

**The PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**  
**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CCONSTANTINE 1**  
**FACULTY OF LETTERS ANDFOREIGN LANGUAGES**  
**DEPARTEMENT OF LETTERS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES**

**ISSUES OF ASSIMILATION IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARURE IN  
SELECTED WORKS BY RICHARD WRIGHT AND AMIRI BARAKA**

**Thesis Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Candidacy for the  
Degree of Doctoral LMD in British and American Studies**

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**2021**

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Struggle has been part of my eight doctoral years; I wished to produce a good work on African American research. Multiple obstacles appeared with time; resources, family, work, and distance. But with the support of my teachers and family I was able to complete this work. The supports of my supervisor and priceless remarks have been ringing bells during all these eight years of my research.

## DEDICATION

To the memory of my grandmothers

To my parents

To my husband

## Abstract

The present work '*Issues of Assimilation of African American Literature in Selected Works by Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka*' examines three major points; the obstacles that African American writers face in their attempt to assimilate into the white mainstream. It also investigates whether attempts of assimilation are worth making compromises from the African American side with particular inclination to Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka as proletarian writers. Besides the multiples challenges that face African Americans in their attempt to reach assimilation.

A lot of attention was given to study Wright and Baraka works through connecting them with race issues. The present work concentrates on examining African American dealing with the idea of assimilation in two different periods, 1930s and 1940s. African Americans of the 1930s were known of having no self-esteem that can help them look for more than what Booker T. Washington or Marcus Garvey called for, but African Americans of the 1960s accepted their difference from the white majority and became more aware of their own distinct identity which made them question the idea of assimilation.

## Résumé:

Le travail intitulé '*Issues of Assimilation in African American Literature in Selected Works by Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka*' examine les obstacles auxquels les écrivains Afro-Américains sont confrontés dans leur tentative de s'assimiler au courant dominant blanc. Il examine également si les tentatives d'assimilation valent la peine de faire des compromis du côté afro-américain avec une inclination particulière pour Richard Wright et Amiri Baraka en tant qu'écrivains prolétariens des années 1930 aux années 1960.

Outre les multiples défis auxquels sont confrontés les Afro-Américains dans leur tentative d'assimilation, cette thèse examine les conséquences sur le moi afro-américain de telles tentatives.

Une grande attention a été accordée à l'étude des travaux de Wright et Baraka en les reliant aux problèmes raciaux. Le présent travail se concentre sur l'examen des Afro-américains face à l'idée d'assimilation à deux périodes différentes, les années 1930 et 1940. Les Afro-Américains des années 1930 étaient connus pour n'avoir aucune estime de soi qui puisse les aider à chercher plus que ce que Booker T. Washington ou Marcus Garvey appelaient, mais les Afro-Américains des années 1960 ont accepté leur différence avec la majorité blanche et sont devenus conscients de leur propre identité qui est distincte qui les a conduit à mettre en question l'idée d'assimilation.

ملخص:

ان العمل المقدم في هذه الرسالة تحت عنوان:

*'Issues of Assimilation in African American Literature in Selected Works by Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka'*

يفحص العقبات التي يواجهها الكتاب الأمريكيون من أصل أفريقي في محاولتهم الاندماج في التيار الابيض المهيمن. كما تبحث في ما إذا كانت محاولات استيعابهم من قبل المجتمع الأمريكي تستحق تقديم تنازلات من جانبهم مع ميل خاص لريتشارد رايت وأميري بركة بوصفهما كاتبين بروليتاريين (من الطبقة العاملة) من الثلاثينيات إلى الستينيات. إلى جانب التحديات المتعددة التي تواجه الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي في محاولتهم للوصول إلى الاستيعاب ، تبحث هذه الأطروحة في عواقب مثل هذه المحاولات على الذات الأمريكية الأفريقية.

تم إيلاء الكثير من الاهتمام لدراسة أعمال رايت وبركة من خلال ربطهم بقضايا العرق. تركز الدراسة الحالية على فحص تعامل الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي مع فكرة الاستيعاب في فترتين مختلفتين ، ثلاثينيات وأربعينيات القرن العشرين. كان الأمريكيون الأفارقة في ثلاثينيات القرن الماضي معروفين بعدم امتلاكهم لاحترام للذات يمكن أن يساعدهم في البحث عن أكثر مما دعا إليه بوكرتي واشنطن أو ماركوس غارفي ، لكن الأمريكيين الأفارقة في الستينيات قبلوا اختلافهم عن الأغلبية البيضاء وأصبحوا أكثر وعياً بهويتهم المميزة التي جعلتهم يتساءلون عن فكرة الاستيعاب.

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## Introduction

Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka remain two of the most controversial and influential African American writers and activists in the history of the United States. Although a number of studies have focused on their literary skills and political actions, little was said about these writer's works dealing with the psychological and social issues, that African Americans face every day in the white mainstream, as a consequence of their attempt to assimilate. Wright and Baraka are among dozens of African Americans who suffered to be accepted and achieve literary success in America.

In African American literary traditions tensions have existed between possibilities of integration into the dominant culture, on one hand, and the potential necessity for a separate black nation on the other hand. These tensions are a result of the paradox of assimilation within a nation that historically denied basic liberty and humanity to blacks through the institutions of slavery; furthermore, even after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, conditions for many African Americans continued to be denied by widespread racism and racism.

Literary debates about black separatism have taken dramatic form, such as in exchanges between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. While Washington in his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1910) advocated acceptance of American exclusion of blacks and suggested that blacks construct their own separate programs for racial uplift, Du Bois used the metaphor of 'Double Consciousness' in his *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to suggest that such plans only colluded with racist traditions. Du Bois contended that African Americans internalized the negative views of themselves held by whites in power.

African American writers have historically considered the different sides of this question, nothing throughout the possibility of some African Americans to 'pass' for white. Pauline Hopkins narrates in her novel, *Contending Forces*, the choice of a mixed character, Jesse Montfort, to live as a black man within a black community rather than choosing to take advantage of his ability to be presumed white. In this and later works of African American literature, authors narrate a wide range of responses taken by characters facing pressures to assimilate by 'passing', or through other means.

During the Harlem Renaissance, writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay focused on a search for shared black cultures in America rather than advocating inclusion in white America. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is considered significant for her depiction of a black character within all-black contexts rather than a relation to white America, although this choice was the subject of controversy among other African American writers of the time. Some readers considered the author's use of black dialect in the novel to be an affirmation of white people's African American Stereotypes, but others saw it as a refusal to assimilate to particular expectations of African literary form.

African American writers took even more militant stances after World War II, when blacks fought for America but found that they are still denied the supposed benefits of assimilation. Novels including those produced by Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, as well as poetry by Amiri Baraka, reflected black demands for racial justice and equality, problematizing requests for chance to assimilation to white norms.

The present work treats three major points; the first one is to call attention to the nuances that African Americans face in their attempt to assimilate into the white society through investigating Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka's struggles. To do so we sought to trace the development of these controversial writers that portrayed a different image of African Americans. The second point is to show the multiple challenges that these writer's major characters meet in their attempts to assimilate. The last point is to investigate the different consequences of their attempt on their relations to their own society and on their personality.

The choice in this research is therefore made on the challenging and controversial personalities of Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka because their intellectual activism made several contributions to a greater understanding of the ways African American intellectuals had questioned the dominant concept of assimilation and its effect on the African American society, culture and identity. Both writers helped in shedding light on the problems that African Americans go through in their attempts to assimilate and to be accepted by the white mainstream.

Historical reconstruction and analysis are absolutely an essential methodology to follow if we are to understand these complex figures; Wright and Baraka, and their effective role in the lives of African Americans. Moreover, historical reconstruction is considered necessary to expose the issues concerning Wright and Baraka. These issues mattered and tracked those concerns which were transformed in the face of the historical, social, and ideological shifts that shaped Baraka and Wright's lives.

Beside the historical approach, we sought to make use of the post-colonial field of studies. The African American post-colonial perspective is unique in that the United States. The U. S. is not a colony and blacks in America were no more native than the

white man. However, in the marginalization that emerged from the slave experience and the deepening of racial divides, African-American writers, such as Wright and Baraka, found themselves within artistic restraints. With the civil rights era, African Americans were forced to redefine themselves. In Wright and Baraka's case, this redefinition occurred through the racial struggle of the Black Nationalist and Black Arts Movements. They sought to recognize their own language and cultural symbols while subverting any white Western influence.

It is of great importance to contemplate Wright and Baraka's view of art as a cultural activity, along with history and politics. Through their writing, they hope to attain a certain status for themselves and their nation. Their writing acts to publicly decolonize their nation by recreating an image of blacks that is more accurate and fitting to their actual relationship to the United States and not merely to a tradition of oppression. In their poetry and prose writing, they fight thoroughly against the 'Negro' myth, which marks the alienation that blacks experience in America. The legitimized acts of lynching, character assassination, terrorization, denial of rights, and oppression worked as a catalyst for Wright and Baraka's writings while highlighting the effects of an imperialist power structure working against its people.

The post-colonial approach that we adopted and employed throughout this study stemmed from the uniqueness of the African-American discourse that followed his familiar trajectory of African and Caribbean post-colonial understanding. The idea of the imperial authority, in this case the United States, is based on a supposition that the ruling power had both greater knowledge and power than the dispossessed. In the United States, this was distinctly a power born of race. Like the works of such writers as Fanon, who will be cited throughout this study due to his proficiency on the subject

matter of post colonialism and the comparativeness of his theories to Baraka's life and work, Baraka's sought to disrupt this myth through his work.

The African American artist found himself in a deep conflict with the surrounding society; therefore, there was a need for a greater exploration of race through ideologies, such as Black Nationalism, which helped individuals to reclaim a cultural heritage and consciousness that was distinct from that of white society. Baraka was an example of the hybridity of the black artist in America, whose life and culture were dependently shaped through the control of a white superstructure. His work, even at its earliest incarnation, challenged these standards and focused on a redefinition of racial and artistic consciousness. For this purpose, the post-colonial field of studies is useful in developing a broader understanding of Baraka's work within the larger context of African-American culture and society. Since his departure from the white circle of the Beat Generation in Greenwich Village, Baraka devoted his life and art to establish black consciousness. In addition, race became his ultimate mover.

The sociological approach is important in dealing with Wright and Baraka's works, as they seek change and improvement for the alienated blacks whose social and economic wellbeing are marred by the capitalist power. By viewing Wright and Baraka's work within this context, we attempt to integrate the historical and cultural changes of American society in the close reading of each work. The sociological approach shows how Wright and Baraka used the implications of race and the history of racial injustice to connect with their audience and draw the masses' attention to the exploitation and helplessness they suffered. A sociological approach is particularly helpful in view of the political turmoil that occurred simultaneously with Wright and Baraka's own transitions of consciousness and underlined the key role of this understanding of self.

This approach is meant to reflect the connection between the base and the superstructure. In Wright and Baraka's case, the artists attempted to avoid exploitation by revolutionizing the forces of production by repeatedly changing the medium of production. By employing these approaches, we hope to reach a better understanding of the works in order to fully contextualize the writers in relation to their works, thus understanding the development of the writers' vision and consciousness.

The major concern of the thesis is not only to analyze the thought of Wright and Baraka and where to situate them. Despite formidable handicaps, these two writers were able to show through their works causes that prevent African Americans from being assimilated and the consequences that they have to face in their attempt. Many African Americans scholars spoke about multiple issues that faced African Americans. The relationship between black intellectuals and their various reactions towards the problems that affected their whole community was a serious indicator of the call for a black community that does not submit to the white standards.

In *'Shades of Black: Diversity in African American Identity'* by Cross Jr. William E., he claims that with a thorough review of scientific literature on Negro identity conducted between 1936 to 1967, Cross demonstrates that important themes of mental health and adoptive strength have frequently been overlooked by scholars, both black and white, with proving Black pathology. He examines Black Power Movement and critics who credit the era with a comprehensive change in Black self-esteem. Allowing for considerable gains in group identity among black people, during this period, Cross shows how, before this, working-class, and even many poor black families were able to offer their descendants a legacy of mental health and personal strength that sustained them in their struggle for political and cultural consensus.



W. E. B Du Bois treated multiple serious problems that affected the lives of African Americans. He spotted the light on the issue of identity that African Americans were having at that period in his *'The Souls of Black Folks'*. He states that;

‘this 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 two-ness- an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keep it from being torn asunder.’ The History of American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-consciousness, manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn’t bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the whole world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.’(Blum.79)

As a result, blacks can suffer from a damaged self-image shaped by the perceptions and treatment of white people. Black life in turn can easily become shaped by stereotypes perpetuated by mainstream culture.

