

Enslavement of Blacks in Richard Wright's Black Boy

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Racial Oppression and its indelible consequence on the lives of blacks is one of the predominant themes in Richard Wright's novels. Through his novels he highlights the evil effects of the whites' looking down upon the blacks and relegating them to a secondary position in the society. In his novel *Black Boy*, he reveals to us how racism has affected black people and has disrupted their aspirations and way of life in the US.

1. Introduction

Racist institutions and regimes that engaged in oppression, violence, and other harmful behaviours were the cause of racial divide. Whites created legislation that curtailed blacks' ability to vote, enforced segregation, and diminished the importance of black society in the South. Undoubtedly, constitutional amendments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries gave them equal rights as citizens, but whites also created unjust laws. Wright's *Black Boy* highlights how uncommon it is to discover a black novelist writing about subjects other than racial oppression, alienation, and war.

The racism in *Black Boy* is extremely obvious. The fundamental issue in the South was that Black youngsters were raised in a segregated region where Whites imposed laws requiring Blacks to conform to their design system. The bigotry was evident even in the amenities offered to black people, such as schools and other leisure and transportation options.

Racism is a theme of the novel that is brought up multiple times in the text by the term *Black Boy*. This also explains why racism has a psychological impact on the author, who appears to be choked with tears as he attempts to articulate himself. Richard describes racism as a contemporary creation as well as an anthropological or psychological phenomenon. In Wright's novels, the emergence and demise of overtly racist regimes from the twentieth century, like the Jim Crow South, Nazi Germany, and South African Apartheid, make the connection between modernity, reason, and racism very evident.

In *Black Boy*, racism is one of the major issues that has affected black people and has disrupted their aspirations and way of life. Richard became weak and scared because of his childhood

malnutrition and persistent fear of asserting his rights. To lynching and racial division against African Americans, racist practises created organisations. The Ku Klux Klan was one of the right-wing groups in America that restricted black people's rights. Its members instilled fear in African Americans, even for the whites who would openly assist them, using masks, the darkness, and the loop.

The white authority structure practised racial segregation in all facets of society, as illustrated in Wright's works, such as transportation and education. When Richard was at the station with his mother, it was obvious that there were two lines: one for whites and one for blacks. Additionally, the separation of elementary schools has an impact on how mentally healthy schoolchildren are. The white's policy of racial segregation was a testament to one of the religious racist attitudes. Wright's tirade against racism, *Black Boy*, focuses on the ineffectiveness of religion in transforming Africans' lives.

It tells the story of Richard's upbringing and adolescence, when he first learned about his grandmother's religion and started to realise how pervasive prejudice was. Because Richard strives and resists bigotry, injustice, and racial divide even within his family, the relatives of Richard and his Granny were generally chilly.

Wright describes how his desire as a black writer to inform his people about this threat helps increase consciousness and understanding of religious experience. This exposure to racism in America and the experiences it produces inevitably cause people to reconsider their religious beliefs. Thus, the Church oppressed Richard through the actions of his grandmother and mother, as Wright comments in his use of hypotactic sentences to illustrate the connection between racism and religion and how it affects people's lives both specifically and broadly.

Wright's personal history of race and universal experiences are combined in *Black Boy*. The culmination of white aggression towards blacks is depicted in this novel. It demonstrates how racism dominated blacks' life, resulting in an atmosphere of terror, fear, starvation, hatred, and violence that makes Wright's life a nightmare.

Wright experiences pain, frustration, and dread because of his actions in resisting and challenging the dominance and superiority of white people, which led him to rebel against societal norms and become one of the rebel leaders in his community. These issues are trenchantly expressed by *Black Boy*, who at first wanted to voice his sentiments but was unable to do so due to his mind's conditioning to remain silent and to endure the torture without a word or a protesting gesture. However, his exposure to communist principles offered him a chance and inspired him to speak openly. To free his suppressed feelings, he began writing novels that conveyed both his humanity and the aspirations of the twelve million blacks for freedom, equality, and social, economic, and political advancement.

