them as unchangeable realities of their miserable lives. Yet, deep down inside somewhere, there is a growing rage towards the white world, which they see as a "... kind of superworld" (Wright, 2000: 231), "looming above them" (Wright, 2000 : 53).

Young Wright does not want to come to terms with his Southern black folk past and achieves some kind of a triumph by fleeing the South. To some extent, he is able to free himself from the burden of his black past and the oppression he is exposed to from both of the communities. He transcends the suffering of the black community by his literacy. In this way, he proves that he is different from the suffocating members of his stunted black life. However the hardships he has witnessed and the crude violence he has encountered, have a deep impact in his career as a black novelist.

CHAPTER 2 Native Son : The Failure Of The Black Hero As A Rebel

2.1 Black Self's Reaction Against The Factors That Shape His Identity

Wright's novel *Native Son* is very much criticized due to the fact that it abounds with violent scenes. Baldwin is one of those critics who foregrounds his criticism on the concept of African-American rage, which he sees as something that is common to all African-Americans. In his critical essay "Alas, Poor Richard" he comments on the "violence factor" of *Native Son*, in claiming that:

The violence is gratuitous and compulsive because the root of violence is never examined. The root is rage. It is the rage, almost literally the howl, of a man who is being castrated. (Baldwin, 1961: 188).

Baldwin's critical eye, examines the experience of violence in *Native Son* to be unnecessary and seeming to have no apparent cause. He further observes that the element of violence in the novel is portrayed as having an obsessive nature. He likens the rage of African-Americans to the moan of a man who is being castrated. African-Americans are very much like castrated men, whose vital organ is brutally cut off to the point that it can no longer function. This symbol of castration signifies emasculation, the removal of black genitals. This lack causes them to be half-man, since they are not on equal terms with white men. This is the reason they moan. Their pride and self-assurance are taken away by white oppressors. They are wiped out. They are left with profound insecurity.

To put it succinctly, Baldwin insists that, at the bottom of the violence in *Native Son*, there is the element of rancorous rage, though its causes are never referred to. The rage Baldwin refers to is clearly experienced by Bigger Thomas who is the protagonist of *Native Son*. According to Baldwin, African-Americans have an instinctive feeling of rage both directed at the conditions in which they are forced to live and to those ones who impose those conditions. Sartre's observation is relevant

when he remarks that there is a suppressed fury in black people and “If this suppressed fury fails to find an outlet, it turns in a vacuum and devastates the oppressed creatures themselves” (qtd. in. Fanon, 1968: 18). Bigger’s tragic end is the illustration of Sartre’s claim that the rage of the oppressed leads to self-destruction. According to Charles I. Glicksberg, by creating violent scenes Wright is as if “...holding a loaded pistol at the head of the white world while he [muttered] between clenched teeth : ‘Either you grant us equal rights as human beings or else this is what will happen’” (Glicksberg , 1946: 482) Hence, it is possible to say that Wright has a threatening attitude in writing about race relations. In brief, Wright employs these scenes, with the aim of daunting the white society by showing them the feeling of violence which is in the hearts of African-Americans. Wright seems to suggest that white society is responsible for the criminality of blacks, since by oppressing them whites transform blacks into criminals. Henry Seidel Canby points out that “... this is a novel which only a Negro could have written; whose theme is the mind of the Negro we see every day; whose emotion is the emotion of that native born American under the stress of a social situation difficult in the extreme; whose point and purpose are not race war or propaganda of any kind, but to show how a “bad nigger” is made from human material that might have become something very different.” (qtd. in. Butler, 1995: 23) Therefore, it would not be wrong to claim that criminals like Bigger are created by the oppressive social conditions. And the violent scenes depicted in *Native Son* serve to show the consequences of oppression which places a black individual in unbearable positions so that he is compelled to engage in violent acts. As Macksey and Moorer observe:

Wright thus uses the violence always so close to the surface in his fiction to deconstruct the comfortable myth of America as a society of unlimited space for the individual. On the contrary, Wright’s recurrent argument is that American society is so repressive that blacks will have to engage in an act of violence (actual or symbolic) to strike through the mask of coercion or alternatively will have to flee the society altogether in pursuit for their potential (Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 6).

Wright uses these violent scenes to criticize the oppressive white society on the one hand, and on the other to make them aware of the dangers of such

repressive practices that may befall them any minute. He does not see many alternatives for black individuals; either they will have to flee the brutal oppression or they will turn to violence as a means to survival. He wants to disturb the white society by reminding them that the myth of a safe, comfortable life is only a product of wishful thinking and there is the reality of oppression and violence.

Wright himself in his highly acclaimed introduction to *Native Son* presents an essay entitled "How 'Bigger' Was Born" which demonstrates his aim in creating a character like Bigger as : "For a long time I toyed with the idea of writing a novel in which a Negro Bigger Thomas would loom as a symbolic figure of American life, a figure who would hold within him the prophecy of our future" (Wright, 1940: xx)⁸ . In creating a violent protagonist like Bigger, Wright intends to arouse fear in the hearts of individuals and in this way he aims to make them aware of the psychological conditions of oppressed African-Americans who can easily be transformed into violent criminals. He wants them to open their eyes to the realities of American life by presenting the character of Bigger, who is an intimidating embodiment of the future of Americans according to Wright.

Nick Aaron Ford declares that "Wright's major purpose in this novel was to show that social and economic barriers against race lead to grave injustices toward racial minorities and that those injustices so distort character and personality growth that criminal monstrosities such as Bigger, are produced." (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 141). What Ford implies is, the racist social order and the oppression it creates are capable of producing revengeful criminals. Wright conveys his views through the character of Bigger Thomas and predicts that if no measure is taken Biggers will continue to commit crime. As Baldwin denotes " ... no American Negro exists who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in the skull." (Baldwin, 1963: 40). Baldwin argues that every Negro in the United States has the same feelings of resentment like Bigger and the violent aspects of Bigger are communal facts since the oppressed ones show their reaction against oppression with violence.

⁸ *Native Son*, Richard, Wright, New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1940. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

Regarding the aim of the presence of frightening violent scenes in *Native Son* Irwing Howe observes that :

A blow at the white man, the novel forced him to recognize himself as an oppressor. A blow at the black man, the novel forced him to recognize the cost of his submission...Speaking from the black wrath of retribution, Wright insisted that history can be a punishment. He told us the one thing even the most liberal whites preferred not to hear: that Negroes were far from patient or forgiving, that they were scarred by fear, that they hated every moment of their suppression even when seeming most acquiescent, and that often enough they hated us, the decent and cultivated white men who from complicity or neglect shared in the responsibility for their plight. (qtd. in. Abcaim, 1970: 136)

Howe conceives that, both the black and white communities have a lesson to learn from the novel. In writing *Native Son*, Wright forces both communities to recognize their faults. Not only whites are guilty in the eyes of Wright, but blacks are equally guilty as they recoil into their own shells in order to shun oppression. He also underlines the fact that blacks pretend to be submissive, but deep down inside of them a hatred grows for the ones who force them to lead miserable lives. Wright also aims to distort the image of patient, forgiving, acquiescent Negroes, who are crushed under oppression.

2.1.1 Black Self Trapped In the Myth of The Rapist

Apart from his criticism of the subservient Uncle Tom stereotype, which is expected of the African-Americans, another stereotype which Wright wants to criticize is the image of the black man as a rapist. On that account, Baldwin denotes that :

I do not think I am the first person to notice this, but there is probably no greater (or more misleading) body of sexual myths in the world today than those which have proliferated around the figure of the American negro. This means that he is penalized for the guilty imagination of the white people who invest him with their hates and longings, and is the principal target of their sexual paranoia. Thus, when in Wright's pages a Negro male is found hacking a white woman to death, the very gusto with which this is done, and the great attention paid to the details of physical

destruction reveal a terrible attempt to break out of the cage in which the American imagination has imprisoned him for so long. (Baldwin, 1961: 188).

Baldwin emphasizes the fact that Wright breaks away from the confinements entrapping African-Americans while dealing with the scenes of violence and physical destruction. He also considers the sexual myths regarding blacks as one of the most common and misleading myths of the world. These deceptive myths cause a sexual paranoia on whites' side and thus, when a sex crime is committed against a white woman, blacks are always presumed to be guilty. There is a shared, collective vision of black males as rapists of white women. This negative identity is constructed for the black man. These preconditioned ideas about blacks are stamped on their faces. No matter how hard they crave for getting rid of this image, there is no way of escaping this mutually accepted vision. Since both blacks and whites internalize such stereotypical identities there is no way of discarding such a fixed fate.

Regarding the rapist myths of blacks, Dorothy Redden states that Bigger is "almost a stereotype of the skulking black brute who violates and kills pale virgins in their beds". (qtd. in. Bloom, 1990: 74). As to the sexual myths of African-American males, it would not be wrong to assert that Bigger is the very victim of this myth of the negro as a rapist. In Bigger's character, it is possible to see the reflections of the white imagination of negroes as criminals or rapists. These racial myths coerce a burden on the consciousness of black individuals and Bigger surrenders to that burden. Jonathan Elmer's observation is relevant when he comments that Wright's intention is to "conjure up... that staple of white supremacist fantasy, the black man as rapist of white women" (Elmer, 1998: 780-781). Wright appeals to the myth of Negroes as rapists and criticizes the misleading idea that blacks have an eternal lust for white women. Therefore, he questions the white imagination which considers black males as rapists and beasts through creating Bigger Thomas, who very much fits in the role of the black as a rapist. However ironically enough, the supposed rape has never occurred in the novel. Wright remarks that "...if a Negro rebels against rule and taboo, he is lynched and the reason for the lynching is usually called "rape", that catchword which has garnered such vile connotations that it can raise a mob

anywhere in the South pretty quickly, even today.” (Wright, 1940: xii). Bigger cannot be an exception to the rule and he is also accused of rape; his being a black male obviously makes him a rape criminal. Fanon asks that “Are they [Americans in the southern United States] not forever saying that the niggers are just waiting for the chance to jump on white women?” (Fanon, 1967: 107).

Wright’s approach to these ‘rape’ accusations signifies his pessimistic views regarding the position of African-Americans in the United States. He explains that :

Any Negro who has lived in the North or the South knows that times without number he has heard of some Negro boy being picked up on the streets and carted off to jail and charged with “rape” . This thing happens so often that to my mind it had become a representative symbol of the Negro’s uncertain position in America (Wright, 1940: 28).

Wright considers the rape accusations as the characteristics of African-Americans’ ambiguous position in the United States. In his view, the condition and the place of African-Americans are vague; they do not have any definite place or a fixed position. The rape accusations imposed upon blacks are so common and ordinary that they become a part of their daily lives. The frequency of such accusations makes Wright acknowledge the fact that these are the undeniable realities of the black life in America. In black community, there is a collective awareness of these accusations since Wright maintains that every negro has heard of such rape accusations numberless times in his life whether he lives in the South or in the North. Hall posits that rape and the fact of lynching are “intimately connected, for...(both) served to keep a subordinate group in a state of anxiety and fear” (Hall, 1993: 153). Therefore, those accusations of rape and the mob’s reaction to rape, which is lynching, aim to suppress black individuals so that they will obey the whites’ rules. In this way, they are rendered as powerless since they are paralyzed by an intensive fear which is caused by whites.

Robin Wiegman regards *Native Son* as “...our literature’s most compelling story of the black man caught in the mythology of the rapist” (Wiegman, 1995: 100) and contends that Bigger is trapped in the myth of the black man as a rapist. In brief, he becomes the victim of his own representative, prototypical identity

as a black criminal. He cannot resist the beast role imposed upon him from the moment he was born. The moment he surrenders himself to this stereotypical rapist beast image, he makes the white supremacist fantasy real.

Baldwin draws heavily on this aspect of negative stereotyping by positing that :

...there exists among the intolerably degraded the perverse and powerful desire to force into the arena of the actual those fantastic crimes of which they have been accused, achieving their vengeance and their own destruction through making the nightmare real. The American image of the Negro lives also in the Negro's heart; and when he has surrendered to this image life has no possible reality. Then he, like the white enemy with whom he will be locked one day in mortal struggle, has no means save this of asserting his identity. This is why Bigger's murder of Mary can be referred as an 'act of creation' and why, once this murder has been committed, he can feel for the first time that he is living fully and deeply as a man was meant to live (Baldwin, 1963: 36).

The perilous consequences of such negative myths are elaborately exemplified in Bigger's case. Wright's vision is in accordance with Baldwin's quotation above, since he creates his protagonist as a reaction to the white fantasy of black males as rapists. Baldwin notes that the only way blacks can assert their identity is through violence. This stereotyping equally affects blacks and whites. These representations lead to prejudice on whites' part and hatred on the blacks'. On the other hand, once they are stereotyped, blacks knowingly or unknowingly keep this stereotypical image in their hearts. The consciousness of the fact that they will be accused of rape crimes sooner or later, creates a desire to take vengeance in blacks. Hence, they further want to assert their identities through turning to violence. Baldwin contends that :

And there is I should think No Negro living in America who has not felt, briefly or for long periods, with anguish sharp or dull, in varying degrees and to varying effect, simple, naked and unanswerable hatred; who has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter in a day, to violate, out of motives of the cruelest vengeance, their women, to break the bodies of all white people and bring them low, as low as that dust into which he himself has been and being trampled; no Negro, finally, who has not had to make his own precarious adjustment to the 'nigger' who surrounds him and to the 'nigger' in himself (Baldwin, 1963: 36).

Baldwin observes that at least for a moment in their lives, blacks have wanted to take revenge from the white society which entraps them. In this quotation, Baldwin talks about the intrinsic hatred in the hearts of African-Americans against the white race. As blacks are crushed by the white society, they want to crush the white community. African-Americans resent the fact that they are rendered as incapable, impotent individuals, therefore they seek for retribution. They want to act in accordance with the stereotype of the 'nigger' which is stamped on their faces. They have this inner urge to get even with the white so that those whites will have a chance grasp the meaning of being a black individual under white supervision.

2.1.2 Black Self's Futile Attempts to Establish An Identity

Bigger lives on Chicago's South Side in the 1930s. Due to his African-American identity, he is relegated to continue his life in a restricted ghetto of the city called the Black Belt where the residents are predominantly black. African-Americans live on the black side of the city, in Chicago's South Side Black Belt, and whites reside on the white side of the city. It is possible to observe the patterns of black segregation and discrimination in the formation of the Black Belt since blacks have to reside on certain areas of the city due to strict housing laws. In white neighborhoods, renting or selling houses to blacks are explicitly banned by the laws. Black people who live in the discriminated side of the city, namely in the Black Belt are barred from everything the white Chicago has. Allan H. Spear explains that "No physical wall has encircled the black belt but an almost equal wall of hostility and discrimination has isolated Negroes from the mainstream of Chicago life" (Spear, 1967: 229). Therefore, the Black Belt can be possibly seen as an example of racial prejudice concerning the living space of African-Americans.

African-Americans can only go to the other side of the neighborhood, if they are needed by whites, for going to the other side means transcending the color line. African-Americans are limited to menial, low paying, low status jobs. They are usually hired as servants, drivers or cooks. The jobs for African-Americans promise only servitude and subordination. As Spear conceives, "Negroes were systematically

excluded from white sections of the city, drastically limited in their choice of jobs, and barred from many places of public accommodation” (Spear, 1967: ix).

As a contrast to the secluded life in the Black Belt, the white Chicago is a place which presents opportunities. Wright depicts the conditions of Chicago as follows: “Chicago’s physical aspect - noisy, crowded, filled with the sense of power and fulfillment – did so much more to dazzle the mind with a taunting sense of possible achievement that the segregation it did impose...” (Wright, 1940: 15). The idea of the possibility of reaching one’s goals and attaining power excite the residents of the city. The powerful image of the city and the opportunities it offer also fascinate Bigger and many other blacks. However, the reality of the city is that it offers much, but the realization of the opportunities of the city is only offered to the white citizens of the city. Although they live in the same city with whites, blacks lead their lives without any hope of fulfilling what the city offers. Macksey and Moorer’s reading of the city attests that:

The cityscape that seemed to promise freedom proves to be just as constrained and controlled by social forces beyond Bigger’s horizon. He inhabits a world where all avenues of self-expression and growth are as effectively barred as the rat’s hole. Like other rural *and* urban blacks, he lives in a world that systematically denies his humanity. The only way he can find, less than consciously, to affirm his humanity is through a brutal act of violence against the society that confines him. (Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 5).

Bigger is one of those black individuals who are subjected to the inhumane living conditions of the Black Belt. He lives in a rat-infested kitchenette with his mother, sister and brother. He is offered a job as a chauffeur in a wealthy white man’s house named the Dalton’s. While going to the white neighborhood for his interview, he feels very strained. On his way to Dalton’s, he thinks of the barriers that are raised between the white and the black worlds. These thoughts enhance his feelings of nervousness. When he crosses the color line to reach Dalton’s house, he even takes his knife with him because :

He was going among white people, so he would take his knife and his gun; it would make him feel that he was the equal of them, give him a sense of completeness. Then he thought of a good reason

why he should take it; in order to get to Dalton's place he had to go through a white neighborhood. He had not heard of any Negroes being molested recently, but he felt that it was always possible. (Wright, 1940: 44).

Bigger is always tense, he does not feel safe, since he is living in a world of insecurities. Therefore, he takes his gun and knife with him. It is only with them that he feels equal to whites whom he perceives as enemies. Only through violence he can assert himself, only with his guns he gets the feeling that he will be able to stand against them. When he has his guns with him, he also feels a sense of completeness. Hence, such instruments of violence give him a sense of confidence. He uses violence in order to forget everything that is upsetting him. Therefore, the rhythms of his life are "...indifference and violence; periods of abstract brooding and periods of intense desire; moments of silence and moments of anger – like water ebbing and flowing from the tug of a far-away invisible force". (Wright, 1940: 31). He is full of anger against the system of white oppression which has kept him in poverty all of these years. He is a character who is deeply affected by this oppression. He is the concrete manifestation of black rage and he very much affirms the stereotype of inhumane, violent black males, therefore he represents the ultimate fear of the white fantasy.

The way Bigger is presented seems to symbolize the plight of African-Americans living in the United States and the results of such subjugated conditions are clearly reflected in the novel through Biggers' actions of violence. The reason for Bigger's taking his guns with him while going to the white neighborhood is his acknowledgement of the possibility of the danger of his being prey to the white terror. He is well aware of the fact that when he is out of his own segregated place, there is always the threat of violent encounters with the white world. His nervousness is doubled when he thinks about the prevalent rape accusations of Negroes in white neighborhoods. Accordingly :

Suppose a policeman saw him wandering in a white neighborhood like this? It would be thought that he was trying to robe or rape somebody. He grew angry. Why had he come to take this goddamn job? He could have stayed among his own people and escaped feeling this fear and hate. This was not his world; he had been foolish in thinking that he would have liked it. He stood in the

middle of the sidewalk with his jaws clamped tight, he wanted to strike something with his fist. (Wright, 1940: 45-46).