Robert E. Park, an American urban sociologist, is considered as one of the most influential figures in early U.S. sociology, claims in his work *'Assimilation, Social'*

that assimilation might, in some senses and to a certain degree, be described as a function of visibility, and he attributed the Negroes lack of assimilation in the United States, during three hundred years, to a physical rather than cultural. This simplified description has been replaced by one that stresses the interaction of racial, ecological, historical, structural, and other variables. For example; physical characteristics were important factor, but by no means the only variable involved, in the decision made by more than 670.000 persons to 'pass' from the Negro group to the white group in the period 1861 to 1960([www.encyclopedia.com/utility/](http://www.encyclopedia.com/utility/)).

One of the main objectives of the present work is to examine Wright and Baraka's cultural influences in order to understand why they have changed their sides throughout their lives. Both writers were supportive of the western literature and culture in general, but during the late years of their lives they were calling for a Black Cultural Nationalism. In the strictest meaning of the term, *Black Nationalism* refers to those ideas and movements that are associated with the quest to achieve separate statehood for African Americans.

The purpose of this study is to show the multiple obstacles that stood in the path of African Americans to assimilation beside problems that came along with the attempts of assimilation. Through investigating the historical background of Wright and Baraka and their major masterpieces we attempt to find the causes that pushed Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka to show such different kind of characters, from those presented during the Harlem Renaissance. They helped in exposing the different struggles that African American have within their selves and with their own society in their attempt to assimilate.

The present work is composed of five chapters. The task addressed in chapter one, we sought to expose and explain the different processes that an African American is

supposed to go through if he desires to be assimilated into the white American society, from a sociological point of view. The emphasis on exposing assimilation and its complexities is fundamental to the understanding the African American intellectual position toward the idea of assimilation in that period.

Chapter two is concerned with probing into the background that helped in unveiling the multiple phases that Richard Wright has gone through in building his consciousness and making him one of the most prominent existentialist writers of his time. It focuses on six major points. First, why did he join the Communist Party and why was he accused of being too assimilated? Second, what was his intention through presenting works that are directed to both kinds of audiences, white and black? Third, how could he provide realistic and naturalistic works instead of presenting stereotyped writings that were widespread during the Harlem Renaissance? Fourth, how were *Native Son and Black Boy*, different from the novels and auto biographies of the time? Fifth, what contribution was played by The French literature and Community in his formative years? Sixth, in the 1930s, how did Wright identify his writings of the time?

Chapter three is devoted to the historical background that enables a better understanding of the literary expressions used by Baraka. It concentrates on Baraka who believed that most of the Negroes, who sought to integrate themselves in a wave of art, were part of the Negro middle class. That group chose to show to America a non Negro face. The third chapter contributes to the whole work in shedding light on two major points. The first one is; what are the compromises that African Americans have to make if they wish to be assimilated? The second point is; how did Baraka break the chains of the white influenced discourse of the Beats and literary history on his writing?

In Chapter four, we study two major works that Wright produced. In this chapter we treat three major points that help see Wright's point of view towards the implications of attempts of assimilation on the African American self. The first point, we see a direct influence of attempts of assimilation on the lead character in *Native Son*. The second point, we investigate the reasons that make assimilation hard to reach for African Americans in *Black Boy*. The last point is to inspect what kind of identity African Americans are forced to create since they lack the opportunity to assimilate.

The last chapter presents Amiri Baraka's ideas about the causes that prevent blacks from assimilating into the white mainstream. It also concentrates on the consequences of such attempts on the black identity. Therefore, the fifth chapter answers two major questions about the myth of assimilation. The first one: is assimilation worth the compromises on the behalf of the identity of the black American? The second point is: at what extend does the notion of stereotype stand at the path of African American assimilation and keep them at a submissive position?

## Chapter One

### Assimilation Theory

#### Introduction

#### 1.1 What is Assimilation?

#### 1.2 Race Relations Theories

#### 1.3 Milton Gordon and Assimilation Phases

#### 1.4 Assimilation Theories complications

## Introduction

In the United States, theories that explain racial and ethnic relations have been concentrating on migration, adaptation, exploitation, stratification, and conflict. Race relations theories, not all of them, are classified in two different categories. They are categorized according to their principal concerns, either *order theories* or *power-conflict* theories. The first kind aims to emphasize patterns of inclusion for example the integration or assimilation of a specific racial and ethnic group to a dominant culture or society. In other words, in order theories, the principal emphasis is on progressive adaptation of the dominant culture and on stability in intergroup relations. Power conflict theories give more attention to migration and conflict. They focus on genocide and continuing hierarchy as well as the continuity of the inequality of power and resource distribution associated with racial or ethnic subordination. In the United States, most theories of assimilation are order theories.

Assimilation, in the United States of America, is according to sociologists the withdrawal of ones, migrants, culture and heritage and the absorption of the culture and the history of an established host group. Charles Hirschman has noted that the assimilation is widely seen as one of the dominant fields of sociological research when studying racial and ethnic inequality. (<http://grove.ufl.edu/~feagin/.htm>) If you look for a dictionary definition for the word assimilation you will find that its origin is Latin and it means to make similar

Since the present work focuses on the causes that prevented African Americans from assimilating and on the effects of such attempts on African Americans, it is necessary to give a clear idea about what assimilation is. So, the importance of this chapter is in giving a clear understanding to the theory of assimilation and what do Richard Wright

and Amiri Baraka think about the idea of assimilation and how it influences African American psyche and society. It is necessary for the present work to see assimilation from the point of view of African American writers who were concerned about their people's well-being. Literary works can help scholars to understand societies in a better way.

Oscar Wild sees Literature as a reflection of society and for sure society is the shaper of literature. Doctor Karen A. Hegtvedt from the University of Emory sees that literature presents what happens in society as if a reflection of it. Different writers see society as the field from which all the stories come. Consequently, for the sake of showing the effects of attempts of assimilation on African Americans, we are going to use the background and works of Wright and Baraka as a field of expertise.

### **1.1 What is Assimilation?**

Assimilation is a universal word for a process that can trail a cluster of diverse path ways. The emphasis in the United States has been on group relations. It is the result of the works of the well-known race relations cycle of Robert Ezra Park that it was later developed by Edward Franklin Frazier in 1957. The Race relation cycle was based on a universal sequence of stages of inter-ethnic relations, beginning with contact, leading to competition followed by a period of stables accommodation and eventually in a process of assimilation (Hirshman.13).

One form of assimilation is expressed in what is called 'the melting pot' a method in which different groups come together and each one of them present an equal share from his culture, these shares fuse together to form a new society. It is believed that in America minorities share their cultures together to form the America we know today in other words they see assimilation in terms of the melting pot. This interpretation

shows the ways in which varied people helped in the construction of the United States Society and made contributions to American culture.

The melting pot metaphor sees assimilation as a gentle and egalitarian process that concentrates on sharing and inclusion. In spite the fact that it presents a powerful image of the United States society, the reality is that the melting pot does not give an exact description of how assimilation actually progressed for American minority groups (Abrahamson.152-154). Some minority groups have been largely excluded from the melting pot process.

It is important to note that the melting pot was based on Anglo centric basis.

Schlesinger, an American historian, social critic, and public intellectual was a specialist in American history, much of his work explored the history of 20th-century American liberalism, stated that [‘for better or worse, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition was for two centuries and still is the dominant influence on the American culture and society.’] (Schlesinger.183)

In fact the melting pot is completely different from assimilation especially in the United States. The U.S.A’s society has mostly been characterized by being frightening, and intimidating. Assimilation was supposed to be based on the equal sharing of elements and then a gradual mixture of diverse peoples but in reality assimilation was put together to keep the prominence of the white supremacy.

In the prewar years, in Harlem, ideas like Black Nationalism, the Black Power movement, the matter of assimilation or integration these were common points of difference then as now. African Americans were among the people who struggled a lot to benefit from an opportunity to assimilate into the white society. Assimilation was highly priced for them, African Americans due to their desire to fit into the white



American society. Writers such as Richard Nathaniel Wright and Amiri Imamu Baraka are African American writers who dedicated their lives and works to the soul benefit of Blacks.

Richard Wright provided works in which he addresses audiences, white and black, in order to push them to see through his eyes. He desired to give a clear protest either it is religious, political, or personal. Wright directed his works to the white audience as well as the black one for the purpose of opening their eyes on the realities of white America. His purpose in directing his work to two different types of audience is to express mutual experience and mutual attitudes in order to enable African Americans to prepare themselves for the battles to come starting with their personality issues. For what concerns Whites, they needed to Wright's black background. In order to help white readers to understand the black history he needed to provide them with the necessary information that will leave a different effect on them from the effect left on the black readers. For this he has to create a feeling of major disturbance while reading his works to the point of pushing them to react, and that is what makes his writings prominent.

In his novels, Wright wrote about themes that he experienced personally. Since fiction never has the same authority as autobiography because art, by its very nature, an author creates personality types and manipulates them for a certain defined result. Autobiography has the revolutionary value of telling the story as it is which enables the readers to see, for real, the issues that African Americans are facing in their attempt to adjust their self to fit the white society's mainstream.

Amiri Baraka on the other hand, the poet and playwright who died earlier January 2014 at the age of 79, was acknowledged for his support of the black nationalist

stance that characterized his political activity and much of his writing for the last five decades of his life. There were various political twists and turns, some of them tortuous, during those years, but Baraka sees race as the principal separating line in American society. This vision seriously afflicted his literary and political efforts, essentially determining the character of his life and legacy.

Baraka was seen as a troubled and alienated black intellectual in the years before the mass civil rights movement. Baraka has a simplistic understanding of black cultural assimilation. He believed that assimilation and acculturation were identical and attributed moral weakness to those blacks that acculturate. He deemed this a moral failure because he saw it as the result of a decision to break away from the masses of black folks and a denial of black cultural authenticity. Jones believed that no moral quality is linked to assimilation or its rejection.

Amiri Baraka presented a significant work entitled '*Blues People*' which represents a deep analysis and a detailed study of jazz and its history besides blues written by an African American. '*Blues People: Negro Music in white America*' is a study suggesting that music can be used as an instrument to measure the cultural assimilation of Africans in North America from the early eighteenth century to the twentieth musicologists. Baraka refuses the idea that people believe that slavery vanquished black people's culture; he claims that through music they were able to save most of it.

## **1.2 Race Relations theories**

Robert E. Park, a major sociological analyst, argued that European out-migration was a major substance for societal reorganization around the globe. In his view inter-

group contacts regularly go through stages of a race relations cycle. In 1926, Robert Park made one of his most influential statements about the eventual assimilation,

‘In the race relations there is a cycle which tends everywhere to repeat itself... the race relations cycle which takes the form ...of contacts, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible... Racial barriers may slacken the tempo of the movement, but cannot change its direction...the forces which have brought about the existing interpenetration of people are so vast and irreversible that the resulting changes assume the character of a cosmic process.’  
(qtq.Huffman.76)

This theory has been criticized and questioned by many sociologists. Brewton Berry provides a useful and critical survey of Robert Park and others’ cycle theories. Amitai Etzioni presents a systematic critic of Park’s views in the context of his review to Louis Wirth. Louis Wirth points out that there is no a priori reason for regarding assimilation as the inevitable outcome of culture contact, and that park’s theory, because it fails to specify the temporal span of and conditions producing each phase, can accommodate any observation and hence is untested.

The concept of the melting pot as descriptive of the American society has been strongly maintained. For the statement of the theory of the ‘triple melting pot’, it presents the case of the disappearance of the ethnicity of the white immigrant groups within the wider structure of American religious pluralism. At this point, it is important to mention Park’s statement of the 1913 about the eventual assimilation of the American Negro. He wrote that: ‘... In the South... the races seem to be tending

in the direction of a bi-racial society, in which the Negro is gradually gaining a limited autonomy.' (Park.219-20)

Frazier E. Franklin was an American sociologist and author. His 1932 Ph.D. dissertation titled *The Negro Family in Chicago*, later released in book form as *The Negro Family in the United States*, in 1939, analyzed the historical forces that influenced the development of the African-American family from the time of slavery to the mid-1930s. Frazier noted that Robert Park's vision of race relation was still narrowed to a bi-racial organization. Therefore if Park believed in the eventual assimilation of races in the United States, his attention as an observer in the contemporary situation was strongly focused on the emergence of a black 'national consciousness'. (256)

In a close analysis of *Native Son*, Richard Wright's influential work; it reveals that when Richard Wright constructed Bigger, the protagonist of the novel, and presented him as a colonized native who fights for his freedom and self-definition Wright contributes to the theory of blackness versus whiteness that will be studied by Frantz Fanon. For this latter, there is a psychological need to face the white man as an equal. This requires the use of the white man's tools of oppression and the ability to find a designated innocent enemy against whom all the aggressively inspired by the oppressive system is directed. This behavior pattern, as Fanon explains, allows the black person to abandon the white man as the real source of his misery and to find victims among his own kind.