Overt racism, which is the most pervasive in American society, is exposed in Wright's novels. Whites have developed stereotypical ideas about blacks because they personally despise them. Because members of the prejudiced groups insist that the stereotypes are accurate, they start to take on a sort of real status. Blacks were viewed with contempt by white people who considered them inferior. Richard accuses the blacks of this acceptance of this position while at the same time blaming them. This type of overt racism was obvious in the acts, feelings, excuses, and support in the beliefs.

The white enslavement of blacks, one of the most blatant instances of overt racism using blacks for the benefit of whites, is also clearly depicted in *Black Boy*. In the novel, overt racism is depicted as an inherent and legalised kind of slavery. But also, when, after the Civil War, this type of racism evolves into institutional forms of racism. The novel examines the overt racism that has imprisoned Jim merely because he is black as a phenomena that exists everywhere, as Wright put it. Ana Fraile, in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, avers: "Wright condemnation of racism in the United States is his global repudiation of oppression in Africa and the rest of the Third World" (523).

The whites exercised their savagery and denied the blacks any ability to participate in communal rituals. Blacks were unable to exhibit their humanity, and as a result, whites subjugated them in all facets of life. The cultural emptiness of black existence is another manifestation of racism in *Black Boy*; when Hoskins was slain, there was no burial and no regard for even death. Wright claims: "There was no funeral, there was no music. There was no period of mourning. There were no flowers" (228). When Richard tries to comprehend why the black community has not retaliated, the oppression connotations, which represent the practises among blacks to avoid the consequences of their race, become apparent. He kept researching his mother's and Aunt Maggie's psychological conditions because of white people's bigotry. He demonstrates the passive aggression that prevents black people from even trying to fit in with their environment.

Wright has consistently believed that black existence was severely harmed by racism and class oppression. He expressed his view of the black race as a critic and seer in *Black Boy*. It describes the negative consequences of racism on a black child and the challenges Richard faces as he interacts with white society. Wright's ability to survive required him to leave the South. Additionally, the novel analyses Richard's conflicts that put him in danger as well as his deviations from what society would have expected of him.

White tyranny for many years caused blacks to lack human traits. And the effects of this discrimination against them were apparent in the black communities of Mississippi. When segregated living began to grow, Richard, an illiterate black insurance salesman, was horrified and alarmed. When he was accused of addressing a white employee at an optical shop, he described white supremacists as representing the hatred in people's brains. He did not address anyone as "Mr." Thus, a white employee said:

Didn't you call him Pease? If you say didn't, I'll rip your gut string loose with F-K-g bar, you black granny dodger! You can't call a white man a liar and get away with it! (86)

This scenario represents how racism was practised across everything that forced him to resign his job. It also shows how black inferiority came about as a natural consequence of white supremacy practises because these practises predominated in the postcolonial era.

The social document *Black Boy* investigates the level of racism and inequality in American culture. Through Wright's narration and actions, the story illustrates the numerous facets of racism in the South. According to Wright, racism is a barrier that prevents blacks from becoming a majority. The employment and firing of employees as a practical conduct of the system itself to justify the fact that black people are not yet qualified to advance is another example. The minority employee has seen non-minority coworkers with equivalent or lower

qualifications climb the corporate ladder without any trouble. Whites employed this tactic against blacks to have them fired from their jobs by engaging in similar actions and behaviour. Racist factors have a negative impact on black lives.

Wright's *Black Boy* has drawn criticism from both black and white critics who claim that it lacks racial pride. Though he does criticise the black community in the South, blaming the black community is not accurate. His goal is to demonstrate that the forced manner of life experienced by black people was the result of a racist system. The novel offers a literary experiment to show how black behaviour is consistent when influenced by societal forces in terms of social determinism.

Forces of segregation had a significant negative impact on black's access to school and employment, which led to an increase in hunger in the black community. In *Black Boy*, Wright demonstrates how hunger and poverty exacerbated problems for black families. He nevertheless tried to conceal his hunger, but a white boy was able to do so. Therefore, it is unfortunate for Wright: "Tell me boy ... I concealed from all whites what I felt" (231). Richard consequently relocated there to live with his uncle. Growing up with his father absent and his mother bedridden, as well as unfriendly family members, made for an extremely difficult upbringing. He was reprimanded by his uncles, and he describes how they treated him: "The backward black boys act on the plantations; he was ordered to grin hang my head, and mumble apologetically when I was spoken to" (138). Additionally, he was taught this at home by his Seventh-Day Adventist grandmother. She was still in control of the household.