Bigger is filled with fear. Due to his physical characteristics, he knows that he will be regarded as a criminal if he is seen in a white neighborhood. He cannot possibly have any reason to be in the white neighborhood other than rape or robbery. He is in a place where he does not and will not ever belong to. He feels impotent and turns to violence by wanting to strike something immediately. Hence, it would not be wrong to claim that his violence is a cover for his inability to cope with the external reality, which incessantly haunts him. Whenever he is intimidated, he pretends to be fearless and his reaction is violence.

When Bigger enters the white neighborhood, the first thing he notices is the difference of this world from that of his own. He depicts the white world as follows :

This was a cold and distant world; a world of white secrets carefully guarded. He could feel a pride, a certainty, and a confidence in these streets and houses (Wright , 1940: 45).

In contrast with his own narrow world, which is full of uncertainties, this white world is a world of certainties. While whites have their own stereotypes of blacks, blacks also have their own stereotypes of whites. Hence, Bigger has an image of white people and the white world on his mind, so he feels awkward when he enters the world of whites. Even from whites' houses, he can feel their sense of pride.

As Fanon argues "When the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension." (Fanon, 1968: 52). Bigger is very tense in the white world, he is so nervous and feels himself in a completely different world. He perceives this world as a distant world, against which he does not have many chances. He knows that he does not have any chance of being a part of this cold, reserved but equally powerful world, whose glitter attracts him. Bigger "... had not expected anything like this; he had not thought that this world would be so utterly different from his own that it would intimidate him" (Wright, 1940: 47). The absolute contrast between his own world and the white world frightens him. He feels threatened in an utterly different world. "He was sitting in a white home; dim lights

burned round him; strange objects challenged him; and he was feeling angry and uncomfortable. (Wright, 1940: 47). Since he feels uneasy in an alien world, he is filled with feelings of resentment. Although he is confronted with the powerful, attractive images of this white world everyday through newspapers, magazines or movies he feels that he is completely excluded from this world. He is full of hatred, anger and predominantly fear to whites, who "...own the world" (Wright, 1940: 25).

Bigger confides to his friend Gus about his feelings for whites. From their conversation below, it is possible to observe his obsessive phobia and hatred of whites:

"You know where the white folks live?"

"Yeah" Gus said, pointing eastward. "Over across the 'line'; over there on Cottage Grove Avenue".

"Naw, they don't." Bigger said.

"What do you mean?" Gus asked, puzzled. "Then, where do they live?"

Bigger doubled his fist and struck his polar plexus. "Right down here in my stomach," he said.

... "Everytime I think of 'em, I *feel* 'em" Bigger said.

"Yeah; and in your chest and throat, too," Gus said. "It's like fire".

"And sometimes you can't hardly breathe..." (Wright, 1940: 24).

Bigger and Gus have similar feelings about whites. They both know the meaning of being black. They are aware of their discriminated condition which brings a narrow choice of possibilities with it. Whites make them "live in one corner of the city, they don't let them fly planes and run ships..." (Wright, 1940: 23) They do not even have the right to choose their own professions. As Abdul R. JanMohamed argues they are "... prevent[ed] from realizing their full potential as human beings and exclude[d] from full and equal participation in civil and political society" (qtd. in. Gates & Appiah, 1993: 286). They are denied the opportunity of equal participation to life in general. Both Bigger and Gus attempt to preserve their humanity in a world of negations. However Bigger cannot get used to their subjugation and his rage against their dehumanization can be read as an assertion of his humanity and dignity.

2.1.3 Black Self's Envy Of The White World

In one scene Bigger and Gus “play white” which is “...a game of play-acting in which he[Bigger]and his friends imitated the ways and manners of white folks.” (Wright, 1940: 21). They pretend to be one of the most powerful figures of the white world and by imitating the actions of these figures they make fun of them. However, their ridicule of the dominant, wealthy white world shows their envy of the white world. It further reinforces their desire of power and control which they lack in every sense. As to their playing white, Michael Vannoy Adams maintains that “... in America, where whites and blacks are not merely different but socially unequal, the one superior and the other inferior, where “racial” persecution is not a paranoid delusion but a pervasive social reality, African-Americans tend, consciously or unconsciously, to “go white” – to adapt to, or identify with, the persecutor in order to survive the victimization that they suffer” (Adams, 1996: 126). In order to break away from their suffocating position in the society, they play white and in this way they mock the white world. However, their mockery of the white world as illustrated by their playing white is nothing but an expression of their pathetic situation against this powerful, white world. With this game, they identify themselves with the white world which they long to be a part of. In addition to this, by playing white, they show their intense desire to adapt to the white world, and by implication to be white like one of them. This play gives them only moments of fulfillment, only a glimpse of being on equal terms with whites. In such moments they are able to forget their lamentable suffering.

On this game of play-acting, Farah Jasmine Griffin conceives that “ ... the closest he[Bigger] gets to holding the power of the white man is through this game... ” (Griffin, 1995: 125). Therefore, on one hand by trying to act like influential white figures they live the illusion of possessing power and on the other hand they reveal their envy of the world which they mock. Samuel Sillen notes that “Playing white with his friends on a Chicago street corner is a grim substitute for living white, for living in a world, that is, where one may presumably be an aviator, or a President or a millionaire or whatever one wants to be” (qtd. in. Butler, 1995:

31). This game of play-acting signifies their strong wish of living like white people, having the rights they have and living in a white world offering endless opportunities.

Regarding their envy of the white world, Fanon explains that :

The settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious. We have seen that the native never ceases to dream of putting himself in the place of the settler – not of becoming the settler but of substituting himself for the settler. This hostile world, ponderous and aggressive because it fends off the colonized masses with all the harshness is capable of, represents not merely a hell from which the swiftest flight possible is desirable, but also a paradise close at hand which is guarded by terrible watchdogs. (Fanon, 1968: 52-53).

The white world rejects black individuals with contempt. Although it is a hostile and indifferent world, they still dream of living in this world which offers endless possibilities. This world expels them, it shuts its doors so that they can never go beyond. However, the dilemma they face is, they both want to escape this world, they want to flee the oppression and they reject being nothing other than a second-class citizen yet they see the opportunities, the glamour, more significantly the power, the wealth of this world and they desperately want to be a part of it. No matter how hard they strive for it, they face negation and live as outsiders. As Edward Margolies puts it forward "Bigger's immediate Negro environment is depicted as being unrelentingly bleak and vacuous – while the white world that stands just beyond his reach remains cruelly indifferent or hostile to his needs" (Margolies, 1969: 105). The vast contrast between the two worlds further agonizes the black individual.

2.2 Black Self's Experience Of Fear As A Picaresque Hero

When Bigger and his friends decide to rob a white man called Blum, Bigger is under the effect of his extreme fear of whites. He and all of his friends are scared of robbing a white man, though they cannot even confess their ultimate fear to themselves. Robbing a white man would not only mean violating the law, but it also

would be a symbolic revolt against the white order. It would further show that they are fearless of whites and they have the courage to fight against them. They all feel that "...robbing of Blum's would be a violation of ultimate taboo; it would be a trespassing into territory where the full wrath of an alien white world would be turned loose upon them, in short, it would be a symbolic challenge of the white world's rule over them; a challenge which they yearned to make, but were afraid to." (Wright, 1940: 18). They all crave for standing against the white world, but their fear of whites is so vast that they cannot even dare to make a single move against them. Robbing Blum would be a declaration of their courage, however they cannot overcome their horror and finally give up the idea of robbing a white man. Bigger confesses himself that:

His confused emotions had made him feel instinctively that it would be better to fight Gus and spoil the plan of the robbery than to confront a white man with a gun. But he kept this knowledge of fear thrust firmly down in him; his courage to live depended on how successfully his fear was hidden from his consciousness. (Wright, 1940: 44).

He knows that he has to hide his fear in order to be able to cope with the white society. Furthermore, he has to hide his fear even from himself, from his own consciousness so as not to lose his courage to live. As Darwin T. Turner writes, "By bullying other Negroes, he[Bigger] seeks to affirm his manliness and courage, even though he subconsciously knows that he cowers from a direct confrontation with white people" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 165). Although very brave in appearance, Bigger is probably the most scared one among his friends to rob a white man. Therefore he projects his fear on his friend Gus and pretends that he is not afraid. He feels:

... a hot hate and fear; he had transferred his fear of the whites to Gus. He hated Gus because he knew that Gus was afraid, as even he was; and he feared Gus because he felt that Gus would consent and then he would be compelled to go through with the robbery. (Wright, 1940: 28).

Since Bigger senses that Gus will not give up the idea of robbing Blum's, he hates him. He is also furious because he sees in Gus the same inherent fear of whites which

also possesses him. In order to get rid of the fear that is suffocating him, Bigger attacks Gus. Sartre's observation is relevant at this point when he argues that "... the man who raises his knife against his brother thinks that he has destroyed once and for all the detested image of their common degradation" (Fanon, 1968: 18). In attacking Gus, Bigger aims to escape the humiliation, which is a shared experience for all blacks including his very self. Bigger perceives Gus as the symbol of African-Americans' fear of the white world. He very much detests the suffering aspect of blackness so he wants to overcome it by hurting his best friend, Gus. It is his fear of the white world which causes his rough treatment of Gus. As he desperately wants to resist the role of being a victim that is imposed on him, he hurts another victim, Gus. As Derrick Bell claims "Victimized themselves by an uncaring society, some blacks vent their rage on victims like themselves, thereby perpetuating the terror that whites once had to invoke directly".(Bell, 1992: 196)

Crucially, Fanon perceives concepts of fear, rage and violence as inherent in African-Americans and conceives that:

We must see whether it is possible for the black man to overcome his feeling of insignificance, to rid his life of the compulsive quality that makes it so like the behavior of the phobic. Affect is exacerbated in the Negro, he is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from an inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors chain him with an unbearable insularity (Fanon, 1967: 50).

In the above excerpt Fanon talks about the phobia of African-Americans which is, one of the most striking characteristics of Bigger. Bigger is full of fear, and his fear is doubled when he is in the presence of whites. It is not only Bigger who is afraid of whites, but his whole community is fearful of the white world. The black individual is thus isolated in this world as he is unsuccessful in the way he relates himself to the others with his feelings of rage and fear. In this context, Wright remarks that " There seems to hover somewhere in that dark part of all our lives, in some more than in others, an objectless, timeless, spaceless element of primal fear and dread, stemming, perhaps from our birth ..." (Wright, 1940: xxv). Hence, the white world is capable of creating fearful, ineffectual black individuals. The element of primal fear is

cultivated in their minds at the moment of their birth and they have to live with this fear in order to continue their lives in a white-dominated world. In their eyes, white people :

...were not really people; they were a sort of great natural force, like a stormy sky looming overhead, or like a deep swirling river stretching suddenly at one's feet in the dark. As long as he and his black folks did not go beyond certain limits, there was no need to fear that white force. But whether they feared it or not, each and every day of their lives they lived with it, even when words did not sound its name, they acknowledged its reality. As long as they lived here in this prescribed corner of the city, they paid mute tribute to it. (Wright, 1940: 109).

To African-Americans whites are omnipotent natural forces that are present everywhere. Their presence is a collective fact for the black community; they live with the fact of the existence of such a great force, which is ready to burst any minute. There is no need for them to be afraid as long as they stay in the dark. If they do not trespass the whites' reserved world, there is no danger for them. However, if they try to break the codes of the white world, they face that tremendous white force. They have to sit in their relegated neighborhood silently without trying to assert themselves. In this narrow world their freedom is subtly suppressed.

In Bigger's character it is possible to observe his resentment and hatred of the whites. "His every action is predicated on his obsessive fear of the white world" (qtd. in. Magill, 1992: 326). On the other hand, he wants to be like one of them, he longs to be one of them since he knows that none of his aspirations will be fulfilled in his condition as a black individual. He cannot reconcile this dual aspect of his social consciousness. As Wright declares :

Bigger was attracted and repelled by the American scene. He was an American, because he was born a native son; but he was also a Negro nationalist in a vague sense because he was not allowed to live as an American. Such was his way of life and mine; neither Bigger nor I resided fully in either camp. (Wright, 1940: xxiv).

This consciousness of the dual aspect of his self is one of the reasons of Bigger's hostile attitude towards life. The conflict between him and social constructions is so extreme that he is unable to act as an individual. Even though he is born in America,

he is dislocated. Even though he is a resident of Chicago, he is an outsider. Therefore it can be said that the title of the novel is ironic in the sense that it acclaims Bigger as a "Native Son". He is born a Native Son, however he is devoid of everything which his country offers. Baldwin comments on the title of the book as :

Each generation has shouted behind him, *Nigger!* as he walked our streets; it is he whom we would rather our sisters did not marry; he is banished into the vast and wailing outer darkness whenever we speak of the "purity" of our women, of the 'sanctity' of our homes, of "American" ideals. What is more, he knows it. He is indeed the "native son". He is the 'nigger'(Baldwin, 1963: 35).

Baldwin writes about the lower status of blacks in the eyes of the white society. A black person is considered to be someone to be avoided. White people are explicitly against the idea of being on close terms with black people. Blacks are considered to be a major threat to the concept of purity of women. They are forbidden to touch white women no matter what the circumstance is. Hence, Bigger does not have any access to the white world of his dreams and he also knows that he is deprived of getting in close relations with white people.

Apart from his total segregation from the white, powerful world Bigger is also segregated from his own community, whom he cannot identify himself to. Neither the black, nor the white society claim him as an individual accepting him with a particular identity. Wright depicts Bigger as "...resentful toward whites, sullen, angry, ignorant, emotionally unstable, depressed and unaccountably elated at times and unable even, because of his own lack of inner organization which American oppression has fostered in him to unite with the members of his own race. (Wright, 1940: xxi). The oppression he has to live under leads to a lack of communication with his friends, with his family, with his girl friend, in short with the ones around him. The humiliation he is subjected to, impairs his relations with his own people as well according to Wright. Both the white and the black communities have robbed him of dignity, identity and individuality in their own different ways. Hence, he finds little peace in his environment and becomes restless. He is not welcomed either by the black or by the white. He is dissatisfied as an individual, he feels his identity assaulted, his humanity challenged. He exists in a

universe which forces him to lead a powerless and meaningless existence. He becomes a drifter, an alienated black individual, suffering from lack of solace in a completely alien world.

The picaresque condition is described as the “paradigmatic confusion between an isolated individual and hostile society”. (Bjornson, 1977 : 4). In this sense, it is possible to say that, Bigger carries the attributes of a picaresque hero⁹. He lives in a hostile environment and there is nobody to help him out of his despair. He lives “...in a world of tension and instability” (Blackburn : 1979 : 9) He is restless all the time, that is to say that he is always in a state of suspense due to his uncertain position in life. Bone also draws attention to the presence of the pattern of the picaresque in *Native Son* and remarks that :

...the pattern of the picaresque is plainly visible in *Native Son*. ... the closed society is the northern ghetto, but it is equally restrictive of Negro life. The symbolic journey is internalized: it is not so much geographical as spiritual or moral. Instead of flight from an oppressive order we have an open foray into criminality. (Bone, 1969: 20).

As explicated in the above excerpt, Bone compares the flight motif in *Black Boy* to the crime motif in *Native Son*. He reinforces the fact that instead of fleeing the oppressive conditions like young Wright, Bigger resolves to criminality as a way of forgetting his subhuman position. He is trapped in his black ghetto and he can never choose to live on the other side of the belt. He knows that he does not have many choices in life. Being a black in a white-dominated world, his condition is unclear, yet he cannot find solace in anyone around him. Yıldırar Çevik also puts forward his views on the picaresque hero as :

The picaro is lonely in the world, totally isolated from society, and cut off from any foundation of ‘security’, such as family, money, friends or social position. Similarly, he is unattached, boundless, at loss in a hostile, social position. The extent of his isolation includes solitude, insecurity and restlessness. In addition, life

⁹ *Native Son* can be regarded as a picaresque novel in the sense that it centers around a single individual, Bigger Thomas and portrays a brief period of the protagonist’s life. The theme of isolation is also presented during the course of the novel. In the end of the novel, the protagonist achieves to understand himself and his relation to the others completely, and at the same time his personality undergoes a radical change.

appears to him primarily as a long wandering without end. Therefore, solitude, confusion, shipwreck and misery are some of the most widely used terms used to describe the situation of the picaro. (Çevik, 2002: 97).

As a picaresque hero, Bigger becomes an outcast since he fails to find an identity which is not offered either to his black race or to him as an individual. Furthermore, he cannot find any satisfaction in his social bonds. As Wright denotes, "... he is a product of a dislocated society; he is a dispossessed and disinherited man; he is all of this, and he lives amid the greatest possible plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out" (Wright, 1940: xx). He is uprooted, excluded from participation to life, deprived of freedom to will. The more he searches for a place in both the black and the white societies, the more he finds himself in the outskirts. He remains an outsider, condemned to lead an existence at the margins of the society. He has nothing to care about, nothing he can call his own, no chance to explore any of his potential. He complains that :

I know I oughtn't think about it, but I can't help it. Every time I think about it I feel like somebody's poking a red-hot iron down my throat. Goddammit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like we're living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence...(Wright, 1940: 23).

In this memorable quotation, Bigger bitterly expresses his feelings about being totally excluded from the world. He perceives that his condition is no different than that of a prisoner's in the sense that they are both locked out: The prisoner is confined to his cell and Bigger and his people are caught in the slums of America. Although Bigger knows the futility of his thoughts, he cannot help thinking about their segregated way of lives. And when he thinks about it, the immense wrath he feels for whites takes hold of him. He considers himself as a passive observer of this life, not a participant of it, he is only allowed to catch a glimpse of it. He feels that his humanity is violated. That is to say that, these confinements crash the humanity of the protagonist. Valerie Smith claims that:

From the beginning of the novel Bigger's alienation from his oppressive environment is evident. His family and friends- poor, frustrated, brutalized – are tantalized by the promise of the American Dream, a narrative of limitless possibilities that will never be theirs. To mitigate their frustration, Bigger's family and friends all participate in some kind of communal activity. His mother finds consolation in religion, his friends and his girlfriend, Bessie, in drinking. Neither of these particular techniques of evasion satisfies Bigger, although he too seeks a way of alleviating his sense of marginality. (qtd. in. Bloom, 1988: 105-106).

Bigger does not see himself either belonging to his fellowmen, or to the white world since he is not one of them. Therefore, as Fanon has observed, he is suffering from an 'unbearable insularity', which is a tormenting state of isolation. On the other hand, he is unable to cling to religion as a "compensatory nourishment" (Wright, 1940: xiii) for him. His mother, like many other blacks turns to religion so as to compensate her void of living. They cannot fully participate in this life, therefore they keep their every hope, aspirations and longings for the other world. "Some of the Negroes living under these conditions got religion, felt that Jesus would redeem the void of living, felt that the more bitter life was in the present the happier it would be in the hereafter." (Wright, 1940: 13). Hence, for them religion is a means to forget their subjugated condition.