Through this the black person generates a psychological armor which permits him to strengthen the predictable confrontation to whiteness. Unexpectedly, though, the attractions of whiteness often push the black man towards whiteness and hence, the

politics of identity in the United States are founded upon two polar opposites, assimilation and resistance.

Before Fanon theorized blackness versus whiteness, resistance versus temptation, *Native Son* had already constructed a character, Bigger Thomas, to actualize these dueling tendencies. Wright's male urban protagonists are psychologically caught between the desire to act like black boys and submit to the powerful white father and resist, sometimes, kill the white father. From another side, they seek to compensate for their socially conditioned feelings of impotence through fantasies of omnipotence, which are fed and formed by the logic of American racism, as well as the nationalistic and fascistic ideologies that flourished internationally in the 1930s. In other words, the protagonists' mode of submission/assimilation and resistance is diverse, as it takes into consideration the reality of the national environment. In *Native Son*, Bigger escapes his feeling of impotence through different forms of diverted resistance to, and assimilation with, his Manichean world including a rat scene.

([essayscam.org/forum/fe/academic-literature](http://essayscam.org/forum/fe/academic-literature))

### **1.3 Milton Gordon and Assimilation Phases**

Park is one of the early sociologists who analyzed race relations and many theorists have adopted his assimilationist standpoint in developing their own theories. Most of them have departed from Park's framework producing a number of important works. One of these remarkable sociologists is Milton Gordon. He is the author of the influential *Assimilation in American Life* in 1964, in which he distinguishes a variety of preliminary encounters between racial and ethnic groups and an array of possible assimilation outcomes. Gordon presents three competing images of assimilation, the

melting pot, cultural pluralism, and Anglo-conformity; he also focuses on Anglo-conformity as the descriptive reality.

According to Gordon's point of view immigrant groups arriving to the United States have, for sure, given up much of their cultural heritage and followed significantly the Anglo-Protestant fundamental culture. It is crucial to note that for theorists like Gordon, cultural assimilation is a very important measurement of intergroup adaptation in the United States. This interpretation of assimilation typically stresses the way in which new groups must adapt the established Anglo-Protestant culture. Gordon made it clear that Anglo-conformity has been considerably attained for most immigrant groups in the United States, especially when it comes to cultural assimilation. Most groups following the early English migration have adapted to the Anglo basic culture. Gordon distinguishes seven dimensions of adaptation. The first one is *Cultural Assimilation* in which immigrants change their cultural patterns to adopt the core of the recipient society. The second one is *Structural Assimilation*, *Marital Assimilation*, *Identification Assimilation* *Attitude-Receptional Assimilation*, *Behavior-Receptional Assimilation*, *Civic Assimilation*: absence of value and power conflict.

Gordon concentrated his work on the numerous white, European immigrants changes and set a model that emphasizes changes that appeared from one generation to another within immigrant groups over time. Considerable *acculturation* or what is also called cultural assimilation to the Anglo-Protestant culture has often been completed by the second or third generation for more recent European immigrant groups.

African American writer Amiri Baraka had a different point of view. He presented some remarkable works such as *Dutchman* in which he presents Clay who is a twenty year old middle class black, a college trained intellectual from New Jersey. He was described as wearing a three button Ivy League suit a tie and passes time through reading a newspaper. He appears to be in control of himself and his environment, openly aware of sex but not of race, which appears clearly when a white woman enters a subway train and coquettishly sits down beside him. He is both embarrassed and fascinated by the woman. Clay is regarded by the woman named, Lula, as the assimilated African American who wants to pretend that people cannot see his blackness and that black and white people are free of their history.

It is essential to note that Gordon acknowledges that racial prejudice and discrimination have retarded structural assimilation, but he proposed that African Americans, particularly those in the middle class, will eventually be absorbed into the dominant culture and society. Concerning African Americans, he argues, in a very positive way, that the United States has changed its mind about the status of blacks in a country that believes in equality and justice. The tremendous progress that he sees that black Americans have made, according to him, has created a policy dilemma for the government whether it should embrace a traditional political liberalism that ignores racial groups or a corporate liberalism that recognizes group rights along racial lines. It is sure that many of white standards do not work for the benefit of the black people. It is also unquestionable that the idea of assimilating blacks and the application of the American belief of equality for blacks will always be debatable.

#### 1.4 Assimilation Theories Complications

It is remarked that most assimilation theorists consider white European groups experience with assimilation into the white society as the model of ethnic adaptation. Nonetheless, one has to keep in mind that European Americans came to America by choice and were not forced. The question that is worth asking here is what about the non-European migrants and what about blacks who were brought in chains to the Americas. Some analysts of assimilation include people of color in their theories, despite the problems that arise from such an inclusion.

Some sociologists have argued that assimilation either cultural or structural is the necessary and the expected cure for the illness named the racial problem in the United States. Gunnar Myrdal is one of the most prominent specialists about the race relations in the United States; argued that assimilation is for the good of African Americans; Negroes as he called them, assimilate into the American culture to obtain personalities modeled to suit the dominant white Americans. According to Myrdal's view there is an ethical contradiction in the United States between the democratic principles of the Declaration of Independence and the established discrimination against black Americans. Myrdal sees this as if people put their morals on hold, a problem that is basically solved in principle but is still being worked out in an ongoing assimilation process that may or may not be completed.

For Wright and Baraka, the obtained, modeled personalities that are shaped to suit the American culture would cause more trouble to African Americans than benefiting them. They believed that African Americans who accept to make compromises about their personality and culture to just be accepted by the white society would face psychological and social problems. More optimistic analysts have emphasized



*progressive inclusion*, which will eventually provide black Americans and other subordinate groups with full citizenship in fact as well as in principle. For that reason, they expect ethnic and racial conflict to disappear as various groups become fully assimilated into the dominant culture and society.

Sociologists as Milton Gordon and others have focused on the classlessness and the egalitarianism of the United States institutions and what they view as the progressive emancipation of non-European groups. Gordon and others have emphasized the measured and gradual assimilation of middle-class black Americans over several decades. Complete affiliation for black Americans appears predictable, for ‘the only tolerable solution to the enormous [racial] tensions lies in constituting a single societal community with full membership for all.’(qtq. in Wsevovod. ch.23) The importance of racial, as well as ethnic, stratification is expected to decline as powerful, universalistic societal forces wipe out the leftovers of earlier ethnocentric value systems. White immigrants have desired considerable assimilation and have been absorbed. The same is expected to happen eventually for non-European groups.

Assimilation theories have been criticized for having an establishment prejudice. A number of Asian American scholars and leaders have reacted vigorously to the application of the concept of assimilation to Asian Americans, arguing that the very concept originated in periods \_from 1870 to 1925\_ of strong attacks by white Americans on Asian immigrants. The term assimilation was, therefore; tainted from the beginning by its association with the notion that the only minority groups that are worthy of it were those that could assimilate in Anglo-conformity approach.

Richard Wright says in his *Outsider*[that the problem of the African American started after he overcame some limitations that have been elevated from the ‘Negro’s

movements', and after certain psychological reserves have been overcome on his part, not only for whites who will have to become familiar with Negroes, but mainly for Negroes that will be familiar with themselves. According to Wright not all African Americans, are conscious of the problem, a problem that they will be familiar with after a certain time. The real problem will come to surface when they will win their so-called rights. Wright keeps on questioning whether the African American is able to face the cruelty of the white society day after day, or will he still cling to his sense of out sidedness.] (Dumain, Ralph. [www.autodidactproject.com](http://www.autodidactproject.com).)

Amiri Baraka was famous for his fatal poems; he wrote to shock and shake the souls of his people and everyone that reads his poetry. In the 1956, he presented '*Black Art*' manifesto or as called the poems that kill. Baraka wrote, 'Assassin poems' in which expressed his anger, and frustration from what was happening with his people. Poems that shoot guns/Poems that wrestle cops into alleys/and take their weapons leaving them dead/with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland.' (Spector, [www.dailymaverick.co.za/article](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article).) In other words, Wright and Baraka tried through their works to draw the attention of African Americans to the importance of being aware of their identity and fight for it. They wished the Black people to stand for their rights to be free of will and not working to be what white people want them to be.

During the 1990's, various researchers have discovered another supposition of traditional assimilationist thinking, the idea that new immigrants should and do assimilate to the core culture in a linear or a one-directional manner. Immigrants by necessity and gradually become Americans in order to overcome the *inferiority* of their old languages, cultures, and societies. This ethnocentric view disregards the fact that the assimilation process can have a negative impact.

Rubén Rumbaut is a famous researcher on immigration and refugee movements, generations, and transitions to adulthood. For more than three decades, he has directed seminal comparative empirical studies of the adaptation of immigrants and refugees in the United States. Rumbaut notes, about the negative effect of assimilation, that modern research signposts that in certain ways the physical or mental health of immigrant groups' declines though they were becoming better off economically and more assimilated to the core culture.

During a period of time many immigrants experience gradually some family as well as social stresses, alongside many teenagers become depressed or suicidal, and associated with mainstream American life. The shift from the culture of origin to the core American culture is not necessarily a shift from an inferior to a superior culture, as many native-born Americans might assume. Such kind of shift appears clearly in Amiri Baraka's work *Dutchman*, in his protagonist's personality.

Robert Park's researches were known for paying considerable attention to the historical and global contexts of migration; in contrast to many of nowadays assimilation theorists who do not analyze properly the historical background and development of a particular racial or ethnic group within a national or international context. Recently, some researchers have established a new perception named transnationalism. Similar to traditional assimilation studies, transnationalism highlights the fact that individual migrants do not migrate individually but in groups, i.e. they take along with them their families or friends.

## Chapter Two

### Richard Wright's Cultural Influence

#### Introduction

#### 2. Historical Background

##### 2.1 Richard Wright and the Communist Party

##### 2.2 Richard Wright's Oeuvres

###### 2.2.1 *Native Son*

###### 2.2.2 *Black Boy* and other publications

#### 3. French Literature and Community Effect on Richard Wright's

#### Writing

#### 4. The Writings of Richard Wright in the 1930's

## Introduction

The present chapter is divided into two main parts, Wright's historical background and his formative years which are distributed into subchapters. The chapter treats the circumstances that helped in forming such a soul and mind awakening writer, besides giving a glimpse on the kind of writing he provided during his early years that helped changing the look of the world to African Americans.

Wright's life was marked by the multiple experiences he went through. He dreamed to be a writer since he was young but kept his dream to be a writer to himself after his first experience with publication. After grade school Wright attended Lanier High School but dropped out after a few weeks to work; he was obliged to take a series of unusual occupations to save enough money to leave for Memphis, which he did at age of seventeen. While in Memphis he began to read contemporary American literature as well as commentary by H. L. Mencken, which struck him with particular force.

Wright acquired and assimilated many European influences in his writings, especially French writers; during his formative years. These cultural acquisitions helped Wright to form an arrogant intellectual cultivated by selfishness which allowed him to admire foreign ways of life. The French literature played an important role in making Wright's writings naturalistic and real, and most importantly helped him in distancing himself from his fellow people's way of portraying African Americans. He learnt naturalism from writers such as Henry Barbusse, besides understanding the power that language can have.

The writings of Wright of the depression era are important to this work because it gives clear ideas on what led Wright to change his mind about the idea of assimilation. He was beginning to build awareness about what kind of contribution to

black American writing he would make during the next few years of his life. Wright's writings from 1937 to 1941 were concentrated on issues related to nationalism. Wright believed that it is necessary to reveal and diminish the subconscious appeal of nationalism in order to make it possible for the working class men to progress politically and not be determined by the self-defeating logics of American racism and nationalism.

The importance of this chapter is in giving a clear idea about the influences that helped shaping Richard Wright's way of thinking and expressing his mind starting from joining the Communist Party to leaving it. This part helps in opening a window to look at his personal experiences and the different nuances that helped in forming his special personality and aided in creating such a radical writer who refused to go with the flow of the Harlem Renaissance's way of depicting African Americans. It is also necessary to understand why Wright was categorized at his early career as being too assimilated into the white mainstream.