Wright describes his discontent with a culture where mistakes are not tolerated. He went through such trying times that it was clear that whites dominated all facets of existence. That illustrates how self-creation can be hindered and mangled. He was a degraded, giggling, and continually frustrated black. He was additionally separated from the white race due to the tint of his skin. He complains and counters that his own suffering and animosity are merely measured by the suffering of others. Black's voicelessness and inferiority were represented by this assessment, which also showed their capacity for self-creation as a goal. Wright came to see and accept the fact that racial hatred had its roots in a system rather than in any one person. *Black Boy* depicts various facets of racial injustice, brutality, and segregation, the protagonist's ability to overcome such oppression is where the focus of attention should be. In addition to the external forces of society, internal issues among the downtrodden also contribute to racial dissonance.

Wright's sincere effort to challenge a naturalistic view of reality is *Black Boy*. He provides a lovely description of the racism that permeated both black and white societies' daily lives. The novel provides examples of how various minority have been impacted by the society. Because they are not white, the minority characters face challenges surviving and thriving in 1930s–1940s society. Wright faces poverty and emotional abuse.

Wright illustrates how the oppressed rebel against the oppressor in *Black Boy*. The suffering and torment endured by blacks shaped their difficulties. He illustrates how, despite whites' socioeconomic advantages over blacks, they were conscious of their own ingrained racism. Furthermore, whites oppress and discriminate against blacks because they have economic dominance and use physical force to avoid confrontation and violent retaliation. The white journalist's perspective on blacks is quite harsh; they are portrayed as vicious, animalistic

brutes.

Black Boy examines how racism is more destructive and poisonous to him intellectually than it is physically. Additionally, racism paralyses, stunts, restrains, and inhibits human traits that must be cultivated. One Christmas, Richard only has one orange to enjoy: "I nursed my orange going to bed. I consumed it" (67). When his peers would inquire, he would observe them purchasing sandwiches. "I asked, 'Why don't you eat lunch?' He would respond, 'I'm not hungry at noon, ever,'" (111) with a shrug of the shoulders. When one of his students notices that he is hungry, he proposes to him that he sell newspapers as a method to make some extra money. He learns about journalism through this company, which gives him the opportunity to work as a reporter and reviewer. If you want to remain healthy, "keep your eyes where they belong" (177).

The main theme in Richard's development is alienation and the painful coming of age, together with his perception of the disease and horror of the white world. He paints a clear and thorough picture of his history of alienation, including the progressive separation from his family. He also traces the spread of that emotion to the white world, extrapolates from his personal observations to explain how they contributed to the development of his unique and native ideas, and identifies their antecedents in the racial structure of American society. He starved himself on purpose to better understand his surroundings. He immediately expands the definition of "hunger" to encompass his experience of being cut off from the other members of his group.

Wright criticises blacks for their subservient response to racial servitude and criticises the predatory nature of rigid religious training. Both whites and blacks perpetrated racism against Richard by blaming and punishing him. The fight between two white employees and two black employees at the optical company in the *Ethics of Living Jim Crow* exhibits panic and a racist mentality through verbal abuse directed at Richard who was anticipating a very negative outcome.

The idea of "imagining" the black body, proposed by Carol E. Henderson, emphasises the linkages between the body as an image, a physical appearance, and the ideological representation that builds it as a mere picture with no further meaning. In his investigation of this visual stereotype of the body as image, Henderson claims that "superficial and metaphoric differences" between various groups of people in America "adversely affect" (*Scarring the Black Body*, 19) racial ideology. The development of America's legal and political systems, which were based on the imaginative tropes of racial difference, particularly for people of African descent, was driven by the need to invent, propagate, and legitimise racial difference, as shown by the history of race theory.

Though Wright has written on the racial issues facing black people, Wright is basically a humanist who is deeply concerned with the issues facing all oppressed groups, whether they are black or white. In addition to expressing Black nationalism, *Black Boy* also has elements of Marxism and promotes the idea that the oppressed should band together to fight their oppressors.

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