According to Baldwin, Bigger's relatives and friends, the ones around him are elaborate manifestations of how this white system silences black individuals. He argues that "Those Negroes who surround him [Bigger], on the other hand his hard-working mother, his ambitious sister, his poolroom cronies, Bessie might be considered as far richer and far more subtle and accurate illustrations of the ways in which Negroes are controlled in our society and the complex techniques they have evolved for their survival." (Baldwin, 1963: 33). The suppressed black individuals gradually change over time in order to survive, in other words they learn to adapt themselves to the conditions under which they have to live. So as to survive in such a hostile environment, Bigger's mother clings to religion and his girlfriend Bessie turns to alcohol. Baldwin regards the characters in Bigger's community as controlled figures who are manipulated according to the dominant culture's wishes. They cannot go beyond the boundaries that are imposed on them. However, Bigger is

different from them. He has to continue his life in a mask like the others do as he cannot find any satisfaction in religion or in leading a meaningless, muted existence. The white world he envies does not acknowledge his individuality, or even his presence. Considering Bigger's physical and spiritual environment in which he has to continue his life, Wright foregrounds the reasons for Bigger's revolt on two facts of his life:

First, through some quirk of circumstance, he had become estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race. Second, he was trying to react to and answer the call of the dominant civilization whose glitter came to him through the newspapers, magazines, radios, movies and the mere imposing sight and sound of daily American life. In many respects his emergence as a distinct type was inevitable. (Wright, 1940: xiii).

Crucially, Wright considers Bigger's difference from the ones around him as inevitable, for Bigger rejects to be a part of his own community. He cannot identify himself with them, as a matter of fact he desperately wants to be a part of the glittering world of whites. Bigger retreats from his world, his community even himself and identifies himself with the powerful whites presented through the organs of media every day. As Nathan A. Scott Jr. denotes:

Though it is only in the occasional pockets of Southern depravity that he is still exposed to the naked forms of violence and intimidation, he knows that the actuality of the American experience continues to involve for him that most unhinging kind of frustration which is a result of the glitter and promise of life in a great country being near yet far enough away to exact a sense of defeat more exacerbating than anything a slave could possibly feel. (qtd. in Macksey & Moor, 1984: 150).

Even though he physically lives in this fascinating world, he is actually so far from it, which creates a sense of frustration in him. He cannot participate in this white glamorous life, on the other hand he does not want to come to terms with his own abasement.

As regards to his relations with his community, he cannot find any relief either in his relations, or in religion like most of the members of his black community, therefore he is alienated in a very profound sense :

He hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them. He knew that the moment he allowed himself to feel to its fullness how they lived, the shame and misery of their lives, he would be swept out of himself with fear and despair. So held toward them an attitude of iron reserve; he lived with them, but behind a wall, a curtain. And toward himself he was even more exacting. He knew that the moment he allowed what his life meant to enter fully into his consciousness, he would either kill himself or someone else. So he denied himself and acted tough (Wright, 1940: 13-14).

Bigger retreats into his own shell so as to avoid facing the suffering. He withdraws behind a wall, a curtain as he is very well aware of the fact that, the moment he faces the reality of his condition, he will be ruined. Unable to cope with this acknowledgement of being black and poor in an utterly hostile world, he turns to himself. He separates himself from his family by putting on a mask of iron reserve. He hides himself so as not to face reality. Although he lives with his family, it is as if he is living in a completely different, distant world. He detaches himself from them carefully in order not to let the fear and despair deep down inside take control of him. He is aware of the fact that, acknowledging his condition will lead to his self-destruction.

Bigger denies the suffering of the ones around him and he even rejects his own frustration. In his character, it is possible to observe a negation of reality which offers him nothing but limitations. He is not even honest to himself, he is equally hostile to himself since he cannot come to terms with the naked reality of his own life. The rage and shame of being black in a white-dominated world often crowd his thoughts. "He is obliged to come to terms with an environment that is cruel and unrewarding toward all" (Çevik, 2002: 97). He has to exist in this discontenting world. He is not only confined by his physical, dark appearance but also by the prejudices of the ones around him. His black complexion becomes an obstacle for him. He feels imprisoned so he is unable to fulfill his dreams, he is confined by the barriers of whites. Bigger views himself as a lower and lesser being than whites, who are contrastingly portrayed as rich and powerful. "What made Bigger's social consciousness most complex was the fact that he was hovering unwanted between

two worlds – between powerful America and his own stunted place in life...” (Wright, 1940: xxiv).

Bigger’s only role model is white people. He grew up on the one hand with the degrading presentations of himself and his black community, on the other hand with the glamorous, powerful images of the white world. And Bigger is a character whose world is “... dominated by movies, magazines, newspapers and detective stories” (qtd. in. Bloom, 1990: 90). His dilemma arises from the fact that he is surrounded by the charming, fascinating images of the white world. He lives in a world of movies, magazines, newspapers and he always observes the white world through these devices of the media. This world is in total contrast with his own narrow, prescribed world. The more he is attracted to them, the more his resentment grows since he does not have any chance to live in this alluring world. He is only allowed to watch, to observe this powerful world from a distance. “It was when he read the newspapers or magazines, went to the movies, or walked along the streets with crowds, that he felt what he wanted: to merge himself with others and to be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black.” (Wright, 1940: 226). When he is confronted with the powerful instruments of the media, his awareness of his own stunted life enhances. Even though he is black, he yearns for a chance to live like others, like white people. He wants to be a part of this world, he wants to be one of them, to join them. He is reluctant to face the reality that he is a black person, yet he is unable to enter the world of whites, hence he is conditioned to live at the outskirts of both black and white societies. He is plagued with an unbearable, agonizing condition.

Du Bois depicts the sensation of being a black man in a white world as :

I was by long education and continual compulsion and daily reminder, a colored man in a white world...I could not stir, I could not act. I could not live without taking into careful daily account the reaction of my white envioning world. (Du Bois, 1940: 653)

A colored man is reminded that he is black on a daily basis. American icons are there to remind him of his blackness, his difference. He has to measure his actions carefully according to the demands of the dominant white society. He has to suit

himself to the needs of his white environment. He is deprived of free will. His behavior are determined meticulously by the white world.

In one scene Bigger and his friend Jack goes to a movie house. In this movie house scene the striking difference between the white world and the black world is carefully drawn. In the movie house "Two features were advertised: one, *The Gay Woman*, was pictured on the posters in images of white men and white women lolling on beaches, swimming and dancing in night clubs; the other *Trader Horn*, was shown on the posters in terms of black men and black women dancing against a wild background of barbaric jungle." (Wright, 1940: 32). As the name of the first movie suggests, whites are portrayed as leading a 'gay' life. With the movie, Bigger and Jack are given the patterns of the white world of fulfillment and pleasure. The lives of whites are glamorous, cheerful and the white characters in the movie are presented as prosperous, powerful and reckless. The only thing they care about is their entertainment. Whereas, in the other movie the contrasting features of the two races are very clear. As opposed to the image of a white civilized world, blacks are shown as uncivilized savages dancing naked in a jungle. The movie calls forth the primitive nature of the people of African-American descent. They are rendered as poor and instinctive beings which are in clash with the gratifying images of the white world. In the *Trader Horn* Bigger sees black men and women "...who were adjusted to their soil and at home in their world, secure from fear and hysteria. (Wright, 1940: 36). African-Americans who are presented as dancing in the jungles, make Bigger contemplate his world which is a world of insecurities, hysteria and terror. At least the savage African-Americans are secure, they are happy in their own world, they feel at home according to Bigger. They have a sense of belonging which Bigger is devoid of.

When Bigger goes for an interview at the Dalton's, he feels very uneasy and degraded in the presence of Mr. Dalton. "The man[Mr. Dalton] was gazing at him with an amused smile that made him conscious of every square inch of skin on his black body". (Wright, 1940: 47). Mr. Dalton observes Bigger in his white gaze. Bigger is subjected to the white, contemptuous gaze, his blackness is defined in such a way that he becomes aware of the every single inch in his black body. He is fixed by the white eyes which observe him carefully, thus he is trapped in his blackness.

Even his identity and humanity are determined by the color of his skin. As Fanon writes, "...the first encounter with a white man oppresses him[The Negro] with the whole weight of his blackness" (Fanon, 1967: 150). Hence, Bigger feels very humiliated in the presence of a white, wealthy man. His consciousness of his being a black individual fills him with anger and shame :

He hated himself at that moment. Why was he acting and feeling this way? He wanted to wave his hand and blot out the white man who was making him feel like this. If not that, he wanted to blot out himself out" (Wright, 1940: 49-50).

His feeling of shame regarding the black color of his skin turns to self-hatred. He wants to blot out, annihilate the man who makes him feel so humiliated and he further wants to erase himself. This metaphor of "blotting out" is a prevalent metaphor in the novel which illuminates Bigger's negation of his entire life. Whenever Bigger cannot find a way out of his oppression and yields to fear, he wants to blot out everything so as to get rid of the feelings of inferiority and shame. As Fanon observes "In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence". (Fanon, 1967: 60). Bigger's desire to blot-out, to annihilate himself thus stems from his acknowledgement of his own stunted life. Since he is unable to cope with the fact of his blackness, he wants to erase himself. He also wants to erase those ones around him since they have effectively blocked him out of their world. He is forced to give up his dreams and aspirations as he is assumed to fail in any endeavor before he tries.

When Bigger meets the daughter of the affluent Dalton family, immediately he recognizes "...the hard fact that she was white and rich, a part of the world of people who told him what he could do and could not do" (Wright, 1940: 66). Even though Mary Dalton tries to be on friendly terms with him, he is very well aware of the fact that he is different from her, since she belongs to the white world which makes him act the way it pleases. His feelings of confusion enhance when he meets Mary's boyfriend Jan who insists Bigger to sit with them in the front seat of the car. Jan also shakes hands with him as if they are friends. Since Bigger cannot rationalize their actions, he thinks that they are making fun of him. In their attempts to treat Bigger as equal, Jan and Mary make him more conscious of his black skin.

An overwhelming sense of anger takes hold of him. He knows that white people despise black skin, so he desperately tries to understand the way they treat him in wanting to shake hands with him, and finally he comes to the conclusion that they are trying to humiliate him. Accordingly :

...they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling. He felt he had no physical existence at all right then; he was something he hated, the badge of shame which he knew was attached to his black skin. It was a shadowy region, a No Man's Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon. He felt naked, transparent, he felt that this white man having helped to put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate anger. (Wright, 1940: 67-68).

The "No Man's Land" Wright refers to is a metaphor illuminating the condition of African-Americans in the United States. Wright's No Man's Land is a region in the middle of two cultures, namely the black and the white. It is the symbol of what Houston Baker Jr. calls "black placelessness" (qtd. in. Gates and Appiah, 1993: 201). Although the United States is their country, they cannot fully belong there. They suffer from lack of a sense of grounding. They live in between two separate worlds, which is the "No Man's Land" in Wright's words. This is a boundary where black individuals face the dual aspect of their identities. This is a collective experience for black Americans. This is the basic condition of their lives. Amiri Baraka also describes this black placelessness in the United States as "A no-man's land, a black country, completely invisible to white America, but so essentially part of it as to stain its whole being an ominous gray" (Baraka, 1962: 114). They are utterly invisible, unrecognizable to the white citizens of the United States, yet they are an indispensable part of the country. The presence of blacks are seen as a threat to whites since Baraka claims that blacks are capable of discoloring the country. They stain the white color of America to an ominous gray with their blackness.

By looking at Bigger with their white gaze, Jan and Mary make him feel naked. He is incapable of expressing the anger he feels for them. He sees them as responsible for his suffering. He is unable to cope with the black identity that is

imposed on him and under their gaze his blackness is further emphasized. Moreover, he perceives his black skin as a sign of shame and degradation. By simply looking at him, Mary and Jan make him aware of his black, despised skin. They define him with their contemptuous gaze. Mr. Dalton, Mary and Jan all make Bigger conscious of his black skin with their white gazes in turns and Bigger's reaction is his mixed feelings of shame, rage and hatred. Regarding the black individual's encounter with the white gaze Fanon notes that :

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me... In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (Fanon, 1967: 110).

Trying to show Bigger that they see him as their equal, Jan insists on driving the car himself and when Mary also gets into the front seat Bigger finds himself stuck between two white people of whom he has deep fears. "There were white people to either side of him; he was sitting between two vast white looming walls" (Wright, 1940: 68). Bigger sees Jan and Mary as two walls which is a reference to intranscendable barriers between the white and the black worlds. There is a wall which separates black people from whites and blacks have to continue their lives on the other side of the wall. He suddenly finds himself in such an absurd situation that he cannot decide how to act. He feels very uneasy and disturbed sitting right next to two white people. He has never been that close to any white person before due to his segregated condition. Even though Jan and Mary try to treat him as their equals, they do not regard Bigger as an individual with a sense of dignity, for Mary still gives orders to Bigger. They are blind to the realities of black life. Bigger is not only psychologically disturbed in sitting between two white people, but he is also physically uncomfortable, however he does not attempt to make himself comfortable in order to avoid being the subject of their white gaze. Accordingly :

His arms and legs were aching from being cramped into so small a space, but he dared not to move. He knew that they would not have cared if he had made himself more comfortable, but his moving would have called attention to himself and to his black body. And

he did not want that. These people made him feel things he did not want to feel. If he were white, if he were like them, it would have been different. But he was black.(Wright, 1940: 69).

Bigger is aware of the fact that he is different, he knows that he is not one of them. In spite of his uneasy position in the front seat, he hesitates to make a little move in thinking that each single movement of him will attract their attention since he is a black man. His awareness of being black makes him aware of his undeniable difference and he is very much agonized by this awareness. Jan and Mary insist Bigger to drive through the Black Belt, where they want to see the poor blacks and then they demand that Bigger take them to an authentic black restaurant as they want to see where and how “colored” people eat. They want Bigger to take them wherever they want to go and they do not even consider asking Bigger’s opinion. Seemingly on friendly terms, Mary and Jan make obvious distinctions between the black and the white races in the way they talk. In Mary’s constant rhetoric of “they”, it is possible to see her views on how she sees black people as a distinct type, being entirely different. She confesses that she has been indifferent to black people and now she wants to relate to them. However even in her well-intentioned acts and conversation it is possible to observe her contempt for black people :

We know so *little* about each other. I just want to *see*. I want to *know* these people. Never in my life I have been inside of a Negro home. Yet they *must* live like we live. They’re *human* ... There are twelve million of them ... They live in our country ... In the same city with us...(Wright, 1940: 70).

As Bigger is used to keep his distance around whites, he cannot rationalize Jan and Mary’s treatment of him. They are unable to understand each other since it is so absurd attempting to destroy the whole history of oppression by a single act of friendliness. Their intention to treat Bigger as their equal turns out to be a disaster as their inconsiderate behavior creates a sense of self-consciousness on Bigger’s part. When they want Bigger to go inside the restaurant and eat with them, he feels “trapped” (Wright, 1940: 71). He struggles to dissuade them from taking him to the restaurant where he will inevitably see his friends and relatives, but his attempts are in vain. “But he did not understand them; he distrusted them, really hated them”

(Wright, 1940: 71) for making him feel so ashamed and for triggering his consciousness of his blackness which he wants to negate. "Suddenly he wanted to seize some heavy object in his hand and grip it with all the strength of his body and in some strange way rise up and stand in naked space above the speeding car and with one final blow blot it out – with himself and them in it." (Wright, 1940: 70). He again wants to annihilate them all in order to escape his feelings of profound hatred and shame. He keeps struggling to find answers to his questions : "Why didn't they leave him alone? What had he done to them? What good could they get out of sitting here making him feel so miserable?" (Wright, 1940: 70). He thinks that there must be a reason for their different treatment of him, however this reason cannot be a well intended one for Bigger.

At the end of the night, Mary gets drunk and tells Bigger to help her out of the car and take her to her bedroom as she cannot go there on her own. While carrying Mary to her bedroom, the feelings of fear and shame take hold of Bigger, he feels "... strange, possessed, or as if he were acting upon a stage in front of a crowd of people" (Wright, 1940: 83). He feels as if his every move is being carefully observed by a crowd of people ready to humiliate and mock him. At the same time he is extremely terrified of being inside of a white man's house. Ann Joyce states that "Bigger understands that being in Mary Dalton's room automatically means that he has broken the most important law of the cosmological order, characteristic of Jim Crow society, he becomes caught up in a spell of hysteria" (Joyce, 1986: 62) When Mary's mother enters the room, his obsessive fear of whites intensifies and leads to his accidental killing of Mary. When he sees Mrs. Dalton coming to the room to check Mary, "...a hysterical terror seized him, as though he were falling from a great height in a dream". (Wright, 1940: 84). In order not to be caught in the same room with a white girl, he suffocates her with a pillow. Therefore his ultimate fear of the white world is the underlying reason for Mary's death. On realizing that Mary is dead, Bigger lives a moment of confusion :

The reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place. She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman. He had to get away from here. (Wright, 1940: 86).

Bigger is aware of the fact that he will be executed because he has killed a white woman. He knows what happens to black murderers and decides to run away. He knows that there is no way out for a black murderer who has killed a white woman. "He stood with her body in his arms in the silent room and cold facts battered him like waves sweeping in from the sea: she was dead; she was white; she was a woman; he had killed her; he was black; he might be caught; he did not want to be caught; if he were they would kill him" (Wright, 1940: 88). After moments of confusion, he makes up his mind and decides to burn her body and put the blame on Jan. He carries her downstairs where he cuts her head brutally with a hatchet so that it will fit in the furnace. He then makes up a story to prove that he is not guilty. When he goes home he remembers the moments when Jan, a white man, wanted to shake hands with him. "That had been an awful moment of hate and shame" (Wright, 1940: 94). He remembers those terrifying moments of fear and anger with resentment. When he sees her mother and sister sleeping, he gets furious and he wants to "...wave his hand and blot them out". (Wright, 1940: 95). He wants to erase his family since he cannot bear to see their suffering. He does not want to acknowledge the reality of their condition, therefore he wants to negate this unbearable reality. Furthermore, he wants to get rid of his family as he thinks that they are violating his sense of freedom. He is not free to move as he wants to in the house as they live in a one-room kitchenette. Accordingly :

Each person lived in one room and had a little world of his own. He hated this room and all the people in it, including himself. Why did he and his folks have to live like this? What had they ever done? Perhaps they had not done anything. Maybe they had to live this way precisely because none of them in all their lives had ever done anything, right or wrong, that mattered much. (Wright, 1940: 100).

Bigger desperately tries to find answers to the reason for their plight. The only reason he can think of is, the passivity of his own community. He criticizes them for not attempting to change these conditions. The individuals of black society are ineffective, enduring, submissive according to Bigger. He and his family are relegated to a rat-infested, miserable house where they have no privacy at all. All the

members of black community are confined to the Black Belt. They cannot go a single step further than the prescribed area and Bigger is bitterly critical of the submissiveness of his own society. However, the black community is not entirely excluded from the white world since the glamour of this world reaches them and attracts them in their daily lives. The presence of such a glorified life not only reminds them of their own, miserable lives which is in contrast with this world, but also reminds them of endless possibilities that are denied to them. It is as if they are being teased by the dazzling presentations of this splendid world. Fanon argues that "The Negro is in every sense of the word a victim of white civilization" (Fanon, 1967: 192).