## 2. Historical Background

### 2.1 Richard Wright and the Communist Party

Richard Wright full name is Richard Nathaniel Wright, he was born on Rucker's Plantation, between Roxie and Natchez, Mississippi. (Rayson. [www.anb.org/articles.](http://www.anb.org/articles/)) His father is Nathaniel Wright, an uneducated sharecropper, and Ella Wilson, a schoolteacher. At the age of five, his father deserted the family and his mother was obliged to accept jobs that separated her from the children. Wright and his brother were put in an orphanage. In 1920 Wright's mother became a paralytic, and the family was obliged to move from Natchez to Jackson, then to Elaine, Arkansas, and back to Jackson to live with Wright's maternal grandmother, who was restrictive Seventh-day Adventists. Wright could not complete his education and graduated from the ninth grade at the Smith Robertson Junior High School in Jackson as the class valedictorian in June 1925(Rayson. <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01806.html>).

'*The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre*' is Wright first published short story, in three parts in the *Southern Register* in 1924. Wright's grandmother was an illiterate religious woman, Margaret Bolden Wilson, who believed that books of fiction were the work of the devil, so she kept them away from the house and forbade Wright from reading them. After Wright's first experience with publication, he hid his desire to become a writer.

Wright was obliged to skip from school so he can work; he was forced to take a series of unusual occupations to save enough money to leave for Memphis, which he did at age of seventeen. In Memphis as well he worked as a dishwasher and delivery boy and for an optical company. He started reading contemporary American literature as well as commentary by H. L. Mencken, which marked him a lot. Wright says in his

autobiography *Black Boy* that he borrowed the library card of an Irish co-worker and forged notes to the librarian so he could read: ‘Dear Madam: Will you please let this nigger boy have some books by H. L. Mencken?’

(Warnes.books.google.com/books.2007)

Wright was determined to leave the South and surpass the bounds of Jim Crow restrictions on blacks; he took the train to Chicago in December 1927.

In Chicago Wright worked at the post office, at a Hospital taking care of lab animals, and as an insurance agent, among other jobs. His hatred towards American capitalism pushed him to join the Communist Party in. In 1932, he joined in the John Reed Club, an intellectual arm of the Communist party. Richard Wright’s involvement with the Communist Party USA was not based on idealism, strong beliefs, or rational judgment, but he joined it on Wright’s need to unmask himself and show his intelligence to the world. We see no evidence that Wright respected Communism ideals. Instead, Wright joined politics because of his yearning to fly away from his cocoon and show his real self to others.

Richard Wright lived most of his life through a mask. Rarely letting down his guard:

‘The essence of the irony of the plight of the Negro in America, to me, is that he is doomed to live in isolation...Though I had fled the pressure of the South, my outward conduct had not changed. I had been schooled to present an unfalteringly smiling face and I continued to do so despite the fact that my environment allowed more open expression. I hid my feelings and avoided all relationships with whites that might cause me to reveal them.’ (*American Hunger*.14-15)



We see in this part that Wright feels that he is imprisoned behind his mask and was unable to express his feelings. What is true is that Wright has strong emotions, he states: ‘All my life I had done nothing but feel and cultivate my feelings’ (*American Hunger*.13). Despite the fact Wright was, at that time, in the North, he could not even engage in a brainy conversation with anyone but himself because of a mixture of societal burdens and his inner anxieties.

Wright did not join the Party because he admired socialism, but because he wanted to connect with people and used the party as a means to develop his writing, but he made little effort to learn what the Party really stood for. Through the John Reed Club, Wright was able to show the world his intellect and vision. Wright had no trouble studying Dostoevsky or Sociology to cultivate his writings, but he could not find the time to read Marx or Moore or even to pick up a newspaper or an encyclopedia and learn about Trotsky. He states ‘... I stammered, trying not to reveal my ignorance of politics, for I had not followed the details of Trotsky’s fight against the Communist party of the Soviet Union...’ (*American hunger*.15). McCall Dan points out that Wright had little in common with the Communist party: ‘Doctrinal differences don’t matter; ideas themselves scarcely matter; all that counts is the blessed new feeling of belonging.’ (qtq. in Louis Henry Gates. 363-81)

It is a fact that Communists were not looking to cultivate free thinkers, and Wright believed that he is not free as long as he cannot think freely. CPUSA was looking for people of action; they were looking for militants who have to obey to orders without asking questions. Wright was a man of action, but he was not a soldier. A true member of the Communist Party did not read books; a real member worked in the factory by day and led protest marches by night. The Communists had two concentrated on food and shelter but Wright looked for more, he longed for books.

The Party made it clear to Wright and asked him to give up on his artistic goals for their needs. Members of the CP accused Wright's intellect as bringing no good for their cause. In fact Wright himself neither understood nor believed their cause. But Wright joined the Communist party for a purpose that was very clear to him. He used the Party as an umbilical cord to nurse his writing and nurture his soul. Wright wanted to use CPUSA to make friends and reveal his thoughts. Wright, however, had no intention to be exploited by the party, especially by the people who did not appreciate his talents. In *American Hunger* Wright says that he was doubted because he was considered an 'intellectual'. When Wright attended his first Communist unit meeting and presented a serious report, the rank met his report with laughter:

‘During the following days I had learned through some discreet questioning that I had seemed a fantastic element to the black Communists. I was shocked to hear that I, who had been only to grammar school, had been classified as an intellectual. What was an intellectual? I had never heard the word used in the sense in which it was applied to me. I had thought that they might refuse me on the grounds that I was not politically advanced; I had thought they might place me on probation; I had thought they might say I would have to be investigated. But they had simply laughed.’(Guzman. Black Writing from Chicago.78)

The John Reed Club completed a huge emptiness which permitted Wright's writing to flourish. In fact, the Club was the reason that Wright related himself with CPUSA in the first place. For Wright, the Club represented an opportunity for thoughtful debates and it provided outlets for writers to publish their work. Wright was very

uncomfortable with the Communists Party decision to eliminate the John Reed Club in the New York Conference:

‘Debate started and I rose and explained what clubs had meant to young writers and begged for their continuance. I sat down amid silence. Debate was closed. The vote was called. The room filled with uplifting hands to dissolve. Then came the call for those who disagreed and my hand went up alone.’(Wright. *I Tried to Be a Communist*.33)

Wright hid behind his mask for a very long time and the Communist Party was his tool to remove it. It is a fact that CP liberated and enabled him to express his feelings. Nevertheless, the party wanted to do more than liberating him, it wished to replace Wright’s old mask with a new mask of their design. They sought to apply a filter to his mind which would select through Wright’s thoughts and only allow him to express the feelings that could work in the benefit of the Communist beliefs.

Wright achieved a lot and was not ready to give up on his individuality, and his sense of himself, which initially attracted him to the Party, is what led to his Communist expiration. Wright eventually left the Party for the same reason he joined it, to reach his artistic goals.

‘An invisible wall was building slowly between me and the people with whom I had cast my lot. Well, I would show them that all men who wrote books were not their enemies. I would communicate the meaning of their lives to people whom they could not reach; then, surely, my intentions would merit their confidence... I had to win the confidence of people who had been misled so often that they were afraid of anybody

who differed from themselves. Yet deep down I feared their militant ignorance.’

(Cunard. *Essays on Race and Empire*. Ed. Maureen Moynagh. 2002. P. 29)

Joining the John Reed Club had an important role in shaping such a great writer, all the intelligent debates, and even his experience with petty politics gave him the tools, the vision, and the confidence to write. Wright wrote half a book in the prime of his life about his experience with Communism. His political experiences and disturbances left a profound mark on his conscious. It is as though he thought he found himself only to realize that his search was far from over, he states:

‘Humbly now, with no vaulting dream of achieving a vast unity, I wanted to try to build a bridge of words between me and the world outside, that world which seemed so distant and elusive that it seemed unreal.’ (Wright. *American Hunger*. 135)

## **2.2 Richard Wright’s Oeuvres**

### **2.2.1 *Native Son***

By 1935 Richard Wright joined the Federal Negro Theater in Chicago under the Federal Writers’ Project. Wright’s writings of the time were not published, some short stories and a novel. Wright moved to New York City, two years later, where he helped launch *New Challenge* magazine and was the Harlem editor of the *Daily Worker* as well as coeditor of *Left Front*. (Rayson.

[www.anb.org/articles/.february.2000](http://www.anb.org/articles/.february.2000))

Wright tasted success for the first time when his short story collection, *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938) won first prize for the Story magazine contest open to Federal Writer’s Project authors for best book-length manuscript. Harper’s published this

collection which included ‘*Fire and Cloud*,’ ‘*Long Black Song*,’ ‘*Down by the Riverside*,’ and ‘*Big Boy Leaves Home*’; in 1940 the story ‘*Bright and Morning Star*’ was added, and the book was rereleased.

*Native Son*, released in 1940, was the first bestselling novel by a black American writer and the first Book-of-the-Month Club selection by an African-American writer. *Native Son* brought respect and wealth to Richard Wright. He was awarded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) respected Spingarn Medal in 1941. Wright declared in ‘*How Bigger Was Born*’ After *Uncle Tom’s Children*’ was released that he needed to write a book that bankers’ daughters would not be able to ‘read and feel good about,’ that would ‘be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears’ (Rayson. ‘*Richard Wright’s Life*’. //www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets); *Native Son* is rigid.

In *Native Son*, Wright presents his guilt-of-the-nation thesis. Bigger Thomas, the main character, is a nineteen-year-old nervous minor criminal from Chicago’s South Side ghetto. The novel runs continuously with no rest in between the three parts: *Book I, Fear*; *Book II, Flight*; and *Book III, Fate*. Bigger’s tragedy is that he lives in a society where he sees other boys especially white boys going to movies, enjoying themselves in amusement room and buying anything they want. Therefore, he immediately feels deprived since he has no means to afford them. White can afford to do everything they want because they are rich. Bigger himself observes: ‘we live here and they live there, we Black and they whites. They got things and we ain’t. They do things and we can’t. It just like living in jail.’ (Wright. 22) That statement tells that the American society is based on segregation.

Bigger is unemployed and survives on aid. For that reason, he is so conditioned by the racial situation that he cannot respond to individual whites as separate persons but only as an abstract embodiment of white power. The insignificance of his education prevents him from being capable of providing any acceptable means of supporting himself along with his family. We must consider Bigger's rejection of the offer of the Daltons to help him attend night school and continue his education. Earlier that day, Bigger complains the fact that Blacks are not allowed to enter certain professions. For him, it is symbolized by the airplanes he wishes to fly. The young man refuses offers of assistance to complete his education for no matter his education, the professions to which he might aspire are closed to him. The life of Bigger Thomas is an absolute denial of his hopes. He will not be more integrated in Northern society; he will hang in 'No Man's land' because of the white society and its discriminatory laws. Therefore, Bigger is living a meaningless life created out of fear and hatred.

When Bigger worked as a chauffeur for the Dalton's, he imagines himself in various fanciful scenarios, including sexual ones with Mary. Lines that referred to Bigger's sexual interest in Mary Dalton were taken out in 1940 and only restored fifty-three years later in the 1993 Library of America edition, edited by Arnold Rampersad and copyrighted by Wright's second wife, Ellen Wright (Rayson. '*Richard Wright's Life*'). [www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/)).

Bigger's first driving job obliges him to pick up Mary's communist boyfriend, Jan Erlone, then forced again to eat with the couple in a black diner on the South Side. Mary and Jan drink on their way home and invite Bigger to join them. Jan leaves, and Bigger's duty was to drive. Bigger takes Mary home and put her in bed. In his attempt to kiss, he got scared to be caught as he is kissing her; he puts a pillow over her face when her blind mother walks in. When he recognizes that he accidentally murdered

her, he drags her to the basement and burns her in the furnace. Bigger calms down at the thought that whites would never suspect him because they will think he is not smart enough to plan such a crime. (Ward.155)

As it begins to snow, Bigger leaves the Dalton house and returns to his mother's tenement feeling like a new man. Bigger now sees that everyone he knows is blind; he himself is filled with joy for having killed a white girl, the ultimate taboo, and gotten away with it. To closure his guilt, Wright has Bigger murder his girlfriend Bessie in a brutal and planned way, in Book II. As the snowfall becomes a snowstorm, Bigger is encircled by the white world, whose search closes in and captures him. At the trial in Book III Bigger is never convicted for Bessie's murder, but only for the assumed rape of Mary, deemed to be a more serious crime than even Mary's murder. Boris A. Max, a Communist party lawyer, undertakes Bigger's defense because Bigger has implicated Jan and the party in a kidnap note to the Daltons. (Ward.155)

It is important to note that Wright made blacks proud of his success, at the same time he also made them uncomfortable with the protagonist, Bigger, who represents a stereotype of the 'brute Negro' they had been trying to overcome with novels of uplift by the 'Talented Tenth' since the Gilded Age. It is worth noting that Wright's argues that racist America is the one which created Bigger; consequently, America had better change or more Bigger's would be out there. At the end, when Max fails to understand Bigger, who cannot be saved from the electric chair, Wright is faulting the Communist party for not comprehending the black people it relied on for support. (Ward.155)

Wright personally was disillusioned with the Communist party, and left it in 1942 published an essay in Atlantic Monthly in 1944 called '*I Tried to Be a Communist,*'

which was later reprinted in *The God That Failed* (1949), a collection of essays by disappointed ex-Communists. *Native Son* continues to be regarded as Wright's greatest novel and most influential book. As a result, he has been called the father of black American literature, a figure with whom writers such as James Baldwin had to contend.

To separate himself of Wright's influence, Baldwin wrote a series of three essays criticizing Wright's use of naturalism and protest fiction. In 'Everybody's Protest Novel,' published in *Partisan Review* in 1949, Baldwin concludes, 'The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended.' On the other hand, Wright has been credited with sanctioning the Black Arts Movement of the 1960's, particularly in his protest poetry, much of which was published in Chicago in the 1930's.

As Irving Howe said in his a 1963 essay, '*Black Boys and Native Sons*,'

'The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. No matter how much qualifying the book might later need, it made impossible a repetition of the old lies . . . [and] brought out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture.'(353-68)

As Wright was rising to fame, his personal life was going through changes as well. In 1939 he had married Dhimah Rose Meadman, a Russian-Jewish ballet dancer. Wright moved her, her son, her mother, and her pianist to Mexico for a few months and then realized the marriage was not a success. He returned to New York and divorced



Dhimah in 1940. On the trip back to New York, Wright stopped to visit his father for the first time in twenty-five years.

In *Black Boy*, he describes his father during this visit as:

‘standing alone upon the red clay of a Mississippi plantation, a sharecropper, clad in ragged overalls, holding a muddy hoe in his gnarled, veined hands . . . when I tried to talk to him I realized that . . . we were forever strangers, speaking a different language, living on vastly distant planes of reality.’ ( Rayson. ‘Richard Wright’s Life’ [www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01806.html](http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-01806.html). february. 2000)

In 1941 he married Ellen Poplar, a white woman and Communist party member with whom he had worked and been in love before he married Dhima, and had two daughters.

To summarize, *Bigger* represents the stereotypical young alienated African-American male in 1930s America, who as a result of white oppression, Wright maintains, feels helpless, merciless and helpless. In the introductory essay, ‘*How Bigger Was Born*,’ Wright says that *Bigger* represents a complex figure of young African-American males who, with very few opportunities in life, become gradually rebellious, violent, and close to explode. Wright blames also the structure of American society for this sense of alienation and warns that there are millions of *Biggers* throughout the country. Changes that benefit African-American culture in the form of education and employment opportunities must be come about, or the consequences will be dire.

### 2.2.2 *Black Boy* and other publications

Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, came out in 1945, again a bestseller and Book-of-the-Month Club selection, although the U.S. Senate denounced *Black Boy* as offensive. The later section about his life in Chicago and experience with the Communist party was not published until 1977 under the title *American Hunger*.

Wright's publishers in 1945 had only wanted the story of his life in the South and cut what followed about his life in the North. Numerous biographies were written about Wright but all have to start with *Black Boy* which deals with his emotional account of his childhood and adolescence in the Jim Crow South.

In a famous passage in the autobiography that has bothered critics and set Wright apart from the African-American sense of community, he asserts the 'cultural barrenness of black life':

'. . . I used to mull over the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of great hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair. (Wright.130)

He found an 'unconscious irony' in the idea that 'Negroes led so passionate an existence': 'I saw that what had been taken for our emotional strength was our negative confusions, our flights, our fears, our frenzy under pressure.' (Wintz. Analysis and Assessment'.52) Statements like these are contradicted by others that describe a caring community. For example, when Wright's mother suffers a paralytic stroke, 'the neighbors nursed my mother day and night, fed us and washed our

clothes,' and Wright admits to being 'ashamed that so often in my life I had to be fed by strangers.' (Wintz. Analysis and Assessment'.52)

In 1946 Wright was invited to France. After he returned to the United States he decided he could no longer tolerate the racism he experienced even in New York City. Married to a white woman and living in the North, he still was not able to buy an apartment as a black man. Furthermore, he hated the stares he and his family received on the streets. And he was still called 'boy' by some shopkeepers. So in 1947 he moved permanently to France and settled in Paris. Wright never again saw the United States.

He worked from 1949 to 1951 on a film version of *Native Son*, in which he himself played Bigger. Wright, forty years old and overweight, had to train and stretch to look very similar to play the nineteen-year-old Bigger. During filming in Buenos Aires and Chicago, the production was fraught with problems. The film was released briefly but was unsuccessful. European audiences acclaimed it, but the abridged version failed in the United States and the film disappeared.

Wright did not publish a book after *Black Boy* until 1953 when his 'existential' novel, *The Outsider*, was published to mixed reviews. Cross Damon, the main character, is overwhelmed by the demands of his wife, his mother, and his mistress. Grabbing a chance occasion during a train boom, he leaves his identity papers with a dead man and disappears. He ends up committing three murders to save himself, and then he himself is murdered by the Communist party in the United States for his independence.

*Savage Holiday* followed in 1954, a 'white' novel whose main character, Erskine Fowler, exemplifies the dangers of repressed emotion. Fowler has been obsessed with

desire for his mother. He marries a prostitute, then murders her; the graphic murder scene disturbed some readers. The novel is an exception to Wright's work in that it has no black characters. *Savage Holiday* was not even a mild critical success.

During the mid-1950's Wright traveled extensively to Africa, Asia, and Spain, and wrote several nonfiction works on political and sociological topics. He had helped found *Présence Africaine* with Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, and Alioune Diop from 1946 to 1948. He spent some time in Ghana and in 1954 published *Black Power*; a term coined by Wright, to mixed reviews. *Black Power* concerns itself with the color line in Africa and the new 'tragic elite,' the leaders of the former colonies.

Ghanaian writer Kwame Anthony Appiah said later that Wright failed to understand Africans when he urged Africa to leave tribal custom behind and join the technological era. In April 1955 Wright attended the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, the first meeting of twenty-nine new nations of Africa and Asia. He published his account as *The Color Curtain* in 1956.

Throughout his international political activities, Wright knew correctly that he was being shadowed by the Central Intelligence Agency; his paranoia was later justified when evidence about his surveillance was made available under the Freedom of Information Act. After Wright made two trips to Franco's Spain, he published a book of his observations, *Pagan Spain*; here Wright with his 'peasant' understanding exposes the dark side of violence and moral hypocrisy beneath the national adherence to Catholicism.

In 1957 he put together a collection of his lectures given between 1950 and 1956 in Europe, *White Man, Listen!*, which includes 'The Literature of the Negro in the United States,' an important overview. Wright's books published during the 1950's

disappointed some critics, who said that his move to Europe alienated him from American blacks and thus separated him from his emotional and psychological roots. During the 1950's Wright grew more internationalist in outlook. While he accomplished much as an important public literary and political figure with a worldwide reputation, his creative work did decline.

The last work Wright submitted for publication during his lifetime, *The Long Dream*, a novel, was released in 1958. Here he portrays his strongest black father, Tyree Tucker, and treats the black middle class in the setting of Clintonville, Mississippi. This was the first novel in a planned trilogy about Tyree Tucker and his son Fishbelly. Wright did finish the second novel, '*Island of Hallucinations*,' about Fishbelly's escape to Paris, but it was not published. Taking place in the long-gone South of the 1940's, *The Long Dream* seemed out of date to readers. Critics faulted Wright for being away from the source of his material for too long, and *Time* magazine criticized him for 'living amid the alien corn.' Subsequent critics, however, have regarded his late fiction more seriously. In 1959 Wright's *Daddy Goodness* was staged in Paris in collaboration with Louis Sapin, and a 1960 Broadway stage version of *The Long Dream*, produced by Ketti Frings, was unsuccessful.

During his last year and a half, Wright suffered from amoebic dysentery acquired during his travels to Africa or Asia, and he died suddenly of an apparent heart attack while recuperating at the Clinique Eugène Gibeux in Paris. There have been recurrent rumors that Wright was murdered, but this has not been proved. After his death, his wife Ellen submitted for publication his second collection of short stories, *Eight Men*, which Wright had completed eight years earlier. She then published his novel *Lawd Today*, generally considered to be the least powerful of Wright's works, although William Burrisson has argued for its sophistication and artistic merit. *Lawd Today*,

clearly influenced by James Joyce's *Ulysses*, presents one day in the life of Jake Jackson in Chicago.

### **3. French Literature and Community Effect on Richard Wright's Writing**

Richard Wright proved through his writings that though he uses inter-textuality in his writings, this could not reduce the notion of authority in his oeuvres which appeared to be the opposite and a problem for most writers who were influenced the literature of other countries. Wright acquired and assimilated many European influences in his writings, especially French writers; during his formative years. These cultural acquisitions helped Wright to form a pompous intellectual nurtured by selfishness which allowed him to admire foreign ways of life. (Webb.167-75)

Richard Wright's appreciation for the French appeared many times through his interviews. He even expressed the desire to live in France one day which he actually did in his late years. Besides that, the French had a deep interest and appreciation of the jazz music and some African American writers such as Michel Fabre and Jean Wagner. Thanks to these writers' interest in Richard Wright, they helped in reviving the attention to his writing.

One thing was special about the French writers is that they believed that a thing said was necessary a thing done. Besides this, the French cared a lot about the form; which means that they did not give a huge importance to what one does, as long as it is pronounced properly. Wright, in his autobiography '*Black Boy*' and in '*American Hunger*', associates marvelous effects to language. Wright used it as a magical power to create new feelings and views. (Miller. Richard Wright, Community, and the French Connection)

In the fall of 1933, Wright joined the John Reed Club with all these ideas in his mind about the language and the power that it has. In this Communist Party, Wright had contact with a best-selling French novelist and Communist VIP Henry Barbusse. Barbusse first came to fame with the publication of his novel *Le Feu*, translated as *Under Fire* in 1916, which was based on his experiences during World War I. By this time, Barbusse had become a pacifist, and his writing demonstrated his growing hatred of militarism. *Le Feu* drew criticism at the time for its harsh naturalism, but won the Prix Goncourt. Wright included his name in his '*Blueprint for Negro Writing*' list of authors that every African American writer should be familiar with. Checking through Barbusse's career and works one finds signs of an influence on Wright (Fabre.291)

Richard Wright did not mention Barbusse in his work directly but Barbusse appearances come clearly or implausibly in Wright's works. If one takes '*Native Son*' for example, which is considered the most successful work by Richard Wright, besides '*The Man Who Lived Underground*', some of Wright's imaginative writing and its relationship to society, Barbusse is surely present. (Fabre.291)

Wright was influenced by another French writer; a contemporary of Barbusse, Jean Richard Bloch. Wright speaks of Bloch's novel '*& Co.*', in the context of as being creative work: a novel basically made of images; emotional perceptions of reality, but philosophically and emotionally united to such an extent that the unity itself becomes the ruling symbol of the work. This all-controlling unity symbol carries any message or judgment the author makes. (Miller Eugene. Richard Wright, Community, and the French Connection)

There are similarities between the works of Wright and Bloch. This similarity appears when Wright shows concern about the problem of authorial intrusion into fiction. Bloch's '- & Co.' is mentioned as an example of complex unity. In Bloch's novel this symbol is obviously signaled in the title, which stresses company, and in the scenes imaging the ethnic and family ties that they are cut even as they foster. Moreover, *Native Son* very possibly owes something to some of the images out of which this unity of '- & Co.' grows. (Miller. Richard Wright, Community, and the French Connection)

In Bloch's work the Jewish Semlers are cloth manufacturers in the region of Alsace in France who decided to migrate westward. One of the family members is a brother-in-law uncle. He is on the borders of the family business. In Alsace he runs a trade store and has been a marketer of the company's goods. In Wright's work this character's name has been moved to Chicago's Black Belt; he is said to run a small grocery, a much more awesome figure to Bigger Thomas.