Thinking about his murder, Bigger starts to feel more and more powerful and experiences a sense of pride in his action. He realizes that he has gained a sense of freedom by killing a white girl. While he gains a new kind of consciousness, his point of view alters. Accordingly:

The thought of what he had done, the awful horror of it, the daring associated with such actions, formed him for the first time in his fear-ridden life a barrier of protection between him and a world he feared. He had murdered and created a new life for himself. It was something that was all his own and it was the first time in his life he had had anything that others could not take from him. (Wright, 1940: 101).

For the first time in his life, Bigger experiences that he possesses something. He feels all his fears are gone after this act of murder. At last, he has something that he can call his own, even if this is a murder. He is no longer afraid, he has done something. He feels he has overcome his fears. From now on, he thinks that he will lead a different life. He has done something against this frightening world. He has challenged the white world by killing one of its members. He is now free from the feeling that he is a non-entity, he has done something at least. He shows his rebellion through an act of murder. He gets rid of the pressure of being a black by killing Mary. After coming to terms with his murder, he feels himself utterly different from his family. The gap between them increases since Bigger perceives himself as someone who has transcended from being a non-entity to an individual with the full weight of his own responsibility on his shoulders. His crime "... added to him a

certain confidence which his gun and knife did not" (Wright, 1940: 101). He feels superior to his family and his friends for he has done something that they cannot even dream of. Before the crime, his gun and knife gave him a sense of relief, however now he has that sense of relief, that sense of self-confidence without them, as his consciousness is crowded by the proud thoughts of his murder. He meditates on his murder as follows :

Though he had killed by accident, not once did he feel the need to tell himself that it had been an accident. He was black and he had been alone in a room where a white girl had been killed; therefore he had killed her. That was what everybody would say anyhow, no matter what he said. And in a certain sense he knew that the girl's death had not been accidental. He had killed many times before, only on those other times there had been no handy victim or circumstance to make visible or dramatic his will to kill. His crime seemed natural; he felt all his life had been leading to something like this. It was no longer a matter of dumb wonder as to what would happen to him and to his black skin; he knew now. The hidden meaning of his life – a meaning which others did not see and which he had always tried to hide – had spilled out. No, it was no accident, and he would never say it was. There was in him a kind of terrified pride in feeling and thinking that some day he would be able to say it publicly that he had done it. It was as though he had an obscure but deep debt to fulfill to himself in accepting the deed. (Wright, 1940: 101).

Bigger tries to persuade himself that Mary's murder is not an accident. In this way, he proves himself that he is an individual with a free will. He feels like a reborn man. He no longer thinks of her death as an accident, for her death gives him a sense of fulfillment which he has lacked throughout his life. His being in the same room with a white girl means that he has violated a taboo. He confesses that he would have killed before but this time intentionally, if it were not for the inconvenient circumstances. Regarding Bigger's murder, Margaret Wallace denotes that:

Bigger's reaction to the murder – he accepts it as such, without bothering about extenuating circumstances – is not accidental. It is rooted in the past which has conditioned him. For the first time in his short life he has done something even the white world would regard as significant, and for the first time he is not afraid. (qtd. in. Butler, 1995: 29).

Hence, he discovers the meaning of his life through this act of murder. He is far from being invisible now; with a sense of pride he wants the white world to know his murder and thus he will assert his identity and he will be visible. He is now immune from his social invisibility which has long been incarcerating him. In killing her, Bigger "...felt a lessening of tension in his muscles, he had shed an invisible burden he had long carried" (Wright, 1940: 109). Mary is only an agent through whom Bigger can assert his humanity. His hatred and anger are not directed at Mary as an individual but to the whole race. In fact he does not have any personal hatred towards her, he merely sees her as a white figure. He feels that he is free from his life-long burden of being a black individual in a white world after killing her. Bigger has longed for something that he could cling to, in other words he was in need of something that would help him to forget his own suffering and Mary's murder becomes his remedy. He believes that his murder is a means to claim a human identity and this murder offers him a new life, a life that he can control, a life of his own. Bone's reading of Bigger's murder attests that :

Bigger's murder of a white girl, Mary Dalton, is philosophical in motive. All his life he has been treated like a cipher, made to feel his nothingness. Reduced to a shadowy presence in the white man's mind, he has been drained of all substantiality. Bigger murders in order to become real, to make the white world acknowledge his existence. The whites conspire to ignore his human presence. Very well, then: let them ignore the presence of a white corpse! It is an act of metaphysical reprisal. If the white world *blots out* his reality, he will blot out the reality of the white world. (Bone, 1969: 21).

Bigger wants to boast about his murder. He wants the white people to know that he has killed a white woman, he wants them to acknowledge himself. He wants to be "... an idea in their minds; that his black face and the image of his smothering Mary and cutting off her head and burning her could hover before their eyes as a terrible picture of reality which they could see and feel and yet not destroy". (Wright, 1940: 123). He wishes that he could be a nightmare for the white. Since the white community has imprisoned and frightened him for so long, he wants to be the symbol of black rage. He wants them to see the consequences of their oppression. He wants

to shake them so that they will have an understanding of the naked truth of black suffering. He wants to create a horrifying image of the murder in their minds and he believes that only in this way they will be conscious of what they have done to him. He also aims to show that blacks are no longer forgiving or patient, but they can turn to violence without hesitation as a reaction to their multitude. "Violent acts and crime often become an outlet for a desperate man struggling against feelings of inferiority." (Poussaint, 1972: 72). Therefore, Bigger's crime and violence can be considered to be an outlet for his feelings of inferiority. As Bone writes :

As a murderer he acquires a new conviction of his own worth, even his superiority. The people around him seem blinded by illusion, by conventional notions of reality, but Bigger has experienced a form of transcendence. He has moved beyond the law, beyond convention, beyond good and evil, and he is now able to see beyond the surfaces of things. His sudden release from the invisible forces that oppress him propels him toward a deeper vision of reality. (Bone, 1969: 21).

When he meets his girlfriend Bessie, Bigger's sense of his own superiority enhances. He feels that Bessie is also blind just like the other blacks around him. In his eyes she is not different from the others. Towards his family and friends he feels contempt, as he identifies himself with the powerful white world. He scorns them as he thinks that they are weak, pitiful characters whom he wants to erase. He also feels shame and hatred towards Bessie because just like her family she is a reminder of his suffering, therefore he "...wished he could clench his fist and swing his arm and blot out, kill sweep away the Bessie on Bessie's face..." (Wright, 1940: 133). He wants to get rid of the feelings of inferiority which he sees on Bessie's face. Bessie is the representation of his own suffering which is in contrast with the white world of his dreams, hence his feelings toward Bessie are that of disgust and violence. He wants to blot out, to erase her and only in this way he will be capable of denying his weakness. As regards to Bigger's relationship with Bessie, Turner claims that :

Bigger himself has escaped from the insecurities, the fears, the feelings of inferiority etched into the Negro psyche by centuries of repression in a white dominated society. In Bessie, he sees a continuation of those mental chains. She is still lazily amoral, timid, compliant – in short, the Sambo personality which threatens

the existence of the new Bigger. In order to live, he must destroy her, the last link that reminds him of and binds him to his Negroness (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 166).

When he goes back to Dalton's house, he is questioned by the investigators, without hesitation he tells his story about Mary. The consciousness of his murder gives him "...a sense of power, a power born of a latent capacity to live" (Wright, 1940: 155). His previous fear is replaced by the feelings of power and self-confidence. "The knowledge that he had killed a white girl they loved and regarded as their symbol of beauty made him feel the equal of them, like a man who had been somehow cheated, but had now evened the score". (Wright, 1940: 155). The feelings of revenge take over him, he wants to say it publicly that he has been capable of standing against them by killing one of them. He is inhibited by strong feelings of vengeance. He feels that he is equal to them, for once he was deceived, degraded but now after killing Mary he feels that he has become even with the white oppressors. They are not superior to him any longer. By destroying their representation of beauty and innocence he has now reached their civilization. George E. Kent contends that "Having murdered the white girl Mary Dalton – thus defying the imprisoning white oppressor – Bigger Thomas feels a rush of energy that makes him equal to the oppressor. (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 52).

Bigger writes a kidnapping note demanding ten thousand dollars. He thinks that he is capable of dealing with the whites. He further wants to prove himself in writing that kidnapping note, for deceiving the white oppressors would mean that he is as clever as them. On the other hand he knows that he will not arouse suspicion as whites will never think of him as an individual with a developed mind. "...they would never think that he had done it; not a meek black boy like him" (Wright, 1940: 179). He is not foreign to the stereotype of blacks therefore he is so assured that they will not consider him as guilty. As Turner observes, "... Bigger assumes the role the guise of a Sambo, the stereotype of the lovably ignorant, harmless darky" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 170). As regards to Bigger's misleading of Daltons and the investigators in Mary's case, Wright puts forward his views as follows:

If there had been one person in the Dalton household who viewed Bigger Thomas as a human being, the crime would have been solved in half an hour. Did not Bigger himself know that it was the denial of his personality that enabled him to escape detection so long? The one piece of incriminating evidence which would have solved the "murder mystery" was Bigger's humanity under their very eyes. (Wright, 1940 : 826).

The reason for Daltons' and detectives' blindness is the fact that they do not acknowledge Bigger's humanity. If they had claimed Bigger as an individual, then they would have suspected from him. As they are indifferent to Bigger and his suffering, they cannot think of him as having the potential to give harm to a white person. They think that such an ineffectual, black boy like him cannot dare to commit such a crime. Moreover they are unable to think that he, a meek, pathetic black boy can be clever enough to write a ransom note. This is the reason why Bigger's crime is discovered very late. However, things do not turn out to be as perfect as he has planned. The investigators discover Mary's earring and her bones in the furnace and Bigger runs away. When the remains of Mary's body are found Bigger feels :

There was just the old feeling, the feeling that he had had all his life: he was black and had done wrong...It was the old feeling, hard and constant again now, of wanting to grab something and clutch it in his hands and swing it into someone's face." (Wright, 1940: 206).

The feelings of pride and power go away and Bigger is left with his old feelings of impotence and fear. He is now wakened up from his dream, his illusions disappear and he faces the cold reality. No matter how hard he tries to get away from them, he realizes that his old feelings of fear, weakness are there. He wants to erase everyone there, since his violence is his overcompensation for his cowardice. "He had always felt outside of this white world, and now it was true". (Wright, 1940: 207). From the very beginning he has been rejected by the white society so he is accustomed to being segregated.

He meets Bessie and confesses his murder. Bessie's first reaction is nothing but the confirmation of the myth of black males as rapists; she says Bigger that he will be accused of raping Mary, this rape accusation is inevitable since Bigger is a black male. On that account Bigger questions himself :

Had he raped her? Yes, he had raped her. Every time he felt as he had felt that night, he raped. But rape was not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one's back was against a wall and one had to strike out, whether one wanted to or not, to keep the pack from killing one. He committed rape every time he looked into a white face. He was a long, taut piece of rubber which a thousand white hands had stretched to the snapping point, and when he snapped it was rape. But it was rape when he cried out in hate deep in his heart as he felt the strain of living day by day. That, too, was rape. (Wright, 1940: 213-214).

What is most remarkable in this quotation is Bigger's own interpretation of rape. He likens himself to a piece of rubber which is stretched to the point that it will break and when it breaks it will be called rape. Bigger's rubber metaphor implies that he has had enough of this oppression. All those years they have exploited him and when he cannot stand the oppression any longer, the rubber has broken. As a matter of fact, it is Bigger and his black community who are raped for years by the white society, they are stripped of their identities. In Bigger's eyes, rape is an act of striking back, an act of taking revenge from the ones who have victimized them for so long. He believes that he has committed rape many times, whenever he is in the presence of whites. According to him, rape is a cornered man's reaction.

In their hiding place, Bigger rapes Bessie and then kills her with a brick by crushing her head. He throws her body down an airshaft. This time his murder is intentional. He plans to kill Bessie beforehand as he is afraid that she will give in him to the police. This time, Bigger is portrayed as a more brutal, more violent individual capable of murderous deeds. After killing Bessie, the sense of power again takes hold of him. "In all of his life these two murders were the most meaningful things that had ever happened to him" (Wright, 1940: 225). He feels that he is alive, he feels a sense of freedom along with a sense of relief.

He had killed twice, but in a true sense it was not the first time he had ever killed. He had killed many times before... (Wright, 1940: 225).

Although he has committed murder two times in his life, he feels that he has killed many times before. This is not his first time of murder, these murders are only the

expression of his life-long hatred. Finally his hatred has found a way to act, that is why these two murders are the most meaningful things in his life. Fanon contends that:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon, 1968: 94)

Bigger's feelings of inferiority and ineffectuality are removed by his violent acts. He finally acts upon his feeling of hatred. Only through violence can he restore his self-respect that has long been gone. Bone explains that "The central irony of *Native Son* is that he[Bigger] can find a larger and more meaningful existence through violence and crime" (Bone, 1969: 21). Bigger feels a sense of wholeness for the first time in his life: "... never in all his life, with this black skin of his, had the two worlds, thought and feeling, will and mind, aspiration and satisfaction, been together; never had he felt a sense of wholeness" (Wright, 1940: 225). The two worlds have been fighting to take control of him in all his life and for the first time he feels a wholeness, a reconciliation. It is only through violence that can he prove his identity. The irreconcilable facts of his life which is full of disappointments, are reconciled by two murders. He becomes an individual who is capable of claiming his own actions. He has tried to deny the oppression throughout his life, he has endured it for so long but finally he explodes in murder. For the first time in his life, he has stepped out of the prescribed patterns of his life, he has acted according to his own will. "He had been so conditioned in a cramped environment that hard words or kicks alone knocked him upright and made him capable of action – action that was futile because the world was too much for him" (Wright, 1940: 225). It is his cramped environment and the hostility of whites that enable Bigger to stand against them and commit murder. Yet, he is aware of the fact that his actions are futile in a world that does not acknowledge his individuality. He cannot be a part of this world, since the whole world rejects him.

Bigger feels a sense of satisfaction through acts of murder. As regards to his murders, Fanon asserts that "To put an end to his[Bigger's] tension, he acts, he

responds to the world's anticipation" (Fanon, 1967: 139). The white world has always anticipated crimes from him. By responding to their anticipation with his murders, he showed that their view of him is true.

2.3 The Media's Role In Creating Stereotypes Of African-Americans

Bigger steals a newspaper and the first thing that strikes him in the newspaper is the headline: "AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME" (Wright, 1940: 228). On reading these words Bigger realizes that he has no choice but to be prey in the hands of the lynching mobs. That catchword means that he will face death sooner or later; there is no way out for a black rapist. By using newspaper headlines and articles effectively, Wright presents the role of the media in perpetuating negative images of blacks.

African-Americans are not regarded as individuals but stereotypical figures who only exist as "beasts" in the imagination of whites. Wright reveals that popular culture helps to construct this negativity through its organs such as motion pictures, magazines and newspapers. In the same newspaper it is also reported that many windows in the Negro section are smashed, several Negro men are beaten and hundreds of Negro workers are dismissed from their jobs as a reaction to Bigger's murder case. The newspaper goes on to write that the plan of the murder and the kidnapping note are too elaborate to be the work of a Negro mind, therefore they suspect that Bigger has a clever partner in crime. The white society's reaction to the crime is evident in the newspaper article. With the lynching mob mentality, they hold all the race responsible for Bigger's murder and uttermost violence and terror are their reaction. The effects of mob violence are felt everywhere. Bigger resents that he does not have many alternatives. He thinks that :

They keep us bottled up here like wild animals... He knew that black people could not go outside of the Black Belt to rent a flat; they had to live on their side of the "line". No white real estate man would rent a flat to a black man other than in the sections where it had been decided that black people might live. (Wright, 1940: 233).

His pattern of life has been decided, even the place he would continue his life is predetermined. He cannot go outside of the Black Belt, therefore Bigger knows that his flight is futile. He is trapped in the city. Finally he gets caught by the police. The crowd surrounds him shouts with disgust and with the feelings of vengeance: "Kill 'im!" "Lynch 'im!" "That black sonofabitch!" "Kill that black ape" (Wright, 1940: 253). When Bigger opens his eyes he sees "... an array of faces, white and looming." (Wright, 1940: 253). The last things he sees are the omnipotent white faces looming above him, he is surrounded by an array of white people who demand that he should be lynched there without a trial. In the prison, he wants to read a newspaper and when he starts to read the *Tribune* Bigger sees that he is referred to as the Negro sex-slayer and a brutish Negro. Bigger is also depicted as:

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...He acted like an earlier missing link in the human species. He seemed out of place in a white man's civilization. (Wright, 1940: 260).

It is true that Bigger is out of place in a white man's civilization, since he is a dislocated, displaced individual. Bigger is alluded as incapable of fitting into white man's civilization. In the article there are also references to the stereotype of Uncle Tom. What is implicit in the references to Uncle Tom is, the white community's desire to suppress blacks' individuality. The dominant, white culture demands blacks to fit in the stereotype of docile, grinning Uncle Tom, who does not have any identity at all. He is shaped according to the expectations of the white society. Langston Hughes also illustrates the way blacks are misrepresented by the media by stating that "On the screen we[blacks] are servants, clowns, or fools" (qtd. in. Santis, 1995: 128). The media portrays the black characters in such humiliating ways that they are either humble servants, pathetic clowns or ignorant fools in these representations. Thus, he pinpoints the fact that white society creates a Jim Crow character and in this way a stereotypical image of black inferiority is formed and this negative preconception of blacks is perpetuated by the media. They are caste in the stereotypical mold of violent primitives. Regarding Bigger's case, the newspaper

editor of *Jackson Daily Star* recommends total segregation and offers to extend the Jim Crow Laws. He asserts that lynching is the solution to the Negro problem. He also sees residential segregation of blacks as imperative. The popular press inflames the vigilante lynch mobs fairly by its provoking headlines and articles.

In the novel it is possible to observe Wright's elaborate criticism of the influential role of the popular press in presenting misleading and humiliating views of African-Americans. Wright is inspired by a case of murder and rape appeared for days in the newspapers of Chicago, which is parallel to Bigger's case, while he is working on his first draft of *Native Son*. This case is the Robert Nixon case and as Wright denotes "Many of the newspaper items and some of the incidents in *Native Son* are but fictionalized versions of the Robert Nixon case and rewrites of news stories from the *Chicago Tribune*" (Wright, 1940: 28). Kenneth Kinnamon in his essay *Native Son: The Personal, Social and Political Background* also talks about the Robert Nixon affair. In this essay he presents the social and political events which influenced Wright while he was writing *Native Son*. He mentions the resemblance of Nixon's case to that of Bigger's by giving the details of the case. Kinnamon explains that :

This case involved Robert Nixon and Earl Hicks, two young Negroes with backgrounds similar to that of Bigger. According to the first in a long series of highly sensationalistic articles in the *Chicago Tribune*, on May 27, 1938, Mrs. Florence Johnson "was beaten to death with a brick by a colored sex criminal... in her apartment" (qtd. in. Yoshinobu, 1982: 123).