More important to '*Native Son*' are passages concerning characters more principal, Guillaume and Joseph, the Semler descendants. Returning from a factory-site-purchasing voyage, Guillaume, after being civilized for his part in what his absolute ruler father sees as the assumption of a ruinous debt, goes back to his wife and children. He is characterized in a few paragraphs ending with saying that he wished that he would never go back. He wished for a universal catastrophe, he thought that his life is miserable; at last he considered the idea to hang himself. (Miller. Richard Wright, Community, and the French Connection)

In *Native Son*, Wright describes Bigger's psychological state in comparable ideas and terms. Bigger felt that his life was terrible and terrifying. He believed that if he kept



on thinking of his fear and despair he would either kill himself or somebody else. And at various times he wishes himself to be the agent of a universal catastrophe, rising up gigantically to blot out everything with a blow. Richard Wright describes clearly Bigger in this passage in which he says:

‘He wished that he had never come back. He longed for a violent shattering of everything in some of everything in some universal catastrophe... He had never allowed himself to think about his horror of life. He diverted to his work the instinct which had let it come to light would have led him to hang himself with two feet of rope from the stoutest branch of the big chestnut-tree of the factory.’ (Wright. 13-14)

In order to make it clearer, Bigger and Guillaume the lead characters of ‘*Native Son*’ and ‘& Co.’ expressed an existential fear and despair that would seem to be caused from different reasons, given the different social class aspects of these images. But the difference in causes offer an insight into how Wright completed into a different context what he saw in other writers. Guillaume’s spirit is said to be from his condition since he had always had to deal with work issues. But this cause is explained in passages concerning Joseph, Guillaume’s brother, passages that support the Guillaume description. Joseph on his return home plays his flute. The harmony of the music unites the little village.

Later on, the reader is met with another event in which Joseph abandons a love marriage to a nice girl because his family refused the relation between them, and he was forced to marry a Jewish girl. The Semler brothers suffer alienation from self and others but not because they are, like Bigger excluded from society. Socio-

psychologically speaking, the images suggest that including the ideas of ethnicity, economical status, and the familial dimensions of society can be as horrifying as exclusion. But from Wright's point of view as a man of letter, he sees images are reserved regarding their value by the unity of a work, by the comment that this unity makes on them; yet this inhibition provides their meaning.

The allusion to art in the Joseph passages obviously also proposes the concept that even the non-ideological poet generates, not just in the work but in society, which leads to the benefit of everybody. Hence, Bloch's novel performed what Wright was to say later; precisely in 1955, this would have been his natural, basic interest because he was deeply interested in expressing racial problems or issues in his literary works. Michel Fabre stated:

‘The broader dilemma of the relationship of the individual to society; that is, the reconciliation of the drive for society, for [intense pleasure]- the getting out of the self into something greater than the self- with his personal passion for the autonomy of the individual’. (Fabre. 427-28)

Hence, Richard Wright at a certain point of his career has thought that he had a type for the relationship between the individual and the society. This means that the community which is the literary work he sought to create might also be a metaphor for social community. Image is to unity as individual is to society. The unity of novel is obtained naturally from separate images, as society is created naturally from the individuals that physically constitute it. Richard Wright was known for his ability to move smoothly from discussing social conditions to writing about literary forms.

'*On Literature*', is a non-published lecture, it discussed the deficiencies of proletarian literature. Richard Wright directed his interest to the ways in which a writer can creatively project himself into his story in order to make his story more living, not in a pure journalistic way. To reach this way of life, he considered this idea of reemphasizing on characters, focusing on images of people rather than on their environment.

Richard Wright is known to be among the first African-American writers that have dealt with existentialism in his fiction. In this respect, his novels *Native Son* and *The Outsider* achieve an incredible accuracy in displaying the struggle between the individual and the society. Wright depicts Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon as the historical rebel and the metaphysical rebel, but he also brings out their limits, which helps us to see Wright's existentialism.

#### **4. The Writings of Richard Wright in the 1930's**

The 1930's were a period that presented an altered political landscape in the United States for African Americans. It was the era following the immediate effects of the First World War, the waves of southern Black migrants in flight from post reconstruction and Jim Crow nightmares and in Harlem; the romantic nationalism and Garveyism and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the New York stock exchange crash of 1929.

Richard Wright was familiar with a quarterly entitled *Blueprint*, and he was very excited when it first launched. *Blueprint* is a black American quarterly that deals in particular with the problem of nationalism for black writers, and Wright was attracted to that new quarterly. Richard Wright was beginning to build a clear idea about what

kind of contribution to black American writing he would make during the next few years of his life. Wright's writings from 1937 to 1941 were concentrated on issues related to nationalism. He even stated that he was very thrilled when his nationalist writings first appeared because according to Richard Wright:

‘For the first time in Negro history problems such as nationalism in literature, perspective, the relation of the Negro to politics and social movements were formulated and discussed’ (Wright. *‘Negro Writers’*.7)

Wright's literary treatment of nationalism remains advanced in comparison to many contemporary theorists that did not reveal the mysteries of the deep psychology of nationalism. Like many of his peers, Wright viewed nationalism as a historical phenomenon which is called ‘imagined communities’ i.e. for people who are anonymous to each other but wish for social unity. (Anderson, Benedict) To explain more, ‘Imagined Communities’ is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson. It is different from an actual community because it is based on every day, face to face interaction between its members. Anderson believed that a nation is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who are part of that group.

Richard Wright had specific plans regarding his contribution to the quarterly. It appears clearly in his *‘Blueprint for Negro Writing’* in which he attempts to formalize what he considered to be the appropriate ideological standpoint for African American literature and to argue that black creative writing should be accorded a narrative centrality in the lives of African Americans. Wright complains about the fact that, for African Americans,

‘The productions of their writers should have been something of a guide in their daily living is a matter which seems never to have been raised seriously.’ (Wright. ‘*Blueprint for Negro Writing*’.53)

In one of the best known and most controversial passages in the essay, Wright asserts that,

‘Generally speaking, negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, prim and decorous ambassadors who went a- begging to white America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro is inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. For most part these artistic ambassadors were conceived as though they were French poodles who do clever tricks’ (Wright. ‘*Blueprint for Negro Writing*’.55)

Wright claims that Negro writers have to look through the medium of their craft to play as meaningful a role in the affairs of men as do other professionals.

Wright insolently proposes that it was because of the kind of literature presented in the Harlem Renaissance that African Americans did not achieve the desired position. (Wright. ‘*Blueprint for Negro Writing*’.55)

Wright stood by the Communist ideology, and he thought that it should replace the ideology of nationalism. Wright considered nationalism as a divisive ideology that cannot help in the emancipation of the working class men. But Wright’s most significant contribution is his synthesis after a long analysis of the Marxist and psychoanalytic concepts in his

effort to portray critically the gradual harm that comes from nationalistic ideas to the infantile desires of working class men. For Wright, the danger posed by nationalism was its unconscious appeal to the psyches of male workers. (Wright. *'Blueprint for Negro Writing'*.60)

It is important to note that Richard Wright was an African American who felt he must escape Southern racism to maintain his emotional and intellectual integrity, Wright did not particularly identify with the Black writers of the 1920's Harlem Renaissance, a cultural flowering which he tended to view as exotic and primitive.

Through using various techniques, his writing, more powerful than elegant, typically presented an implicit challenge to the reader in terms of how to take action in response to the collective troubles facing humanity. In the political choices of their own lives, Richard Wright comprised the unifying efforts of workers and international anti-fascism. Such a record establishes an honorable contribution to the worldwide radical tradition that subsequently became best-known through the debates about the 'engaged' writer and 'commitment' in literature that gripped intellectual circles in France after World War II.

By the mid of the 1930's, Wright acknowledged that he had passed through, and beyond, an attraction to Black Nationalism, and he held a profound respect for African-American folk culture in the South. (Stanford. 9) Yet he looked upon traditional Black culture as peasant-based and beneficial principally to survival in rural and agricultural settings; the mounting 20th-century conditions of capitalist modernity and urban industrial life demanded that Black writers benefit themselves of the most sophisticated accomplishments of the West. (Wright. *'Blueprint for Negro Writing'*. 53

His highest interest in Black culture centered on religious strivings, which he had studied intensely when he lived in Mississippi with his maternal grandmother, Margaret Wilson.<sup>28</sup> Wright's observations about her ability to cope with the cruelty of Jim Crow by living in a supernatural world profoundly affected his view of Black American life. Later, Wright came to see a resemblance in the operations of the ideology of the American Communist Party. Communists attached comparable emotional needs but then claimed to restrain their mental picture of a just society with logical analysis aimed at non-spiritual ends.

However, in the 1930's, as a politically committed writer, Wright passionately fit in to the significant section of Great Depression activists that settled precipitously toward a romanticized image of the Soviet Union and an estimation of the United States Communist movement as the advance guard of humanity. This kind of viewpoint then seemed necessary by the astonishing events of the 1917 disturbance in Russia, along with the ideals and brilliant writings of its Bolshevik leaders. Wright and others witnessed at first hand the unmatched heroism and self-sacrifice of U.S. Communists who positioned anti-racism at the top of the political agenda and organized the industrial working class. Apart from a few individualist authors such as William Faulkner and Zora Neale Hurston, it is hard to find major U.S. writers unaffected by the mass of involuntary orientation by organisms or one of its parts to the Left encouraged by international events and encouraged by Communism.

Wright's break with Communism is best remembered in connection with '*I Tried to Be a Communist*,' a memoir telling his involvements in Chicago. Wright gives a picture of U.S. Communists as narrow-minded, arrogant and intolerant fanatics, setting the stage for his 1953 novel, *The Outsider*, which further portrays them as

power-hungry and murderous. Yet in his political practice of the 1950's, Wright would challenge the paradigm of the Cold War 'anti-communist.' As an alternative to ordering Soviet aggression and rebellion, he gave highest consideration to his solid opposition to Western colonialism, which he identified with capitalism itself.

(Wald.[www.solidarity-us.org](http://www.solidarity-us.org). January-February 2009)

Wright's political difficulties with the Communist Party; in reality, originated in his involvement with African-American party members in Chicago, including leaders such as Harry Haywood and Oliver Law, who tried to intimidate him into conventional behavior. His suspicions grew into a critique of policy at the time of World War II when he lived in New York City. During the 18 months of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, 1939-1941, Wright was politically comfortable. The Communist movement focused on the colonialist crimes of the West, made U.S. racism its prime target, and appeared to break with the liberalism of the Popular Front support of President Roosevelt who in fact, with Eleanor Roosevelt, might even be identified with the wealthy Daltons in *Native Son*. (Wald.[www.solidarity-us.org](http://www.solidarity-us.org). January-February 2009)

In *Lawd Today!* and *Native Son*, Wright exhibits urban black men who fell in the trap of the problem of racilized men who struggle with the Oedipal complex. Wright's urban protagonists keep deeply the secret feeling of interaction between the black boy and the white father relation and are, hence; psychologically caught between a push to act the black boy who gives away to whites and a desire to be the man, which involves behavior associated with the powerful white father. (Dawahare.455)

Wright's protagonists search to compensate for their determined feeling of weakness through fantasies of a full controlled world. These fantasies come from what they



have seen as behaviours from the white fathers and try to imitate them. His protagonists' psychology is basically the result of the social, psychological, and political factors. These protagonists unconsciously relate the acquisition of manhood with the possession of a black motherland. (Dawahare.456)

With regard to the appeal of nationalism, Wright is a great supporter but he thinks that such an ideology is incapable of self-reflexively addressing the precondition for its being. Wright believed that because of the racist class society, nationalism cannot be applicable. Wright believed that it is necessary to reveal and diminish the subconscious appeal of nationalism in order to make it possible for the working class men to progress politically and not be determined by the self-defeating logics of American racism and nationalism.

In order to find the Black Cultural Nationalist resolution of the personality crisis mentioned before, and figure it out, it is necessary to work through Wright's cultural history of black Americans, though Richard Wright was influenced by the Communist Party's comprehension of nationalism.

The Communist Party as well as Wright believed that blacks had a common national culture that originally arose from a plantation-feudal system of the South. The foundation of this modern black culture lies in the African American folk tradition of the blues, spirituals, work songs, and folk tales. Black social institutions, such as the black church, black sports, black business, black schools, and a black press, represent, in short an African American style of life in America. (Dawahare.451-66)

Despite his supportive actions for the communists he disagreed with it on a very important idea in which the Communist Party believed that the Black cultural

nationalism is the result of forced common experiences of slavery and segregation that produced an unwanted common black culture. Wright argues that the Negro people did not ask for [their cultural nationalism], and deep down, though they express themselves through their institutions and adhere to this special way of life, they do not want it now. This special existence was forced upon them from without by lynch rope and other means of harassment. (Wright. 'Blueprint for Negro Writing'.99)

Richard Wright saw that nationalism of such a kind is unstable because it is seen as a social history of black Americans, as their historical process. A process with a very different direction as he stated in 'Twelve Million Voices'; he saw it as a complex movement of degraded feudal folk toward a twentieth-century urbanization that has occurred at a historically rapid pace. He believed that the black conscious is, approximately, similar and cultural community resulting from provincial, southern material conditions was in the process of being motivated by modernization. Since this kind of nationalism is forced upon African Americans, according to him it is unstable. As he asserts that:

'It is in industry that we encounter experiences that [nationalism aims] to break down the structure of our folk characters and project us toward the vertex of modern urban life... we are gripped and influenced by the world-wide forces that shape and mold the life of Western civilization.'

(Wright. Twelve Black Voices.115)

In this case Wright sees that the liberation of the feudal black peasantry does not lay in preserving or developing a black national culture in the south, but in a historical overcoming of the black identity and cultural nationalism. (Dawahare.466) To say it differently, Wright accepts temporarily the unified cultural identity of the post-war

'*New Negro*', since he favors a multicultural identity in the process of further socialization by modernity.

In his numerous articles that he wrote for the *Daily Worker*, one does not find any article in which he praises the Communist Party's desires for a black republic in the Southern Black Belt. He praised the historical movement toward modernity wherever he saw it. It appears clearly through one of his articles, he celebrates a former slave woman who was an active communist in Harlem. He said in that article that ['that woman had seen the face of her country had changed for many times during her 71 years and still waiting for other changes.'](Dawahare.466) That woman was aware that the movement from a southern slave to an urban communist is an element and a package that enfolds her progressive history and the history of Blacks itself.

Though Wright identifies a cultural nationalism in decline, he believes that writers should be aware of the varying degrees of cultural nationalism among black Americans. Wright believed that if Negro writers want to shape and influence the consciousness of the Negro people they must direct their messages to them through the ideologies and, adopted attitudes that surround their lives.

Richard Wright was careful to portray his characters as cultural nationalists through representing contextually grades of cultural nationalism in his characters. This appears clearly in his male urban protagonists from the 1930's like Jake Jackson the lead character of '*Lawd Today!*' and Bigger Thomas in '*Native Son*'. Jake and Bigger are representatives of Wright's view of what happens when a first generation of male feudal folks is exposed to the contemporary principles and practices prevalent in Chicago.

Wright said that Bigger and Jake are obscure and vague cultural nationalists because they have a difficulty in identifying with their parents, black culture, which means that they are forced to be identified as blacks. Jake and Bigger are vague Negro nationalists because of their deep hatred of white people which functions the place of a strong folk identity to toughen their identification as black. Wright states that:

‘Bigger had become estranged from the religion and the folk culture of his race’

(Wright. *‘How Bigger was Born’*. 527)

Richard Wright’s characters are also met with what most African Americans have lived through at a certain time in their lives; experienced the gap of having two cultures or having the sentiment of belonging nowhere. This notion of placeless is called by Richard Wright the ‘No Man’s Land’ notion. It is essential to draw attention to the point that, only Wright’s male urban protagonists are caught, and have this feeling of placelessness. They developed such feeling because they are given by the patriarchal organization of American society more social communication with urban culture than his female characters.

Bigger and Jake are the lead characters of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and *Lawd Today!* They were both presented to the readers of these works as characters who grew up in the South. They did whatever it takes for the soul purpose of not being at home but on the streets or at work in civilization. With such actions, both characters alienated themselves further from their Southern origins.

For Wright, the correct Black Nationalism is only an issue for his urban male characters. Jake and Bigger have always imagined a black state that they fantasy about controlling. Both characters see their black nationalism as being made up of two inseparable parts: freedom that come along with self-determination. This escape

towards the imaginative world can be seen as a way to escape from the U. S racist system.

Consequently, that feeble cultural nationalism that specifies and characterizes most of Richard Wright's urban protagonists is supported by a black nationalism that fantasies about the creation of a black national state as a solution to escape from the racist ideologies of the United States. To say it differently, the imaginative world that the characters develop is understood as the psychological consequence of the racist domination of post-war nationalisms. Both Jake and Bigger have visions of a black state that they would like to rule. While undeveloped, their black nationalism associates freedom with national self-determination.

Consequently again, the feeble cultural nationalism of most of Richard Wright's urban protagonists is complemented by a black nationalism that believes in the creation of a black national state in order to solve the problem of racism in the United States. Jake and Bigger attraction to Black Nationalist visions can be seen through two major reasons; the first one is the psychological consequences of American racism and the second one is the predominance of post-war nationalisms in the 1930's.

Wright made it clear through many of his works that black men ['have a specific predictable economy through history that is conditioned by a complex racist discourse and practice that lends itself to nationalist's appeal'] (Dawahare. 451-66). He tried to show as clear as possible that the Jim Crow education of blacks in the South and the several forms of racism either explicitly or implicitly in the North gathered and worked side by side into an attempt to halt and put the psychological development of black American men on a hold.

White people always mean to minimize the self-esteem of Black Americans even for themselves i.e. they push African Americans to look down to themselves. Their address to black adult men as boys is just to show them that they are subordinates and even less, children. With this behaviour, Whites attempt to put men with women at the same level, shows nothing but to mean that black men are as helpless as black women. It is important to bear in mind that in this racist, patriarchal society there is no head of people but the white men. The white men have the power to control the helpless, dependent, and ignorant black boy. In order to keep the black men in his subordinate position this kind of psychological detention is necessary. Though it is necessary tool to white oppression, the legal arrest of black men signifies the failure of the ideology of racism.

Wright tried to explain through his works that black males try to become men through imitating the white father; in other words the good obedient black boy obeys the white fathers' example and tries his best to become like him. As an illustration of their imitation to white people is a scene in *Native son* that happens between Bigger the lead character and Gus his friend. [‘The two guys smoke. They watch the sky and make small-talk about the weather. Then, they see a plane writing something in the sky. While it slowly etches words out (‘USE SPEED GASOLINE’), they discuss how fast planes fly. Bigger claims he could fly a plane if he had a chance, but Gus mocks him, saying he wouldn’t be able to fly because he’s black. Bigger is resentful of the way white people treat blacks. Gus, on the other hand, just thinks that the world is how it is and there’s no use getting all upset about it. Bigger suggests that they "play white," a game where they imitate white folks.’] (Gallantz. Bromberg.37) Wright’s male characters needed to be unconscious in order to internalize the racist

developmental logic. In order to make submission automatic, it is necessary to remove the conscious of the black subordinates.

It is important to mention here that if one desires to make submission instinctive, it has to be unconscious. It is necessary to make it part of the black men's preconscious behavior pattern. (Fabr.71) In the case of African Americans, their behavior is unconsciously controlled by the superior ideology of the white men. In other words, the process of psychological development of African Americans is put on hold because it is subconsciously controlled by racist ideology, and even the super ego of African Americans contain the white father's judgment. Bigger states that he knows that white people are present in every part of his life even within him, he states: ['White folks, live down here in my stomach']. (Fabre.71)

The American working class is made up of black and white workers who are both made to feel helpless under capitalism and try to find ways to escape the infantile and nationalism. In other words, white workers pretend to be strong but during the depression era they were as helpless as the black workers. This is the way that the psychological status of the working class men was depicted. In the literary works directed to the category of the working class man, many works speak about the powerful white workers who live under the feeling of powerlessness. But in the case of Wright, it is necessary to point out how he sees the psychological understanding of the urban black men historically; in other words that racism hurts the black working class men more.

Wright's black male protagonists want to escape from the material conditions like racism and low wages. The racist society in which Wright's protagonists live is a painful, humiliating and self-negating space that calls forth utopian spaces, including

Black Nationalist. These idealized states are gone with the wind with the developmental conflicts of males as mediated by American racism and inter-war nationalism. To summarize what was said before, Wright tries to address to his readers the question of what happens when every working class man feels socially underestimated, treated and stereotyped as a boy.

The first point to be made here is that Wright's urban black protagonists have absorbed the imposed boy status, and therefore seek ways to take control of their lives, that is the option to act the boy or to become a man, which, though certainly a major theme in many of Wright's stories are not mutually exclusive. One finds the two forces to be a boy and to be a man in the character of Jake from *Lawd Today!*

Jake is described as being unhappily married, a cautious, person who works as a postal clerk, and who spends his free time with a few co-workers. He is a typical Wright character; Jake is full of anger and he is unable to define why he shows such sentiments. His major problem is that every aspect of his life is working against him especially being black and belonging to the working class, all that helps the reader of this work to classify it as a naturalistic novel. It is a naturalistic novel because it depicts life as accurately as possible, without artificial distortions of emotion, idealism, and literary convention. It asserts that human beings exist entirely in the order of nature. Human beings do not have souls or any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond the biological realm of nature, and any such attempts to engage in a religious or spiritual world are acts of self-delusion and wish-fulfillment.

The end of the naturalistic novel is usually unpleasant or unhappy, perhaps even tragic. Naturalists emphasize the smallness of humanity in the universe; they remind



readers of the immensity, power, and cruelty of the natural world, which does not care whether humanity lives or dies. Jake's childish reaction to his oppression is most obvious in his desire to leave the harsh realities of white America and flee to some imagined, joyful, child-like state. To escape from his harsh reality, Jake develops one of these joyful states as being taken care of by his idealized mother figure. In one passage, for example, he fantasizes about a woman with whom he feels like a 'child nestling. . . into a mother's bosom' (Wright. *Lawd Today!*. 36).

In another passage he identifies with the 'little boy blue' from a popular song who has helplessly lost but still desires a maternal woman who is 'so beautiful,' 'so wonderful,' and 'so divine' (Wright. *Lawd Today!*. 36). In other words, he imagines and fantasies about a satisfaction of whose absence he suffers in his life in the form of a regressive fantasy of being secure at the mother's breast. For Jake, the breast is a symbol of a lost place of love, security, pleasure, and self-preservation.

Jake has always desired to be taken care of, meaning that he suffers from a bigger problem that of not taking responsibility for his response to the painful feelings such as anger, jealousy, bitterness, envy, and hatred. These sentiments are caused by Jake's oppressive circumstances. Jake's attraction to the easy repair for his life, whether through maternal fantasies, gaming, medical antidotes, or even alcohol abuse is very disturbing and a sign of irresponsibility. Wright depicts Jake's blame of his wife's condition saying that: 'his eyes grew misty with tears, tears of hatred for Lil and tears of pity for himself. My life is just all shot to hell. I wouldn't be in all this mess if it wasn't for her.' (Wright. *Lawd Today!*. 20-23)

Jake plays the role of the helpless victim because he does not take responsibility for his feelings. He verbally and physically abuses his wife because she depends upon

him. He does so because he depreciates his wife since she is completely different from an idealized mother figure that satisfies his needs and removes the pains and frustrations he feels from his oppression. He attacks and threatens to kill her because he plans and wants to destroy what he sees as his own weakness, his own sense of social and political helplessness, dependency, and, in a word, emasculation, all socially gendered as feminine. In other words, the whole black society is kept unable to defend or to depend on itself; it is dependent on the white society as a woman is dependent on a man.

At the end of the novel, after passing through a series of defeats, he returns home telling himself that he was going back to teach her a lesson, that he will show her who the boss is. The sign of power for the emasculated Jake is the seemingly almighty boss. Jake hates himself and Lil because he hides deep in his subconscious his feminized boy status. (Wright. *Lawd Today!*. 214-216)

Jake is clearly a victim of racism and class oppression. But Wright made it clear that Jake's irresponsible acts are damaging his and Lil's life. Jake's reaction to his unfair situations, debt, discrimination, and poverty is not justified by Wright. The scene that shows this is when Jake meets with the postal Board of Review for his abuse of his wife. He argues that nobody can blame him for a crazy woman, and that everything she said to the Board was lies. He even goes so far as to say that, since he is proud to be black, he would never do something to disgrace his race

At the end, Jake and the Board are shown as equally wrong and bad. The black member of the Board tells Jake that he should be handling his personal affairs. Paradoxically, the Board is a kind of authority to control and handle his life, as defined by the paternalistic class relations that position Jake as the helpless, bad boy

to be judged by primarily white fathers/bosses, and one of their black lackeys or 'Uncle Toms' who wield a certain amount of power over him. They in large part produce and then punish Jake's boyish behavior. To conclude, Jake did not choose perpetual flight from his reality to his world of fantasies to forget his pain. His last attempt to escape was to Chicago, but he realizes that for a black man there is no difference between the South and the north.