Kinnamon pinpoints the similarities of the backgrounds of Bigger and the two convicts. Bigger also kills Bessie with a brick and the degrading presentations of Bigger in the newspapers are very central to the novel. Like Bigger, Nixon is mentioned as the colored sex criminal, thus whether he has committed rape or not, he is considered to be a rape criminal and there is no way out for a black male if a rape accusation is made against him. Without any evidence both Bigger and Nixon are accused of rape. Kinnamon emphasizes the fact that "Though no evidence of rape was adduced, the *Tribune* from the beginning called the murder a sex crime and exploited fully this apparently false accusation" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984:

90) In Nixon's case although two people, Robert Nixon and Earl Hicks, are arrested for the crime, Nixon is the focus of attention and Kinnamon gives Nixon's darker skin to be the cause of this focus. As Kinnamon conceives "He was referred repeatedly as the 'brick moron', 'rapist slayer', 'jungle beast', 'sex moron' and the like." (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 90) In the Chicago Sunday Tribune, the article regarding the case of the Robert Nixon was published on June 5, 1938. Charles Leavelle, the writer of the article "Brick Slayer is Likened to Jungle Beast" animalizes the black convict to a great deal, his comments on the 'very dark skin' of Nixon are very striking illustrations of his humiliating attitude towards blacks. In Bigger's case, the editor of the Jackson Daily Star also mentions Bigger's "dead-black complexion." (Wright, 1940: 261). From the quotation below which is taken from Leavelle's article, it is easy to observe his degrading viewpoint of African-Americans which is quite parallel with Bigger's presentation in the article of the editor of the *Jackson Daily Star*:

That charm is a mark of civilization, and so far as manner and appearance go, civilization has left Nixon practically untouched. His hunched shoulders and long, sinewy arms that dangle almost to his knees; his out-thrust head and catlike tread all suggest the animal. He is very black – almost pure Negro. His physical characteristics suggest an earlier link in the species. Mississippi river steamboat mates, who hire and fire roastsabouts by the hundreds, would classify Nixon as a jungle hero. They would hire him only if they were sorely in need of rousters. And they would keep close watch on him. This type is known to be ferocious and relentless in a fight. Though docile under ordinary circumstances, they are easily aroused. And when this happens the veneer of civilization disappears. (Leavelle, 1938: 6)

Nixon, who is accused of rape is likened to a jungle man. In the article he is depicted as a savage monster, the jungle beast. His physical description also suggests that of an animal. The blackness of his complexion is very much stressed, furthermore regarding his black skin, he is considered to be a "pure" Negro. Thus, being a pure Negro connotes beastliness. Leavelle's comments on the 'very dark skin' of Nixon bring Kinnamon's claim, regarding Nixon's being the focus of attention because of his darker skin, to minds. In the same article Leavelle quotes a Louisiana sheriff who sees the death of Nixon as the only remedy in asserting that "Only death can cure

him” (Leavelle, 1938: 6) The sheriff perceives Nixon as a disease and the only remedy is death, there is no possible cure other than death. The only option is his execution. On the other hand, Leavelle is insistent in referring Nixon as a ‘type’ who is different from others. He is not human but a different type, a different species according to the writer. He thinks that Nixon’s civilization is seeming and supernatural and can disappear easily, though he is docile under ordinary circumstances. Therefore, it is possible to claim that Wright’s journalistic retelling of Bigger’s case serves to present and criticize the stereotypical views of the media on black characters. Wright seeks to amend the stereotypical image of African-American males as rapist beasts by portraying the media’s evident role in perpetuating this humiliating image.

Like in the cases of Nixon and Bigger, for years African-Americans are shown to be filthy, dumb, untrustworthy and equal to only animals. Du Bois in “The Souls of Black Folk” illustrates that black people are seen as responsible for everything that is negative; “...personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and the boisterous welcoming of the worse, the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain for everything black, from Toussaint to the devil” (Du Bois, 1994: 13). With these words Du Bois maintains that, there is a strong wish to implant the contempt for blacks. Recklessly, whites encourage imaginary ideas of blacks while suppressing or simply ignoring, doubting the positive qualities of them. Adams also shows that :

The associations black-primitive-instinctive constitute a series of ideologized, theorized or fantasized analogies. The black, the primitive, the instinctive are alleged to be analogous. They are signifiers of an underlying something, a shared meaning, a signified. What is this signified? The common denominator by which the “black”, the “primitive”, and the “instinctive” are divisible is a psyche that is presumed to be not merely different from but qualitatively inferior to the European psyche—which is “white”, “civilized”, and “rational”. That is, implicit in these associations are the oppositions black–white, primitive–civilized, instinctive–rational and, most important of all, inferior–superior. (Adams, 1996: 52).

The physical features of African-Americans have become a common denominator, by which their inferiority or superiority is measured. Possessing black characteristics

clearly points not only to physical inferiority but also to mental inferiority. These oppositions serve as a tool for scorning African-Americans. As to the oppositional associations of black and white. J. Hillman asserts that "the supremacy of white depends on oppositional imagining" (Hillman, 1986: 41) Whites see in African-Americans a reflection of their deepest fears and imagination, and Bigger cannot break away from this imposed cycle and turns into a criminal. Thus, he proves to whites that he fits the stereotypical African-American role that they believe him to be, however, ironically he has already been a criminal from the moment he was born black. Hence, "The ultimate crime, for which he cannot bring himself to acknowledge any guilt, but for which he knows that he will nonetheless be punished, is the crime of being black" (Bone, 1969: 17).

2.4 Bigger Thomas' Coming To Terms With The Meaning Of His Existence

In the prison Bigger contemplates his murder and the meaning of his existence. The thing which hurts him most is his knowledge that "...they were going to use his death as a bloody symbol of fear to wave before they eyes of that black world." (Wright, 1940: 257). He knows that his death will be used so as to intimidate and suppress the black society. He will be an example of failure, he will be the embodiment of the impotence of blacks. The white society will continue to haunt the black world with the execution of Bigger. They will live with the fear that one day they will face the same, inevitable end of Bigger unless they continue to exist in their own prescribed patterns of life. The ones who do not conform to the rules of the white dominant system will be punished in death, just like Bigger. Bigger's death will set an example of the inescapable fate of insubserviant black individuals. He feels "...that not only had they resolved to put him to death, but that they were determined to make his death mean more than a mere punishment; that they regarded him as a figment of that black world which they feared and were anxious to keep under control". (Wright, 1940: 257).

Bigger is a product of the white imagination which regards him as the symbol of their worst nightmares. He is the realization of their uttermost fears. Bigger's death will not be enough for the raging mob, all their ideas, feelings about blacks are personified in Bigger. Therefore, they not only want to put him to death but also with his death they attempt to achieve to daunt the black community. Canby regards the raging mob as a "...character, stirred up by sensational newspapers, getting blood-thirsty, wanting to lynch – the mob whose threatening roar is always in the background of the book and of the Negro's mind" (qtd. in Butler, 1995: 23-24). The mob's presence not only haunts Bigger but also the whole black community. Bigger stands in for the entire race. There is no doubt that the media with its publications has an enraging effect on the white mob. Bigger judges himself from the eyes of the white and decides that :

To those who want to kill him he was not human, not included in that picture of Creation; and that was why he had killed it. To live, he had created a new world for himself, and for that he was to die. (Wright, 1940: 264).

He knows that he has never been acknowledged as human by them. He has not existed for them. He is also aware of the imminence of his situation and that he would face death sooner or later. In order to exist under such humiliating circumstances, he has felt that he must act and create a new world for himself. And now he has to pay the price.

When his family comes to visit him, Bigger is very much disturbed since he feels weakness and despair in front of whites. "He identified himself with his family and felt their naked shame under the eyes of white folks" (Wright, 1940: 275). When he sees his mother begging Daltons to spare the life of him he is "... paralyzed with shame... violated" (Wright, 1940: 280). His shame then turns to hatred and anger again. He thinks that his family should be proud of him because he is the one among them who has dared to act. As Baldwin notes that "He[Bigger] has forced his oppressors to see the fruit of that oppression : and he feels, when his family and friends come to visit him in the death cell, that they should not be weeping or frightened, that they should be happy, *proud* that he has dared, through murder and

now through his own imminent destruction, to redeem their anger and humiliation, that he has hurled into the spiritless obscurity of their lives the lamp of his passionate life and death" (Baldwin, 1963: 37). Through his acts of violence he feels that he has shed a light to their oppression. He has intimidated that white world which relentlessly has stolen his right to live. He has made a stand against the world of white control and supervision. Accordingly:

Had he not taken fully upon himself the crime of being black? Had he not done the thing which they dreaded above all others? Then they ought not stand here and pity him, cry over him; but look at him and go home, contented, feeling that their shame was washed away (Wright, 1940: 275).

Bigger wants his death to be meaningful, he wants his execution to be his victory. He does not want anybody to lament, since it is his own choice. He does not repent of paying the price of his own choices, that is why he hates to see his mother crying. "How could he go to his death with white faces looking on and saying only death would cure him for having flung into their faces his feeling of being black?" (Wright, 1940: 289). He ultimately understands that his death will not be victorious, in fact his whole life had been an illusion, he had deceived himself that he would find a meaning to his existence through his murders, but in prison he bitterly accepts the fact that he had "...emptied the vessel which life had filled for him and found the emptying meaningless" (Wright, 1940: 288).

In the trial, Bessie's dead body is taken to the courtroom for evidence. Her corpse is used by the state attorney to show how Bigger has murdered Mary Dalton. Bessie's death has nothing to do with the trial and her body is only an instrument through which the murder of the white girl will be examined. Bigger's killing Bessie is only mentioned in order to show Bigger's murder of Mary. He has never been accused of killing and raping Bessie. Watching Bessie's body taken to the courtroom Bigger reflects:

They were bringing Bessie's body in now to make the white men and women feel that nothing short of a quick blotting out of his life would make the city safe again. They were using his having killed Bessie to kill him for his having killed Mary, to cast him in a light

that would sanction any action taken to destroy him. Though he had killed a black girl and a white girl, he knew that it would be for the death of the white girl that he would be punished. The black girl was merely "evidence". And under it all he knew that the white people did not really care about Bessie's being killed. White people never searched for Negroes who killed other Negroes. He had even heard it said that white people felt it was good when one Negro killed another; it meant that they had one Negro less to contend with. Crime for a Negro was only when he harmed whites, took white lives, or injured white property.(Wright, 1940: 306-307).

Bessie's raped body testifies that Bigger is a black rapist. With the evidence of Bessie's body, he is transformed into the black beast stereotype of white fantasies. He has confirmed the stereotype of black rapist male as it is expected from him. In the above excerpt, it is also possible to reflect upon the racial opinions of the judicial system. In this judicial system, only the rights and the safety of whites are defended. Bigger resentfully thinks that Bessie's death will not be given the same importance as Mary's. The death of a black person has no meaning and it is nothing to be cared about. The death of a black person can make whites happy so that they will not have to deal with another trouble-maker. In the court scene, the state attorney describes Bigger's murder of Mary as :

My God, what bloody scenes must have taken place! How swift and unexpected must have been that lustful and murderous attack! How that poor child must have struggled to escape that maddened ape! How she must have pled on bended knee, with tears in her eyes, to be spared the vile touch of this horrible person! Your Honor, must not this infernal monster have burned her body to destroy the evidence of offenses *worse* than rape? That treacherous beast must have known that if the marks of his teeth were ever seen on the innocent white flesh of her breasts, he would not have been accorded the high honor of sitting here in this court of law! O suffering Christ, there are no words to tell of a deed so black and awful! (Wright, 1940: 376).

In this lengthy quotation, Bigger is characterized by the violent attributes of a beast. Without any evidence, he is charged with rape. The description of Bigger's supposed rape is an affirmation of the stereotype of black males as beasts. By portraying Mary as an innocent figure of a defenseless victim of black victimization, the state attorney aims to evoke feelings of rage and hatred towards the black criminal. He also asserts

that for the security of our wives and daughters, people like Bigger should be annihilated. This time it is Bigger who is going to be 'blotted-out'. He will be cut off from the reality which he wanted to deny throughout his pathetic life.

Bigger appreciates the communist lawyer Max's attempts to understand him. Max treats him like a human being, asking him questions and wanting to defend him. Through Max, Bigger realizes that he can communicate with another human being. He wants to share his feelings and thoughts with another human being. Accordingly:

...he had spoken to Max as he had never spoken to anyone in his life; not even to himself. And his talking had eased from his shoulders a heavy burden. (Wright, 1940: 333).

Before Max, he has never spoken to anyone in his life, he did not know the existence of bonds between human beings. Furthermore, after talking about his life, and his murders he feels relieved. He believes that, in talking to another human being "... he ought to be able to reach out with his bare hands and carve from naked space the concrete, solid reasons why he had murdered." (Wright, 1940: 323). Bigger searches for a sense of meaning in his murders and wants to share them with Max.

His long conversations with Max evoke in him a sense of human solidarity. He asks himself "...if it were possible that after all everybody in the world felt alike?" (Wright, 1940: 333) For the first time in his life, Bigger becomes aware of the fact that there are others just like himself. His conversations with Max make him aware of the sense of wholeness which he lacks throughout his life, and he understands that this sense of wholeness would be fulfilled with relating to other beings. Max gives Bigger "...the faith that at bottom all men lived as he lived and felt as he felt" (Wright, 1940: 386). In the prison, he contemplates his talk with Max and he wants to reach out and touch the hands of people who are locked in other cells. He wants to know how they feel. He wants to relate to them:

... just to know that they were there and warm! Just that, and no more; and it would have been enough, more than enough. And in that touch, response of recognition, there would be union, identity; there would be a supporting oneness, a wholeness which had been denied him all his life. (Wright, 1940: 335)

He desperately wants to be unified with other people and he believes that in this way he will reach a wholeness. Bigger's sense of alienation diminishes in the prison. It is possible to say that, he gains a new kind of consciousness; he becomes aware of the fact that he has a self as an individual. He understands the value of his self. He wants to find meaning in his life. This new excitement takes hold of him and he realizes that he wants to live. "He felt he wanted to live now – not escape paying for his crime – but live in order to find out, to see if it were true, and to feel it more deeply; and, if he had to die, to die within it".(Wright, 1940: 336). However, his realization cannot alter his prescribed fate. It is too late for him.

While talking about his crimes, Bigger comes to the conclusion that he is neither full of fear nor he feels any hatred. He feels that he has transcended these feelings. He shows that he has taken the responsibility for his murders. "They don't give black people a chance, so I took a chance and lost." (Wright, 1940: 330). He has made an attempt to change things in his own, violent way, however he failed.

They wouldn't let me live and I killed. Maybe it ain't fair to kill and I reckon I really didn't want to kill. But when I think of why the killing was, I begin to feel what I wanted, What I am...(Wright, 1940: 391)

In the above excerpt taken from the last pages of the novel, Bigger explains what he feels about his murders. As Donald B. Gibson declares, "He accepts himself as never before, and in realizing his identity is able to evaluate his past actions objectively" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 97). Nevertheless, Max is far from understanding Bigger's motives and the reasons for his murders. He is shocked to hear Bigger's exclaim that "...what I killed for, I *am*" (Wright, 1940: 391-392). "What terrifies Max is that Bigger, repossessed by hate, ends by accepting what life has made him: a killer." (Bone, 1966, 150).

Max's final speech in the court is not satisfactory in reflecting Bigger's plight. It is also incoherent since it cannot shed a light on the reality of Bigger's life and his motives for murder. He does not raise an objection against Bigger's false charge of rape of Mary. Hence, Bigger cannot be an exception to the myth of the black rapist. On the other hand, he never mentions Bigger's intended murder of Bessie, which seems to imply that Max also agrees with the prevalent racial judicial

system that does not deal with the crimes blacks commit against each other. Blacks are even excluded from law as illustrated in the case of Bessie's murder and further in Max's rendering Bessie's murder as insignificant by not dealing with it. Max also seems to accept the notion that blacks have an inclination for criminal deeds. He gives the impression that he sees all blacks alike rather than as individuals. His defense proves to be unsuccessful as his plea is incredible and irrelevant and in the end Bigger is executed.

Consequently, Max is ineffective in conveying Bigger's predicament. "Though Max's motivations are good, founded as they are upon his basic good character and good feeling, he is unable to finally save Bigger, for Bigger's salvation comes about through his own efforts, through his eventual ability to find freedom from the constraints of his past"(qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 103). Max is far from recognizing the conclusions Bigger has arrived at. Furthermore, he is incapable of seeing Bigger's humanity, for he does not see him as an individual with a particular identity, but as the representative figure of an entire race. He prepares his plea so as to strike attention to social problems rather than focusing on Bigger's particular, individual case. As to Max's defense, Gibson conceives that "... the strategy he[Max] chooses to defend Bigger requires that he deal with him largely on an abstract level with the intention of convincing his hearers that the abstraction is embodied within the particular individual before them." (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 102).

Bigger can achieve a sense of self-worth and assert himself only through brutality and violence. He rejects to be repentful of his violent actions since his violence is a statement of his freedom. Furthermore, his violence can be seen as his revolt, his rebellion against the oppressive practices of both black and white societies. Through his murder, which can be seen as a means to assert his identity, he accomplishes a sense of transcendence. He demonstrates that he is ready to die for his freedom and independence. He finally overcomes the barriers imposed on his life. He goes beyond the passivity of the black life. As Baldwin asserts, by murdering Bigger "... has made it manifest that *he* lives and that his despised blood nourishes the passions of a man." (Baldwin, 1963: 36-37). He was presented with two choices, either he would turn to violence and rebel or he would submit and lose his dignity.

He chooses violent rebellion over submission. By killing he constructs and maintains an identity for himself under dehumanizing treatments of whites who have dismembered him and his entire race. As Gibson asserts, "... Bigger, through introspection, finally arrives at a definition of self which is his own and different from that assigned to him by everyone else in the novel" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 96). Fanon's feelings on the fact of his blackness can denote the feelings of Bigger and the quotation below illustrates the reasons lying beneath Bigger's murders, Fanon explains that :

The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man- or at least like a nigger...I was told to stay within bounds, to go back where I belonged. They would see, then!... What! When it was I who had every reason to hate, to despise, I was rejected? When I should have been begged, implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known (Fanon, 1967: 114-115).

And Bigger chooses to make himself known, to assert his existence, his humanity. With his murders he proves himself, he makes the white society recognize him. From the beginning of his life, he was expected to behave like a nigger, finally he resolves to behave like one. But, in trying to make himself recognized by the white society he becomes a stereotype, he cannot cut loose from the preconditioned image of himself. On the other hand, he acquires an individuality by submitting to this negative image. However, this newly acquired identity as a murderer leads to his inevitable end. Harold T. Mc Carthy insists that "...he[Wright] produced a scarcely human creature – not an imaginary monster, in Wright's opinion, but a faithful rendering of America's idea of "the American Negro," and thereby a mirror image of American civilization itself. (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 72).

In Bigger's last words, it is possible to observe the formation of normal human relations. As Max is leaving he asks him to tell "... Tell Mister... Tell Jan hello..." (Wright, 1940: 392) which indicates his growing humanity towards other human beings. " Bigger does not go to death hating all white men" (qtd. in. Macksey

& Moorer, 1984: 115). He addresses Jan with his first name, which can be read as his growing sympathy towards others. According to Gibson, Bigger's final "Tell Jan hello" reveals that:

... Bigger's contradictory feelings about himself and his situation have been resolved, for they could only be spoken by virtue of Bigger's having accepted the consequences of his actions and hence himself. He has no choice – if he is to achieve the degree of reconciliation to his fate necessary for him to face death and therefore assert his humanity – but to recognize that he *is* what he has *done*. (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 98).

Bigger comes to terms with himself and with the human condition. In the end he is able to find some meaning in his life. "The conclusion finds him feeling a calm assurance and acceptance of self". (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 99). He understands the value of his life, but it is too late. As Bone contends, "He has established an identity through murder, but that identity, by virtue of its horror, has cut him off from the human community of which he longs to be a part. (Bone, 1969: 22). Finally, he dies in an electric chair with the realization of his self-worth and the meaning of his existence.

CHAPTER 3 : The Man Who Lived Underground : Odyssey Of The Fragmentary Self

3.1 Retreat Into the Underground

I am an invisible man... I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me...That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality...Or again, you often doubt if you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy...You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in a real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful. (Ellison, 1980: 3).

Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* is the story of a desperate black individual who withdraws himself from the world above and makes a decision to lead a literally and metaphorically invisible existence in the municipal sewer system. The protagonist of the novella unwillingly descends into the underground in order to evade the police who have tortured him into confessing a crime he had not committed. In the underground, the protagonist discovers new ways of interpreting his existence, community and environment. He gains a new kind of consciousness which is totally independent of the aboveground. In writing *The Man Who Lived Underground*, Wright is very much inspired by his own personal experiences. Accordingly:

The image of the Negro as underground man had its origin in Wright's personal experience. During the winter of 1932, he was employed by a Chicago hospital to look after the experimental animals. He and his fellow porters were confined to the basement corridors of the institution, restricted to what might be called an underground point of view: "The hospital kept us four Negroes as though we were close kin to the animals we tended,

huddled together down in the underworld corridors of the hospital, separated by a vast psychological distance from the significant processes of the rest of the hospital – just as America had kept us locked in the dark underworld of American life for three hundred years...” (Bone, 1969: 26).

Wright is profoundly affected by the maltreatment of the employers in the hospital. Since blacks are given the most dehumanizing jobs, they are offered a job in the underground where he looks after the experimental animals. They are treated as equal to those animals there. Furthermore, during the time he works there, he is forced to stay in the underground with the experimental animals. Therefore, it is possible to say that, Wright draws heavily on his personal experiences in this hospital while writing *The Man Who Lived Underground*. His underground experience offers Wright a different point of view. During his stay, he has the chance to observe things from a distinctive perspective. In the hospital, he and the other African-American workers are all kept away from the rest of the hospital. They are carefully segregated from the other parts of the hospital as well as the other white employees of the hospital. Crucially, Wright calls attention to the parallelism between his underground experience and the black life in the United States. He compares the black life in the United States to a dark, underworld existence. As Wright’s biographer Michel Fabre points out, “...the underground rather clearly represents the marginal character of the black man’s existence and his ambiguous rapport with American civilization” (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 211).

The novella opens with the scene where a young, fearful, anxious, black man enters the underground through a manhole. “I’VE GOT TO HIDE, he told himself.” (Wright, 1987: 27).¹⁰ The opening sentence of the narrative is this sentence that presents the black protagonist’s desperate situation. Fred Daniels, the protagonist, is a man on the run. In order not to be caught and sentenced, he decides to hide in the municipal sewer system. The preeminent reason for this young man’s ultimate decision to abandon this world and to make a choice to live underground is the fact that he is presumed guilty for a crime for which he is innocent. In other words, Fred Daniels, the black protagonist of the story, is forced to lead an invisible

¹⁰ All references to “The Man Who Lived Underground” are from *Eight Men*, Richard Wright, Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1987.

existence since he is supposed to be a guilty criminal. So as not to be sentenced for a crime he has not committed, Daniels, unwillingly starts to lead a new life in the underground. The underground can be considered to be a subtle illustration of blacks' constrained world in the United States. As Bone comments, Wright "...employs the underground motif as a symbol of Negro self-immolation" (Bone, 1969: 40). In addition to the illustration of African-Americans' excluded condition, the underground is also the symbol of their renunciation of the white world.

Daniels' descent into underground evokes multiple meanings. It suggests a form of transcendence as the protagonist is now beyond the limits of the upperworld. On the other hand, his descent indisputably connotes the concept of flight. Rejected by the above ground, the protagonist chooses to flee, chooses to live another kind of existence. He chooses a place where he will not be excluded. Bone's observation is appropriate when he considers that :

Wright's subterranean world is a symbol of the Negro's social marginality. Thrust from the upperworld by the racial exclusiveness of whites, he is forced to lead an underground existence. (Bone, 1969: 26).

Instead of surrendering, the protagonist takes a decision to live, since surrendering would mean death. Therefore, he chooses life over death in the aboveground, however what the symbolic underground offers him will not be a substitute for the real world. His retreat into the underground connotes his metaphorical death, since he is cut loose from everything belonging to the real world. "To be driven underground is to suffer spiritual death, to be the victim of metaphysical annihilation" (Bone, 1969: 26).

As soon as he enters the sewer and hides himself carefully, Daniels sees a white face in panic. "Looming above his head in the rain a white face hovered over the hole" (Wright, 1987: 28). The white faces that chase him throughout his entire life, continue to haunt him in the underground. The last thing Daniels sees belonging to the aboveground is a white face. Fortunately, white men do not notice him and they close the cover of the manhole through which he has slipped inside the sewer. With the closure of the manhole cover, he is entirely shut away from the outside

world, enclosed in another place, which is quite different from the familiar world above. It is at this point that Daniels' journey in the underground starts.

The first thing that strikes his attention in his first moments in the sewer, is how "everything seemed strange and unreal" there in the underground. (Wright, 1987: 29). After getting rid of his feelings of nervousness, and after assuring himself that danger has passed, he wants to know this strange place, that is vastly different from the world outside. With the help of a match, he observes this alien place and tries to think of a way of getting out. While he is contemplating on the ways of survival in the underground, a sudden desire to stay there takes hold of him. "Though he wanted to leave, an irrational impulse held him rooted" (Wright, 1987: 30). In spite of the awareness of the dangers awaiting him in this strange place, he wants to stay there. While considering all the hidden perils of the underground, he yields in to his inner voice and decides to continue his journey in the sewers. Nevertheless, his presence in the underground makes Daniels very nervous, he is on alert every second, yet never considers giving up living. Soon he becomes an inhabitant of the sewer. In Bone's view the sewer is :

... a place for discarded and rejected things, a place of filth and excrement, bad odors, revulsion and disgust. Wright employs it as a symbol of Negro life. For white people shrink from the black man as if he were a filthy thing. They respond to his dark skin as if it were dirty. He is made to feel repulsive, and Wright's sewer is a brilliant projection of this feeling. (Bone, 1969: 28).

According to Bone underground is a place for refused people and Wright uses the sewer as the symbol of black man's rejection. Bone also associates the black skin of African-Americans with the blackness and the filth of the underground. Black skin is found repugnant by the white, and black people also have the same negative feeling about their skin and this feeling of disgust is symbolized by the sewer. Fabre conceives that by putting Daniels between brackets in the sunless world, and by creating a hero who exists in the sewer, Wright attempts to reinforce the blacks' position as outsiders. He goes on to denote that:

...the lower or underground position is less important than the exclusion or marginality. Setting the individual apart allows him to

pass judgment in a more detached and perhaps objective manner on whatever he is excluded from. At the same time, it implies a certain invisibility of the individual whose personality is unrecognized. If he is not actually seen, he does not exist. The metaphysical bearing of this image of the black outsider is thus double. It presupposes superiority in his vision over the common vision, also the agony in his exclusion and the necessity to return... (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 215).

By putting Daniels in the filthy underground, Wright aims to reinforce the exclusion of blacks. On the other hand, by making his protagonist metaphorically and literally invisible, Wright offers a precise, objective point of view. The hero is able to separate himself from his community, since he is also invisible to them, in this way he can pass impartial judgments. He can lucidly evaluate the outer world and the inhabitants of it. His descent enhances his consciousness as well as presenting him many different ways of interpretation. With his new status in the underground, he can observe and interpret the victimization he and his whole race are subjected to.

The invisibility of the protagonist suggests non-existence. He exists as long as he is seen and recognized by the others, since nobody is aware of his presence Daniels is supposed to be a non-entity. Hence, the image of Daniels as a black outsider on the first hand symbolizes a lack of recognition, however on the other hand it offers him a superior vision, through which he can observe everything in an objective and superior way. However, the fact of his invisibility also points out to his rejected status as a black, since on account of his blackness he has to be a passive observer. He has to watch everything from a distance as an outsider. Bone declares that :

The hero's angle of vision is also symbolic. He is forever the outsider, looking at the world through a knothole in the fence. To see without being seen, to overhear without being heard, is the daily fate of a servant class. How many black maids and cooks and waiters look out upon America from this underground perspective? (Bone, 1969: 28).

In this quotation, Bone calls attention to the point of similarity between the experience of black menial workers and the experience of Daniels, in the sense that

they both share an underground perspective. That is to say that, they are both outsiders peeping at the world through a knothole.

3.1.1 Journey In the Subterranean World

In his first moments in the sewer, while Daniels is searching for a shelter, he senses a rat moving in the dim light, when he holds the match close he sees a huge rat and kills it with a pole. This rat image is a recurrent one in foreshadowing the tragic ends of Wright's protagonists. Daniels continues to walk so as to discover his new surrounding and is startled to hear strange human voices in the sewer. When he listens carefully, he realizes that the cadence he hears is coming from a church whose walls are near the sewer. He wants to watch this scene of church service without being noticed. Therefore, in order to watch the choir singing in the church, he peeks through a crevice. The lyrics he hears are "*Jesus, take me to your home above*" (Wright, 1987: 32). When he sees that the ones whose singing voices reach him, are black people, he cannot help himself laughing. Those black people want to be taken to a better world above, which indicates their dissatisfaction with this world. Their uttermost desire is a better life, which they believe to exist above. Daniels finds his people's singing such hymns ridiculous, but soon he is accompanied by thoughts of shame and guilt. Accordingly:

What was he doing? He was crushed with a sense of guilt. Would God strike him dead for that? The singing swept on and he shook his head, disagreeing inspite of himself. They oughtn't do that, he thought. But he could think of no reason *why* they should not do it... He felt that he was gazing upon something abysmally obscene, yet he could not bring himself to leave... Pain throbbed in his legs and a deeper pain, induced by the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get, churned in him. A vague conviction made him feel that those people should stand unrepentant and yield no quarter in singing and praying, yet *he* had run away from the police, had pleaded with them to believe in *his* innocence. He shook his head bewildered. (Wright, 1987: 32-33).

Daniels' first response to the black church congregation is contempt. However, at the same time watching those poor black people in white robes praying, gives Daniels

feelings of grief and sorrow. He is deeply disturbed by this scene, which he finds to be absurd and obscene. As Fabre suggests, "There is an obscenity in the disparity between the actual situation of man and his aspirations..." (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 213). That is the reason why Daniels finds their begging so obscene, for he thinks that those black people's strivings are futile. He does not approve of their praying and begging, since he is very well aware of the fact that, their longings will never be fulfilled as black individuals. He cannot understand why those people should feel remorse. For Bone, this scene of Negro church service is nothing but a mere "...symbol of segregation-in-Christ: the Jim Crow Christianity that offers salvation without human brotherhood." (Bone, 1969: 28). Blacks are even segregated in their religious services. What Bone refers to as the "Jim Crow Christianity" is in fact the reason for Daniels' feeling of guilt and absurd laughter. He laughs at the absurdity of their Christianity, which presents a meaningless redemption, since it abandons the principle of human brotherhood by segregating blacks.

When Daniels thinks of his own situation, he suddenly realizes how irrational he had been in expecting the white police to believe in his innocence. In fact, he was no different from those naive black people groveling for something they could never attain, in the sense that he also deceived himself in supposing that the police would believe in his innocence. How stupid he had been in thinking that he would be released since he was not guilty. With dismay, he realizes that he has blindly disregarded the fact that he is black.

Regarding Daniels' encounter with the black church congregation, Fabre remarks that "The juxtaposition of the foul-smelling sewer and the worshippers seeking God suggests a revolting contrast" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 213). Those black people seek happiness in their white robes which is in utter contrast with their black skin. And Daniels is watching them worship, from a filthy, black sewer which is also in contrast with the whiteness of the robes of black people gathered in the church. In this Negro church, those segregated black people are praying for happiness in the other world since they have no hopes left for this world.

After this church scene, Daniels continues to walk in the sewer till his eyes catch a glimpse of a familiar thing floating in the water. When he comes close, he realizes that it is a dead body of a baby. Accordingly :

...a tiny nude body of a baby snagged by debris and half-submerged in water. Thinking that the baby was alive, he moved impulsively to save it, but his roused feelings told him that it was dead, cold, nothing, the same nothingness he had felt while watching the men and women singing in the church. Water blossomed about the tiny legs, the tiny arms, the tiny head, and rushed onward. The eyes were closed, as though in sleep; the fists were clenched, as though in protest; and the mouth gaped black in a soundless cry. (Wright, 1987: 34).

The baby floating in the water connotes the beginning of a new life. It also implies redemption, purification. The water in which the baby floats can be considered as the womb. As Fabre puts forward, "The sewer resembles the womb with its dripping dome and its multiple drains into which body fluids spout forth, and the newborn baby is carried" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 214). However, the baby Daniels encounters is dead, therefore it can be said that rather than a new, fresh beginning, it symbolizes a rotten end. Since the sewer resembles the womb, Daniels' withdrawal to the symbolic underground represents his escape to the mother womb. Again to quote Fabre, "Returned to the maternal womb, man is recreated, charged with a new force, and then ejected" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 214). Although his return to the underground symbolizes a new beginning for him, where he will be recreated, the fact that the baby is dead connotes that he will never be able to make a fresh start. He is destined to lead this very life or he will be ejected. This dead baby has no meaning for Daniels, the sight of the dead baby gives him the same feeling of nothingness which he has felt while watching the black church congregation. Bone's reading of the dead baby attests that:

The discarded infant is emblematic of the Negro as the unwanted child of his culture. Still more it is a symbol of what has been killed, and thrust down out of sight, in the Negro's heart. That something is newborn hope, or possibility. The child, as yet unshaped by his environment, represents potentiality. But the Negro's humanity nipped in the bud. What-might-have-been is systematically destroyed by white oppression. (Bone, 1969: 28-29).

As explicated in the above excerpt, Bone assumes that the dead baby stands for the segregation of African-Americans. Just like the unwanted baby, who is thrown into a

sewer, African-Americans are unwanted in this society. They are rejected by the American culture and their existence is negated as symbolized by the unwanted, dead baby. In addition to this, a baby represents hope and potentiality, yet the potential, this newborn hope is killed before it comes into being. This dead baby, which connotes the humanity of African-Americans is killed and muted into death by white oppression. As Henry Louis Gate Jr. insists, "It is precisely at this point in the narrative that we know Fred Daniels to be the "dead baby" (Gates, 1988: 106).

As Daniels observes, the dead baby's fists are clenched as if it is protesting something and its mouth is open as if it is screaming. The baby is protesting the white oppression, however it is silenced. The baby and the potential it carries are reduced to silence. There are no details about the baby, neither its gender nor its race is given in the passage which also suggests that African-Americans are non-entities without a particular identity just as the identityless dead baby. The sight of the dead baby affects Daniels. He feels "... as condemned as when the policemen had accused him" (Wright, 1987: 34). He feels the same desperation when he was forced to sign a confession for a crime which he had not committed. In order not to see the baby, he pushes it and closes his eyes till it disappears from his sight.

When he returns to the dirt cave by the church, he finds himself trembling. After sleeping there for some time, he contemplates his new life in the sewer. Accordingly:

He had to leave this foul place, but leaving meant facing those policemen who had wrongly accused him. No, he could not go back aboveground. He remembered the beating they had given him and how he had signed his name to a confession, a confession which he had not even read. He had been too tired when they had shouted at him, demanding that he sign his name; he had signed it to end his pain. (Wright, 1987: 35).

The reason for Daniels' escape is apparent in this quotation. His being a black individual simply made him a criminal. Due to his black skin, he is assumed to be a murderer and he had no choice but to sign the confession which he had not even read. As he could not bear the violence and torture he was exposed to any longer, he had unwillingly signed the confession. As Fabre asserts, "If his skin had not been dark, Daniels would not have been arrested and falsely accused..." (qtd. in.

Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 214 -215). Therefore, the protagonist's race plays a crucial role in his new life underground. If he was not a black man, he would not have to lead a new existence in the underground.

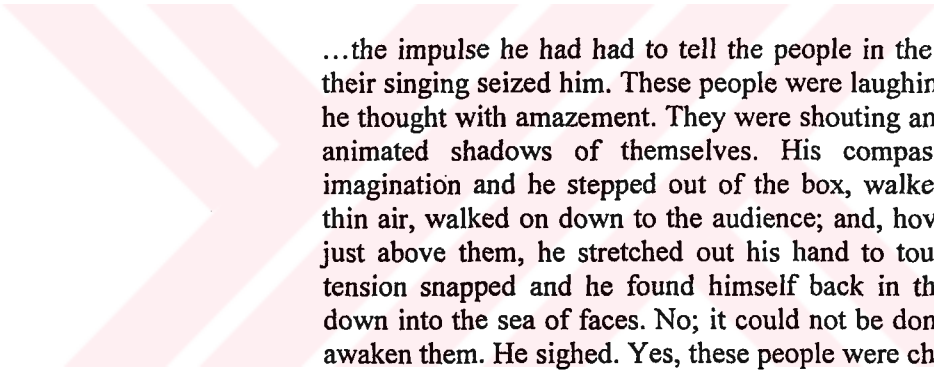
Soon Daniels begins to feel hunger and thirst. In order to quench his thirst he tries to find a place where he can get some water. While searching for water, he finds an old, rusty iron pipe and then he notices a brick wall which he cannot pass through. In Bone's view, these brick walls symbolize "... the fixed boundaries of Negro life which he proceeds to violate" (Bone, 1969: 29). Daniels encounters many brick walls during his stay in the sewer. These walls, which do not give easy access to him, represent the limitations of black life. By attempting to go beyond those walls, Daniels is violating the fixed boundaries, therefore he will ultimately be punished for attempting to transcend the boundaries. Then, he starts digging the wall cautiously so as not to be heard by anyone. He digs a hole through which he can see inside. When he looks carefully, he sees a nude man lying on a white table and above him he notices a container filled with a blood-red liquid. After seeing a coffin inside, he suddenly realizes that he is peeping at an undertaker's establishment. In the establishment, he smells a sharp odor. He realizes that this peculiar odor is coming from the undertaker's embalming stuff. As regards to Daniels' presence in the undertaker's experience Bone argues that :

It is an undertaker's establishment, and it symbolizes the lethal power of the anti-Negro stereotype. These stereotypes drain the black man's blood and replace it with embalming fluid. They dehumanize him; turn him into a nonexistent thing. (Bone, 1969: 29).

According to Bone, Daniel's encounter with the dead body in the undertaker's establishment plays a significant role in the plot. He remarks that, by using the embalmed dead figure, Wright symbolizes the threatening anti-Negro stereotype. Those white people are slowly taking away the blood, the life of negroes and turning them into dehumanized puppets. In other words, they empty black people of their substances. They take away all the human qualities and simply make them nonexistent. Blacks are transformed into stereotypical figures of the white world with this embalming process.

3.1.2 Fred Daniels In Contrast With The Social Reality

Daniels recognizes a tool chest inside the undertaker's establishment and thinking that he can use tools to dig caves and tunnels, he decides to take the chest back to his cave. While trying to carry the chest, he discovers a door which leads to a basement, where he finds another door. Behind this door, he hears faint sounds and voices. When he dares to open the door, he sees a furnace and stairs in the basement. After ascending those stairs, he finds himself in a movie house. In the movie house, he places himself in a box in a reserved section and observes people carefully. He sees human faces, laughing, screaming, whistling. While watching them, the same feelings of guilt and agony capture him. Accordingly:



...the impulse he had had to tell the people in the church to stop their singing seized him. These people were laughing at their lives, he thought with amazement. They were shouting and yelling at the animated shadows of themselves. His compassion fired his imagination and he stepped out of the box, walked out upon the thin air, walked on down to the audience; and, hovering in the air just above them, he stretched out his hand to touch them... His tension snapped and he found himself back in the box, looking down into the sea of faces. No; it could not be done; he could not awaken them. He sighed. Yes, these people were children, sleeping in their living, awake in their dying. (Wright, 1987: 38).

Daniels painfully wants to relate to the people in the movie. He wants to touch them. With his touch, he wants to open their eyes. Yet, he is aware of the fact that his attempts to awaken them will be futile, as he refers to those people as 'children'. They are not mature enough to understand him. They are sleeping, therefore their perception is limited. The same sudden urge of wanting to enlighten, to save these people takes hold of him. With his new form of consciousness, Daniels clearly observes their naivety as they blind themselves with the illusions the movie presents. So as to forget their victimization and suffering, these people choose to succumb to the illusionary world of movies. He desperately wants to tell them that they are laughing at their own images, however he knows that they will not understand him,

for they are only innocent children whose perception is confined within the images on the screen.

Daniels goes back in his cave and sleeps for a while. When he wakes up, he eats the sandwiches which he has found in the tool box. Then he hears a soft, continuous tapping and realizes that the tapping sound is coming from a typewriter. Excited by his new discovery, he tries to find a way to see it. When he lifts himself upward, he sees a safe and a white hand which dials the code of the safe. The safe is filled with banknotes, rows of coins, glass jars and many boxes. Daniels stays in his place so as to see the combination of the safe's code, however due to his impatience he cannot get the code. While exploring the basement, he comes across a radio shop where he steals a radio and takes it to his cave. This radio is the only thing he has, enabling his connection with the terrestrial world. He digs a hole in order to get the code of the safe, but instead of the room where the safe is placed, he finds himself in a meat shop. When the owner of the shop goes outside, he goes inside the shop and eats as much as he can. He also steals a cleaver from the shop. Looking outside from the window of the shop, he wants to be there outside. "Emotionally he hovered between the world aboveground and the world underground." (Wright, 1987: 48). Daniels is literally and figuratively in between the two worlds; the world underground and the terrestrial world. Though he wants to be in the terrestrial world, "...sober judgment urged him to remain there". (Wright, 1987: 48).

While he is on the doorway watching outside, a white couple comes to the shop and mistakes him for a shop assistant. He successfully takes the guise of a shop assistant and sells them a pound of grapes. Accordingly :

He is continually the invisible, transparent man. Eyes are so used to looking at him without seeing him that one person mistakes him for someone else..." (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 218)

The reason for his not being caught is his invisibility. He does not have any sense of individuality as they can easily mistake him for someone else. People look at him without recognizing his self. When the white couple leaves the store, hesitantly he goes to a newsstand where he sees a headline: " HUNT NEGRO FOR MURDER" (Wright, 1987: 49). On seeing the headline he feels that"... someone had slipped up

on him from behind and was stripping of his clothes" (Wright, 1987: 49). He realizes that his innocence does not count. Due to his African-American identity, he is condemned as guilty. As written in the newspaper headlines, he is now a negro murderer, since he fits the stereotype of a criminal. He rushes back to his cave and desperately thinks of his own situation. "Though innocent, he felt guilty, condemned" (Wright, 1987: 49). The awareness of his innocence is not enough to save him, since he has signed the confession. Although he is innocent, he feels himself condemned, and he cannot get rid of his feeling of guilt.

When Daniels remembers the safe, he decides to get the code of the safe against all odds. "It was not the money that was luring him, but the mere fact that he could get it with impunity" (Wright, 1987: 54). He is aware that he will not be punished or found guilty for stealing the money since he is invisible. This awareness of freedom from punishment gives him a sense of power. Finally, he obtains the code of the safe and goes inside the room where the safe is kept. He opens the safe and touches the wad of money "as though expecting it to reveal hidden qualities", however he realizes that the wad is "Just like any other paper..." (Wright, 1987: 54). The wad of money has no meaning for him, nevertheless he fills a sack with money. "There was in him no sense of possessiveness; he was intrigued with the form and color of the money, with the manifold reactions which he knew that men aboveground held toward it" (Wright, 1987: 55). For him, the money is valueless but he is interested because he knows that it is a symbol of power in the world above. Daniels rejects the value given to it. For him, this money is no different than an ordinary piece of paper. He then, finds the typewriter and decides to take it to his cave as well. Though he does not know how to use a typewriter, he diligently succeeds to write his name on it. "*freddaniels*" (Wright, 1987: 55). Writing his name on this typewriter can be seen as "...an elementary act of self-definition..." (Bone, 1969: 29). He recreates his identity by writing his name. This is the first time in his life he uses a typewriter. Daniels' keen interest in the typewriter also symbolizes his desire to be a professional businessman. He wants to be a part of the white business world. As blacks are only offered menial jobs, he does not have any chances of using a typewriter. Hence, his involvement in the typewriter can be considered to be

connoting his desire to be white. When he thinks of the things he has stolen, he feels no remorse since those things do not have any meaning for him. Accordingly :

He did not feel he was stealing, for the cleaver, the radio, the money, and the typewriter were all on the same level of value, all meant the same thing to him. They were the serious toys of the men who lived in the dead world of sunshine and rain he had left, the world that had condemned him, branded him guilty. (Wright, 1987: 55).

Daniels' reaction to the objects he has stolen is numbness. He does not acknowledge the value of the objects or the meanings that are attached to them. For him, the cleaver, the money, the radio and the typewriter are no different from each other in the sense that they are all valueless in his eyes. They do not have any validity in this underground. They are objects belonging to the aboveworld, to 'the dead world of sunshine and rain'. Therefore, in the underground they lose their meaning. On the other hand, possessing the particular objects of the serious men above makes him equal to them in a sense. He refers to the aboveground as 'the dead world of sunshine and rain', hence the terrestrial world is dead for him. However this very world is the reason for his descent. He has been condemned and found guilty by this dead world.

He wants to explore the shop further and while looking around, he discovers that he is in a jewelry shop. He runs back to the safe and finds diamonds, watches and rings. Although he is amazed by the jewelry he has seen, he nevertheless questions their value. "Were they worth anything? (Wright, 1987: 56). With this question, he negates their material worth. He is aware that those precious stones cannot restore his humanity. They are not a substitute for his lost sense of integrity. When he sees his own reflection on the wall, Daniels is frightened. He lives a momentary terror, he is afraid of this new identity as a burglar. Back in his cave, he contemplates his loot. Accordingly :

He stood in the dark, wet with sweat, brooding about the diamonds, the rings, the watches, the money; he remembered the singing in the church, the people yelling in the movie, the dead baby, the nudeman stretched upon the white table...He saw these items hovering before his eyes and felt that some dim meaning linked them together, that some magical relationship made them

kin. He stared with vacant eyes, convinced that all of these images, with their tongueless reality, were striving to tell him something...(Wright, 1987: 59).

Looking at his loot, he remembers all his underground experiences. He considers his encounters in the underground as being connected to each other. He finds new meanings under prevailing meanings. He creates his own point of view and reevaluates these instances in the light of this newly established point of view. He breaks away from the conventions, rules of the aboveground and with his new sense of consciousness, he subverts the meaning of these material things and creates new meanings.

Daniels decides to arrange his cave according to his own wish. First he finds live electric wires and illuminates his cave. "The sudden illumination blinded him..." (Wright, 1987: 60). Daniels is illuminated both figuratively and literally. Then he grounds the antenna wires and opens the radio. When he hears the music coming from the radio, he is "...deliriously happy" (Wright, 1987: 60). Then he looks at the money he has stolen. He does not even count the money, for it only stands for "-the various currents of life swirling aboveground-" (Wright, 1987: 60). This money is only an evidence of the life aboveground, nothing more. When he wants to write his name on the typewriter again, to his surprise he realizes that he cannot remember his name. Accordingly:

But what was his name? He stared, trying to remember. He stood and glared about the dirt cave, his name on the tip of his lips. But it would not come to him. Why was he here? Yes, he had been running away from the police. But why? His mind was blank. He bit his lips and sat again, feeling a vague terror. (Wright, 1987: 61).

The protagonist's loss of consciousness is significant in the sense that it indicates his lack of a sense of identity. He cannot even remember his name. His name and his identity disappear gradually in this new symbolic subterranean world. At the same time, by forgetting his name, Daniels shows further rejection of the above ground values. He cannot remember anything belonging to the aboveground including his own name, which enables him to establish his own patterns and meanings. Then, he pretends to be a businessman. "Yes, I'll have the contacts ready tomorrow." (Wright,

1987: 60). Then he gets tired of this game of imitating wealthy, white people. At that moment, he sees a can of glue and he suddenly thinks of an idea. He begins to decorate his cave with the piles of money. He papers the dirt walls of the cave with banknotes and very much pleased with his new environment, he thinks that :

He had triumphed over the world aboveground! He was free! If only people could see this! He wanted to run from his cave and yell his discovery to the world. (Wright, 1987: 62).

By defying the values of the terrestrial world above, he feels he has won a victory against it. He constructs a new world for himself. However, he disregards the fact that, he cannot totally break his ties with the above ground. He is still relying on it, as he wants to go above and share his discoveries with the people outside. Then he hangs the cleaver, watches and diamonds on the walls of the cave. "This room would be his hide-out; between him and the world that had branded him guilty would stand this mocking symbol" (Wright, 1987: 62). This room becomes the embodiment of Daniels' ultimate rejection and defiance of the above ground values. Bone's observation is appropriate when he suggests that, "Wright's hero has perceived, in short, the absurdity at the heart of white civilization." (Bone, 1969: 30). By designing his dirt cave with the invaluable objects of the upperworld, Daniels achieves to go beyond the prescribed patterns of the above ground, and he also demonstrates his criticism of the materialist society. Crucially, "By constructing this mocking symbol of the white man's most cherished values, Fred Daniels has set himself free." (Bone, 1969: 30)

It would not be wrong to assert that, he has an absolute control over his subterranean realm. By arranging all the objects according to his own will, he proves that he rules the cave. On the other hand, Daniels uses all the objects in a different context. The way he arranges and uses those objects signifies his negation of the above ground concepts and values, since he does not use all the objects in their above ground values. He subverts the values of the upperworld and creates a new kind of identity outside it. Accordingly:

Alone in his cave, Daniels tries to elaborate his universe in an ironical antithesis to what is considered the normal world. He

would simply have to take it apart and invert the relationships. But whether he takes apart or reconstructs, Daniels is nonetheless prisoner of the preexisting relationships, because reversing a signification implies accepting its priority. It is impossible to create an *ex nihilo*, to attain an independent, asocial perspective; the individual cannot elude his human and cultural heritage, since the metaphysical reality of the human condition seems to deny solitary existence. (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 213)

No matter how hard he strives to create a new kind of existence, he will fail in his endeavor since he cannot exist outside social bonds. It is impossible for him to gain a completely different perspective, as there is no way of denying his own cultural and human heritage. He cannot arrange a new world independently of the aboveworld.

Daniels invents another game to entertain himself. He imagines that "... he was a rich man and he was strolling through a park of a summer morning, smiling, nodding to his neighbours, sucking an after-breakfast cigar" (Wright, 1987: 63). Even though, he has established a new kingdom for himself, he is still longing for the aboveground values as illustrated by this game of being a rich man. While pretending to walk like a rich man, he crushes the diamonds under his feet. He feels very powerful as he could easily crush the icons of wealth of the aboveground. "He felt that he had a glorious victory locked in his heart." (Wright, 1987: 64). Yet, the consciousness of this victory does not satisfy him, he wants to relate to other people.

When thinking of his own actions, he feels himself free. Accordingly:

Maybe *anything's* right, he mumbled. Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, any act a man took to satisfy himself, murder, theft, torture. (Wright, 1987: 64).

In this way, he justifies his theft. However, if anything is right in this world, then his torture and false accusation should be right as well. He realizes that, if he is drawn to such thoughts, he will be justifying the police men's actions who have branded him guilty and have not accepted his innocence. The feeling of guilt takes hold of him. "...he was afraid of himself, afraid of doing some nameless thing". (Wright, 1987: 64) His feelings of victory are very short-lived, soon he begins to feel that something terrible is going to happen to him. He is very well aware that his feeling of freedom is meaningless, since he cannot stay there forever. His new environment does not

satisfy him. The protagonist is afraid of being seized by his own irrational impulses. He turns on the radio to fight with the impulse telling him to act. Accordingly:

He walked aimlessly about the cave, touching the walls with his fingertips. Suddenly he stood still. *What was the matter with him?* Yes, he knew...It was these walls; these crazy walls were filling him with a wild urge to climb out into the dark sunshine aboveground. Quickly, he doused the light to banish the shouting walls, then sat again upon the tool chest. Yes, he was trapped. His muscles were flexed taut and sweat ran down his face. He knew now that he could not stay here and he could no go out. (Wright, 1987: 65-66).

Daniels cannot belong to the subterranean world, yet he cannot go back to the aboveworld. He is torn between two utterly distinct worlds. He realizes that he will eventually go back to the aboveground, inspite of the fact that he will face death there. "He shuddered, feeling that, inspite of his fear, sooner or later he would go up into that dead world of sunshine and somehow say something to somebody about all this." (Wright, 1987: 66) His indescribable urge to go up into the aboveworld stems from his desire to communicate people. No matter what the consequences may be, he wants to tell people about his experiences and discoveries in the underground and to share his new consciousness and vision. Even though, everything above is dead for him, he still wants to go there and make a statement. He seeks human solidarity and communication.

After dousing the light and turning off the radio, he sleeps. Some faint sounds coming from the church awaken Daniels. He watches a black woman singing a hymn. The singing of the church congregation makes Daniels uneasy. Accordingly:

They're wrong, he whispered in the lyric darkness. He felt that their search for a happiness they could never find made them feel that they had committed some dreadful offense which they could not remember or understand. He was now in possession of the feeling that had gripped him when he had first come into the underground. It came to him in a series of questions : Why was this sense of guilt so seemingly innate, so easy to come by, to think, to feel, so verily physical? It seemed that when one felt this guilt one was retracing in one's feelings a faint pattern designed long before; it seemed that one was always trying to remember a gigantic shock that had left a haunting impression upon one's body which one could not forget or shake off, but which had been forgotten by the

conscious mind, creating in one's life a state of eternal anxiety. (Wright, 1987: 68).

Daniels does not approve of their singing. For him, turning to religion as a means for compensation is unacceptable. So as to forget their inferior status, those people dedicate themselves to the premises of religion. In fact, they are striving for the unattainable. They can never reach happiness, since they are presumed to be guilty. Yet, they can neither understand nor remember the source of their guilt. Their guilt is inherent. This constant feeling of guilt is imposed on those people at the moment they are born. The patterns of lives of those people are predestined since their guilt is a 'physical' guilt. Their blackness is considered to be an inescapable guilt. This sense of guilt never ceases to haunt them. Hence, they continue their lives in a state of everlasting fear and anxiety. Daniels rejects their fear in stating that 'They're wrong'.

As Bone emphasizes, their fear is "a fear of nothingness", which he sees as "key to Negro personality" (Bone, 1969: 27). He goes on to assert that, "At the bottom of the Negro's metaphysical dread is his fear of rejection." (Bone, 1969: 27). Hence, the fear of the church congregation is in fact the projection of their inherent fear of rejection. "Anxiety, self-hatred, and a sense of nothingness are the daily psychological realities of Negro life." (Bone, 1969: 41). Therefore, the Negro church congregation are in the church, singing hymns so as to attain a temporary relief from their eternal anxiety and fear. They seek to get rid of their daily fears by fulfilling their church services. However, they are only relieved for a short period of time, their suffering remains in their souls.

In the basement of the radio store, Daniels hears loud voices and discovers that a boy is beaten for stealing the radio. First he thinks of bringing the radio back, but then he decides not to do that. "Perhaps it was a good thing that they were beating the poor boy; perhaps the beating would bring to the boy's attention, for the first time in his life, the secret of his existence, the guilt that he could never get rid of" (Wright, 1987: 69). He thinks that the boy will awaken to the realities of life after the beating. He will soon understand that, they do not really care about his innocence. What they care about is the continuation of their oppressive practices. Daniels realizes that all men are guilty, since this feeling of guilt is intrinsic and the

shop boy is no exception to it. Hence, he is also guilty. Then, Daniels discovers that the night watchman, Thompson is blamed for his burglary. To his surprise, the interrogators of the watchman are the same policemen who have tortured him into signing the confession. The same policemen are now torturing and beating Thompson. When Thompson passes out from the beating he is given, the policemen take a break outside. At that moment, Thompson stands up, opens a drawer, takes out a gun and shoots himself. The policemen find the dead body and convince themselves that Thompson has committed suicide because he is guilty and close the case. By taking his destiny in his own hands, the night watchman makes a stand against them. He acts and chooses to die instead of surrendering.

Daniels returns to his cave and contemplates his days in the underground. The urge to go outside again captures him. "He had to act, yet he was afraid" (Wright, 1987: 72). Like Thompson, he decides to make a choice, he decides to act, no matter what the consequence is. Once the protagonist decides to act, his movements are more precise and resolute. At the same time, he is compelled by an inner fear. Accordingly :

He did not know how much fear he felt, for fear claimed him completely; yet it was not a fear of the police or of people, but a cold dread at the thought of the actions he knew he would perform if he went out into that cruel sunshine. His mind said no; his body said yes; and his mind could not understand his feelings. A low whine broke from him and he was in the act of uncoiling. He climbed upward and heard the faint honking of auto horns. Like a frantic cat clutching a rag, he clung to the steel prongs and heaved his shoulder against the cover and pushed it off halfway. For a split second his eyes were drowned in the terror of yellow light and he was in a deeper darkness than he had ever known in the underground. (Wright, 1987: 73).

After witnessing the suicide of Thompson, Daniels eventually leaves his realm in the underground and goes outside to the upperworld. He is now in the dead world of sunshine. The above ground seems much darker than his own world in the underground. He is even more desperate than the times he lived in the underground, as he is aware of the possible outcomes of his ascend. His decision to return aboveground demonstrates his need to relate to other human beings. On that account,

Bone argues that "He wants to share his vision with the whites, disclose his underground reality, make his darkness visible" (Bone, 1969: 30).

3.1.3 Fred Daniels' Final Encounter With the Above Ground

"He pushed the cover aside, stood, swaying in a world so fragile that he expected it to collapse and drop him into some deep void" (Wright, 1987: 74). His first observation regarding the above ground is striking, in the sense that Daniels refers to this world as something that is about to collapse. It is an implication of the collapsing values of the above ground. He is also afraid that this material world will throw him into some deep void. The protagonist is very nervous and on alert every second, as his mind is occupied with the obsessive thought that he will get caught instantly. However, the very minute he steps out of the manhole cover, he is mistaken for a sewer workman. He wanders aimlessly in the streets for a while. "Yet, sleeping within him, was the drive to go somewhere and say something to somebody" (Wright, 1987: 75). While strolling, he hears "the sound of spirited singing" (Wright, 1987: 75) and discovers that the singing is coming from the same church that he has peered. Eagerly, he goes inside, thinking that he will be able to share his experiences. He desperately wants to tell the churchgoers about his discoveries, however he is expelled from the church. Even his own black community rejects to listen to him. They are unable to recognize the meaning of his underground experiences. He desperately clings on to the idea that his story will make sense to the others. However, the more he tries to communicate, the more he fails to express himself. He is deluded in thinking that they would listen to him. In frenzy, he thinks of going to the police and telling them everything. Accordingly:

He would go there and clear up everything, make a statement. What statement? He did not know. He was the statement, and since it was so all clear to him, surely he would be able to make it clear to others (Wright, 1987: 76-77).

He wants to make the whole world know about his new discoveries and his newly established point of view. He is very certain that he will be able to relate to the

others. However, the police men do not listen to him either. They first think that he is a lunatic and ignore him. When, Daniels mentions the murdered woman for whom he was found guilty, they take him inside the police station. He tries to tell about his underground experiences, yet he cannot succeed in relating to them. "Something told him, as he stood there looking into their faces, that he would never be able to tell them, that they would never believe him even if he told them" (Wright, 1987: 80). He painfully comes to realize that there is no way of making his discoveries known. He accepts that he will not be able to tell them. Even if he succeeded in telling, they would never understand him. Then Daniels is taken to the room, where the police men who have tortured and beaten him worked. He remembers how they had beaten him to death and made him sign that confession. Yet, the urge in him to communicate is so vast that, he decides to tell them about his cave. He dares to face his cruel accusers for the sake of conveying his messages. One of the officers remembers him and starts to make fun of him. Accordingly:

...they were indifferent to what he would say! They were waiting for him to speak and they would laugh at him. He had to rescue himself from this bog; he had to force the reality of himself upon them. (Wright, 1987: 81,82)

He becomes an object of mockery in the police station. They burn the confession paper he has signed saying that they have found the murderer. However, Daniels is restless and hopelessly tries to tell his story. In order to get rid of their humiliation and mockery, he feels the necessity to make his story known. However his attempts to tell his story is futile since he is not taken seriously. "They did not believe him, but he *had* to make them believe him!" (Wright, 1987: 83). He finds an impressive idea to make the police men believe him. He remembers that he is the only one who has witnessed Thompson's suicide. When he mentions his name, the stolen jewelry and the suicide, he succeeds to strike their attention. The case of Thompson is not published in the newspapers yet, therefore he could not have read it in the newspapers. The police men decide to take him out of the station, since they find him threatening. They are afraid that he will betray them. The police men take him to a house, where they get drunk. In the house, Daniels contemplates :

He felt that he could not explain himself to them. He tried to muster all the sprawling images that floated in him; the images stood out sharply in his mind, but he could not make them have the meaning for others that they had for him. He felt so helpless that he began to cry. (Wright, 1987: 87)

He recollects all the images that he has encountered in the underground, and in grief he realizes that they will not have the same meaning for others. At that moment, he understands that he will never succeed in conveying his vision, that he will never be able to fully relate to anyone. Out of grief and helplessness he starts to cry. One of the police men beats him and when he opens his eyes, they want him to take them to the underground. Accordingly:

He had triumphed at last! He would now do what he had felt was compelling him all along. At last he would be free of his burden. (Wright, 1987: 87)

He is very innocent in thinking that at last they have believed him. Feelings of victory seize him. With joy, he thinks that finally he will be free of the burden which has been disturbing him for so long. Eventually, he would get rid of the burden of keeping a secret to himself. He would be able to make his discoveries known. With these illusions on his mind, Daniels feels so glad that :

He could barely contain his rising spirits. They would see what he had seen; they would feel what he had felt. He would lead them through all the holes he had dug and... He wanted to make a hymn, prance about in physical ecstasy, throw his arm about the policemen in fellowship. (Wright, 1987: 88)

He is so happy that he even wants to embrace the policemen who have tortured him. He is willing to show them every single discovery he has made. He wants to share everything with these cruel policemen. He is so blinded by his obsession to relate to people that he cannot fully evaluate the motives behind the policemen's seemingly friendly behavior. While he is trying to tell them his story, one of the policemen concludes that he is suffering from "delusions of grandeur", since "he lives in a white man's world" (Wright, 1987: 89). Since he is a black man existing in a world which is governed by whites, his lunacy can be justified according to the policeman. They

conclude that, he has lost his mental balance due to his subjugated position as a black in a white world. Then, Daniels shows them the manhole cover, where he has gone down. Accordingly :

He was eager to show them the cave now. If he could show them what he had seen, then they would feel what he had felt and they in turn would show it to others and those others would feel as they had felt, and soon everybody would be governed by the same impulse of pity. (Wright, 1987: 89)

This quotation illustrates Daniels' mission precisely. His mission is to reach people and to show them the emptiness of the values they believed in. He further wants to demonstrate the existence of human bonds. He wants everyone to be governed by the same sympathetic feelings toward each other. By demonstrating his symbolic cave, he aims to evoke feelings of human brotherhood. However, the human brotherhood he is seeking for can neither be found in religion nor in his social bonds.

While he is trying to share his enthusiasm with the policemen. One of the officers raises his gun and shoots him. He is simply shot upon the sewer and left to float away. Accordingly:

... there was a thunderous report and a streak of fire ripped through his chest. He was hurled into the water, flat on his back. He looked in amazement at the blurred white faces looming above him. They shot me, he said to himself. The water flow past him, blossoming in foam about his arms, his legs, and his head. His jaw sagged and his mouth gaped soundless. (Wright, 1987: 91)

The last things Daniels sees are, the white faces looming above him. In all his life, he cannot get rid of those white faces tormenting him. His journey in the sewers ends with this scene of white faces looming above him like white mountains of hate. His end is no different than the baby who is thrown in inside the sewers, in the sense that both their mouths gaped soundless. Like the dead baby, he is also expelled from this world. He becomes the unwanted baby of this society, therefore he is excluded from it. On his death, McCarthy comments that "... the sewer-dweller is murdered while trying to communicate his gospel of joy and love to the white police" (qtd. in. Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 76).

The reason for his murder is explained by the policeman as follows :

You've got to shoot his kind. They'd wreck things. (Wright, 1987: 92)

The policeman refers to Daniels as a 'kind', as if he is a different kind of species, which further emphasizes his otherness in the eyes of the white world. Since he is merely a troublemaker nigger, he has to be shot. Bone claims that :

This ritual murder is an emblem of American racism. Its object is the obliteration of the Negro's existential reality. For the black man is a scape goat, and as such, an actor in someone else's drama. To prepare him for the role, his claim to an autonomous existence is ruthlessly denied. (Bone, 1969: 30).

Thus the black hero's existence is annihilated. His independence and his newly established identity are denied by the whites and symbolically he is murdered in cold blood. Daniels could only find a shelter in the underground, but it has proven to be futile since he has chosen to leave the safety of the underground for the sake of sharing his newly gained vision with humanity. He wanted to show people what he has learned from his underground experiences, thus giving his message that rejects materialism and the symbols of power. He chooses to act, rather than to live passively in the underground. However, he cannot escape his blackness, which is the source of his feeling of guilt. In fact, he comes to the realization that his physical black appearance is the source of his original crime, which has created in him a sense of guilt. The fact that he is black makes him guilty for living. As Fabre puts forward, Daniels is "... followed and chased in a dark world (a dirty, evil-smelling character such as the white man imagines the Negro) and is finally eliminated by the oppressive system, which is a parable of black life in America." (qtd. in Macksey & Moorer, 1984: 215) .

Conclusion

Wright illuminates in his works that his racial identity is a barrier to attaining a self-identity. In all his books, he deals with the complex problem of identity and the misrepresentations of African-Americans. The problem of identity of African-Americans is closely related to how they see themselves and how the others evaluate them. Both races have their own stereotypes of the other race. Wright attempts to break this vicious cycle of stereotypes through his fiction, for he believes that these racial myths impose a burden on the consciousness of African-Americans.

In his autobiography he seems to suggest ways in which African-Americans might release themselves from the racial oppression. Therefore, he chooses to employ the motif of 'flight' in his works. He seeks for a place where he will be free of all racial barriers however futile this flight might be. Wright's own life is full of such flights as exemplified in his autobiographical novel *Black Boy*. In his struggle to attain an identity and freedom, the unfictional protagonist of *Black Boy* flees to the North. However, he is more and more disillusioned with the racial order in the North for he sees little difference in racial equality there. Unable to cope with the restrictions imposed on him due to the color of his skin, he expresses his rage through writing. While the protagonist of *Native Son*, Bigger expresses his rage against this oppressive system in murder, Wright expresses the same emotion by creating a violent protagonist like Bigger. By creating a revengeful black self, Wright also shows his opposition to the prevailing black stereotype of the humble servant. However, by attempting to break this cycle of Uncle Tom stereotype, he employs an opposite stereotype of the black, which is the negative stereotype of the black as a violent rebel. Hence, his protagonist is trapped in another negative picture of the black race. Wright turns to violence as a way of countering oppression, but his protagonist is defeated in his struggle with the white dominant culture.

Attempting to survive in such a racial environment, both Wright and Bigger Thomas put on a mask of subordination and only in this way they can avoid

trouble from the whites. While Wright and Bigger take on the guise of an ignorant black boy as a way of survival, Fred Daniels chooses to descend underground. Both Bigger and Wright aim to stab the whites on the back while pretending to be a meek Uncle Tom. On the other hand, by choosing to lead a literally and metaphorically invisible existence, Daniels demonstrates that wearing this mask is futile and the only alternative is to recoil into your own shell. Bigger, Wright and Daniels are forced into fleeing so as to save their lives. Either you will wear a mask and hide your true identity or you will respond to violence and oppression with violence. Bigger chooses the second alternative. However, his desperate attempts to attain freedom and self-identity end in entrapment. Likewise, Daniels is entrapped in the sewers.

Since Wright spent his childhood with strictly religious relatives, he is traumatized by their extremely restrictive attitudes. He never conforms to the religious, docile boy figure that his family and community demand, hence he does not experience social acceptance neither from the black nor from the white. Likewise Bigger has a devoutly religious family. However, neither Bigger nor Daniels nor Wright himself can find any solace in religion. Bigger hates his mother's clinging to religion as a means to forget her suffering. Daniels finds his community's religious practices ridiculous. He cannot find any sense in religion like Wright and Bigger and finally he is expelled from the church. Churches also anger and irritate Wright. Like his protagonists, Wright also fails to place his faith in religion as exemplified by his aversion to religion in *Black Boy*.

Wright stands against those who force him to submit to oppression and tries to maintain his individuality. He does not have a solid place in his community, just like his protagonists. In the case of Bigger, he is always at odds with the ones around him, therefore he is a constant outcast. Daniels is another solitary hero. He is alone from the beginning of the novella till the end, and finally he dies alone. Bigger also dies alone in an electric chair.

Bigger decides to choose a violent strategy, which also ends in failure. Wright's early background is very similar to that of Bigger's. Like Bigger, Wright is also brought up without a father. Like Bigger's family, Wright's own family left the racial South for the North. Wright also lives in a little kitchenette with his family.

assertive, Such lessons do not, however, destroy the need for aggression and self-assertion (Atkinson and Poussaint, 1970: 117)

On the contrary, these disavowals sometimes result in fatal consequences as illustrated in Bigger's case. Unable to cope with the racial oppression he is subjected to, Bigger explodes in murder. Instead of choosing subordination to whites, he chooses to assert himself. Daniels' way of asserting himself is quite different from that of Bigger's in the sense that by creating a new life for himself in the underground he defies all the values of the aboveground which has condemned him throughout his life.

As a consequence, as illustrated in *The Man Who Lived Underground* Wright turns his back to aggression for he sees no hope in violence for the struggle of African-Americans. In his novella, Wright switches from violent resistance and suggests passive resistance to his black community. He finally admits defeat by creating a hero who is buried in the underground. His last hero refuses to emerge as a black man unlike Bigger and Wright himself. Instead Daniels is the epitome of disintegration of the black self. He is portrayed as a figure of isolation and impotence. Hence, it would not be wrong to assert that, since Wright's role as an African-American author is to show possible ways to fight racism, he offers passive resistance instead of violent encounters, as he himself has witnessed that violence is not a solution to racial problems in the United States. He also decides to recoil into passivity and leaves his country in agony as he cannot bear the harshness of the white America.

Bibliography

Abcaim, Richard ed.: **Richard Wright's Native Son : A Critical Handbook**, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1970.

Adams, Michael Vannoy Adams : **The Multicultural Imagination : "Race", Color, and the Unconscious**, London, Routledge, 1996.

Atkinson, Carolyn and Poussaint, Alvin F. : "Black Youth and Motivation", **The Black Scholar** - 9, 1970, 43-51.

Baldwin, James: **Notes of A Native Son**, New York, The Dial Press, 1963.

----- : **Nobody Knows My Name : More Notes of A Native Son**, New York, The Dial Press, 1961.

Baraka, Amiri : "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature'", **Home: Social Essays**, New York, 1962. 105-115.

Bell, Derrick : **Faces at the Bottom of the Well : The Permanence of Racism**, Basic Books, New York, 1992.

Bjornson, Richard: **The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction**, Madison Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.

Blackburn, Alexander: **The Myth of the Picaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954** , Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Bloom, Harold ed. : **Bigger Thomas**, New York, Chelsea House, 1990.

----- : **Richard Wright's Native Son**, New York, Chelsea House, 1988.

Bone, Robert: **The Negro Novel In America**, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966.

-----: **Richard Wright**, Minneapolis, Jones Press, 1969.

Bruce, Dickinson: "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness".
American Literature -Vol 64.2 -, 1992. 299-309.

Butler, Robert J. ed. : **The Critical Response to Richard Wright**, Westport, CT.,
Greenwood Press, 1995.

Butterfield, Stephen: **Black Autobiography in America**, Amherst, University of
Massachusetts Press, 1974.

Çevik, Yıldırım: "What is the Picaresque?", **Kara Harp Okulu Bilim Dergisi**, 2002,
92 - 102.

Davis, Ronald L. F: "Creating Jim Crow",
(Çevrimiçi) <http://jimcrowhistory.org/history/creating.htm>, 02 Kasım 2003 .

Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt : **The Souls of Black Folk**, Chicago, A.C.
McClurg and Co., 1903, Reprinted in New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.

-----: **Dusk of Dawn**, New York, Hartcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1940.

Elkins, Stanley M. : **Slavery : A Problem in American Institutional and
Intellectual Life**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959.

Ellison, Ralph : **Invisible Man**, New York, Vintage Books, 1980.

Elmer, Jonathan : "Spectacle and Event in Native Son", **American Literature** -70, 1998. 767-798.

Fabre, Michel : **The Unfinished Quest Of Richard Wright**, trans. by. Isabel Barzun, New York, Morrow, 1973.

----- : **The World of Richard Wright**, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1985.

Fanon, Frantz : **Black Skin, White Masks**, trans. by. Charles L. Markmann, New York, Grove Press, 1967.

----- : **The Wretched of The Earth**, trans. by. Constance Farrington, New York, Grove Press, 1968.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. : **The Signifying Monkey : A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. and Appiah, Kwame Anthony, eds. : **Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present**, New York, Amistad, 1993.

Glicksberg, Charles I. : "Negro Fiction in America", **The South Atlantic Quarterly**, XLV, 1946. 481-492.

Gounardoo, Jean-François : **The Racial Problem in the Works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin**, trans. by. Joseph J. Rodgers Jr., Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1992.

Grier, William and Cobbs, Price : **Black Rage**, New York, 1968.

Griffin, Farah Jasmine: **Who's Set You Flowin'?: The African-American Migration Narrative**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd : **Revolt Against Chivalry : Jessie Daniel Ames and The Women's Campaign Against Lynching**, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich: **Phenomenology of Spirit**, Trans. by A. V. Miller, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977.

Hughes, Langston : **Selected Poems of Langston Hughes**, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1959.

Johnson, James Weldon: **The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man**, New York, Penguin Books, 1990.

Joyce, Ann : **Richard Wright's Art of Tragedy**, Iowa, IP, 1986.

Jung, Carl Gustav and Kerenyi, Carl: **Essays on a Science of Mythology : The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis**, New York, Pantheon Books, 1949.

Leavelle, Charles: "Brick Slayer Is Likened to Jungle Beast", **Chicago Sunday Tribune**, June 5, 1938, Sec. 1, p.6.

Lott, Eric : **Love and Theft : Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1984.

Macksey, Richard and Moorer, Frank E. eds. : **Richard Wright : A Collection of Critical Essays**, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1984.

Magill, Frank N. ed. : **Masterpieces of African-American Literature**, New York, Harper Collins, 1992.

Margolies, Edward : **The Art of Richard Wright**, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969.

Poussaint, Alvin : **Why Blacks Kill Blacks**, Emerson Hall Publishers, New York, 1972.

Santis, Christopher C. De, Ed. by: **Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender : Essays on Race, Politics and Culture**, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Sartre, Jean-Paul : "Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth*," **The Wretched of the Earth**, Trans. by. Constance Farrington, New York, Grove Press, 1968. 7-31.

Spear, Allan H. : **Black Chicago : The Making of A Negro Ghetto 1890-1920**, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher : **Uncle Tom's Cabin or Negro Life in the Slave States of America**, Wordsworth, 1995.

Webb, Constance : **Richard Wright: A Biography**, New York, Putnam, 1968.

Wiegman, Robyn : **American Anatomies : Theorizing Race and Gender**, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995.

Williamson, Joel : **The Crucible of Race : Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1984.

Wright, Richard : **White Men, Listen!**, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1957.

----- : **Black Boy : A Record of Childhood and Youth**, New York, Vintage Books, 2000.

----- : **Native Son**, New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1940.

----- : **Eight Men**, New York, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1987.

-----: **Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States**, New York, The Viking Press, 1941.

----- : "I Bite The Hand That Feeds Me", **Atlantic Monthly**, CLXV, 1940. 822-831.

----- : **Uncle Tom's Children**, New York, Harper and Row, 1940.

----- : **American Hunger**, New York, Harper and Row, 1979.