Speaking now about, the protagonist of *Native Son*; Bigger Thomas With whom Richard Wright presents a more fully developed character, a better representative of the urban black male. Bigger is also a character on the point of losing control of his actions. He is the abject of the racist Chicago. He lives in a tiny rat infested room, to be more specific in a ghetto.

Though Bigger and Jake are fighting to control their lives, which is leading us to the issue of nationalism and, exactly, the second cause in Wright's black male protagonists' attraction to Black Nationalism, the cultures of nationalism of the 1930's that Wright depicts in his novels. Since Wright's urban male protagonists are caught in a 'No Man's Land' of disbelief, somewhere between their parents' Southern folk beliefs and urban, mass-cultural ideologies.

*Lawd Today!* is a study of cultures of nationalism in America around 1935 and their effects on identity formation. Wright tells us that Bigger 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 a time of fascistic civilization, Wright's male urban protagonists make up for their sense of being children, arrested in *Lawd Today!* by identifying with patriarchal, nationalist figures. At several points in *Lawd Today!* Jake

has Black Nationalist fantasies. In one scene Jake and his friends witness a Garveyite parade whose banner reads, 'ONWARD TO AFRICA', Wright's depiction of the parade is highly satirical. The black nationalists come off as comical, deceived, and ironically influenced by the very white imperialists they theoretically reject.

However, on hearing the leader's title 'The Supreme Undisputed Exalted Commander of the Allied Imperial African War Councils unto the Fourth and Last Generation' (Wright. *Lawd Today!*. 110), Jake exclaims by calling the name of the lord and wondering whether these people were right. Remarkably, after criticizing the nationalists about their program to go back to Africa, Jake and his friends agreed with the music of the parade, which recalls some memories of those Sunday mornings in the South when they had attended church. Immediately following this Jake wonders that maybe those people were right in calling for going back to Africa. Later on he imagines himself in Africa

## Chapter Three

### Amiri Baraka's Influences and Writing

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## Introduction

LeRoi Jones was born in Newark, New Jersey, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1934. After spending three years in the U.S. Air Force, he merged into the Beat Movement in Greenwich Village. LeRoi Jones became Amiri Baraka after the assassination of Malcolm X, and became involved in the Black Nationalist poetry. He later joined the Marxist movement. After a trip to Cuba, Baraka broke ties with the Beats movement in an attempt to concentrate his efforts on racial politics.

After becoming Amiri Baraka, he changed his life after his beliefs changed to the point of rejecting his marriage to Hettie Cohen. Baraka became a black nationalist and moved to Harlem where he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School. The company dissolved after a few months, and Baraka moved back to Newark and created the Spirit House Players. Baraka immersed himself completely in Newark, becoming a leader of the city's African-American community.

Amiri Baraka wrote more than 50 books in fiction, music criticism, essays, short stories, poetry and plays. In 1984, he published *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*. He taught at many universities, including the New School for Social Research, San Francisco State University and Yale University. Before retirement, he served as professor emeritus of Africana Studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook for 20 years.

This chapter aims to give a clear idea about the influences that helped in forming such a radical writer. It also shows the price that Amiri Baraka paid for his assimilation and absorption of white values. Besides presenting Baraka's beliefs about the kind of art that African Americans are supposed to present if they desire to guide their people to a better life.

This chapter is divided into four parts, the first part treats the multiple phases that the writer has gone through from being LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka. The other two parts present Baraka's writings and what helped in turning him from a devotee of the Western culture to a non-assimilationist supporter. Each part of this chapter works together in showing the reasons that pushed Baraka to work to convince his people that they have to refuse to make compromises when it comes to who they really are. Amiri Baraka believed that Afro-American writers defended social violence as necessary to self-defense and nation-building. Baraka believed strongly that through a show of deadly force, African Americans eventually would be able to build up a Black world where there will be no more killing.

### **3. Amiri Baraka's Influences**

#### **3.1 Baraka's Formative Years:**

Amiri Baraka was born Everett Leroy Jones in Newark, New Jersey in 1934. His father worked as a postal employee and his mother was a social worker. Jones had a normal childhood. His parents were very supportive and gave him impetus through his educational and social exchanges providing thus, a protected but normal childhood.

In his later interviews, he made it clear that his parents were very supportive and protective as well, he explained:

‘For them two Negroes right there, they knew what they were going to do, they were going to give us all the information in the world, and they were going to equip us to go out and fight the white’ (Ya Salam.

Historical Overviews of the Black Arts Movement’ .2009)

Through this statement, it is sure that his parents played an important role in his life. They prepared Jones to his coming days and what he learned in his early days would help him in his role as a Black Nationalist and activist. It is worth noting that even as a young child he was completely aware of his blackness which created in him the feeling of conflict about race and the expectations of American culture began to rise.

Baraka's childhood was marked by his over-protective parents and teachers who did their best in preparing him for the battles that awaited him. He learned a lot about race in America through his family's experiences. He stated once that at the knees of his granny, he heard stories of lynching and white supremacists. Through his grandmother's tales, he came to know the black history of America, the history that is not taught at schools.

When Jones was a student at Newark's Barringer High School, he concentrated on his education and was even involved in the school's newspaper. Due to his excellent works, he was allowed to graduate two years earlier than his peers. When he graduated to Howard University, he made the first changes to his name's writing and pronunciation to LeRoi (Thompson. 83). At the same University, Jones started forming his views about the black middle class which had abandoned and differentiate itself against its own cultural heritage and supported white culture. He said in one of his interviews that Howard University taught students how to pretend to be white. Jones called these blacks false Negroes, he stated

'Howard University shocked me into realizing how desperately sick the Negro could be, how he could be led into self-destruction and how he would not realize that it was the society that had forced him into a great sickness.' (qtq. Al-Otibi.46)



These so called false Negroes refuse to identify themselves with the mainstream black America but still could not benefit from assimilation into the white structure. The middle class blacks created their own society which Jones felt that it would be beneficial to the black culture. To Jones, the middle class came to represent the failure of black arts, since middle-class blacks were in the best position within the community to explore literature, drama, and the arts beyond the mainstream concepts of white America.

The middle class in all societies is underdeveloped, according to Frantz Fanon, and so is the black middle class. This class has no economic power besides it has no chance to modify or replace the bourgeoisie of any country. From a literary point of view, Jones thought and considered the idea that the black middle class in America is playing no important or effective role in the creation of black art. In one of his writings he stated:

‘In most cases the Negroes who found themselves in a position to pursue some art[...]have been members of the Negro middle class, a group that has always gone out of its way to cultivate any mediocrity, as long as that mediocrity was guaranteed to prove to America[...]that they were not really who they were, i.e., Negroes’

(Martin. [www.english.illinois.edu](http://www.english.illinois.edu). March10)

In this statement one sees that Baraka thinks that most of the Negroes, who sought to integrate themselves in a wave of art, were part of the Negro middle class. That group chose to show to America a non Negro face.

Jones believed that the black middle class would never be capable exploring or producing a special art form since they still wanted to impress the white America and

tried to show them that they are not blacks. (Martin. [www.english.illinois.edu](http://www.english.illinois.edu). March 10) Such kind of blacks had completely forgotten who they really were and embraced the white culture with all the power it has.

After Jones graduated from Howard in 1953, he joined the United States Air Force and then started to think of himself as a writer. During this period, Jones read the Western classics, building a foundation for his later career as a writer. Jones describes this point in his life where he began to think of himself as a complete intellect and kept on reading Joyce's *Ulysses* or T.S. Eliot's writings.

As a child, Jones was over protected by his parents who explained to him how racist the world is. But Jones experienced the mechanisms of racism personally when he joined the air force, besides learning about literature. Jones experienced the bitterness of racism that was directed towards black men and realized how harsh life was for all his people. He even stated that the Air Force had made him understand the white sickness. It shocked him and awoke his attention to what was happening to his people. He stated:

‘The Air Force made me understand the white sickness. It shocked me into realizing what was happening to me and others. By oppressing Negroes the whites have become oppressors twisted in the sense of doing bad things to people and justifying them.’ (qtq. In Al-Otibi. 48)

The military years made Jones more aware of the lies and hypocrisies of America. Shortly after his dismissal from the Air Force for suspicion of supporting the communists and possessing some of their books, he started reacting to racism and American hypocrisy. The writing of the 1950's differed from those of the 1920's in the subjects treated. On the one hand, the 1920's writings were focused on entertaining the audience, no social problems treated.

On the other hand, the 1950's raised their hands in protest for civil rights and social problems. Even Jones protested in his 1950's writings on social and political inequality. The Black art Movement was built on such basis.

The first movement that LeRoi encountered with in New York was the Beats Movement. He was remarkably able to identify with this need for community and with rebellion against a status-quo. Jones was very attracted to the Beats because they had no trust in the Western Culture, and he liked and appreciated their self-philosophy. The Beats philosophy of the self was described as being a wonderful world which existed just beyond the ordinary. The only thing that can tie one to their disgusted shared reality was that person's own stubborn reliance on the senses. They had no interest in politics because this would prevent them from entering to the world of the soul. (Stiles. 115-118)

Though being a black man Jones tried to integrate into the Beats, but he found himself an outsider and exiled- because of the color of his skin- from both the mainstream society that the Beats' rebelled against, and the popular culture that they accepted as an alternative (Stiles. 115-118). The ideal shared by the Beats and Baraka was to look beyond, or rise above, racial barriers. Baraka explained to David Ossman in *The Sullen Art: Interviews with Modern American Poets*: 'I'm fully conscious all the time that I'm an American Negro, because it's part of my life. But I also know that if I want to say, 'I see a bus full of people,' I don't have to say, 'I am a Negro seeing a bus full of people.' I would deal with it when it has to do directly with the poem, and not as a kind of broad generalization that doesn't have much to do with a lot of young writers today who are Negroes.' (Stiles. 115-118)

But Jones faced the reality that the counter culture was not keeping him safe or away from the stereotyped ideas that fill the American society. The Beats had their own

troubles, especially those of fear of homosexuality, 'homophobia'; besides the problem of hatred, male excessive patriotism or 'chauvinism'. Due to all that, Jones found his artistic sanctuary as full of differences and inequalities as the rest of the nation.

Though his young age, Jones provided so much to the Beat movement. During this time he married and worked with his wife to edit *Yugen* to publish East Village Poets. During the late 1950's he co-edited the literary newsletter '*Floating Bear*'. The *Floating Bear* aimed to bring together intellectuals who share the same ideas and appeal to friends of artists, since it followed the Beat era publication. A vital relationship with Ginsberg developed. Baraka recalled in the *Village Voice*:

'We talked endlessly about poetry, about prosody, about literature and it is clear to me that my poetry would not have evolved as it has without A. G.'s ideas. He let me in on poetry as a living phenomenon, a world of human concern, and literature as a breathing force in one's life, the task of a lifetime. I absorbed and grew because of these ideas, and even in resisting some of Ginsberg's other ideas, I still grew and developed because of contact with them.' (Goldsworthy. Minderovic.

'Baraka, Amiri 1934-.)

His poetry presented in 1961 under the name of '*Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note*' was considered very much influenced by the Beat style. He aimed to attack the commercial orientation of society. (qtq. In Al Otibi) Among the multiple themes treated in the poems, there was one about the racial identity and how he desired to break away from inherited conventions. This shows that even in the early days of his career Jones struggled with his racial consciousness.

Jones was one of those exceptional writers who wanted to produce literature that can touch all aspects of the human life. Overcoming the stereotyped ideas of racism, segregation, civil rights, and African American identity was a goal aimed by Jones. He wanted to be seen as an explorer of the self and culture as experienced not as forced upon blacks through the notion of race. In Jones's collection of poems the poems were characterized by a deep sense of despair, alienation, and self-depreciation. Besides this they reflected the Beats' rejection of the pressures exercised by the forces of convention pretense and materialism. (qtq. In Al Otibi.3)

The Beats called for keeping themselves away from the needs of the self and society. Unlike Jones who was attracted to action, The Beats concentrated on the search for the soul and hoping to transcend rather than overcome the materialism and capitalism inherent in the structures of American society. This specific point pushed Jones to give up on the ideals of the Beats and decided to go to battle for civil rights. As a black American who struggled with racism in all aspects of his life he could not alienate himself from the civil rights struggle. At this period, Jones combined his accumulated experiences with individualism and nonconformity in his civil rights appeal.

Marxism was a marking point in Jones's views, he rebelled against the Beats ideals. He stated that 'Now there could be absolutely no ties with whites, and certainly not any intimate ones'. During an eye opening trip to Cuba, Jones started to struggle with feelings of discontent especially after he started to acknowledge that his intellect has been formed by the principles of white men not by free black experience. The trip to Cuba made him see the reality that his intellect was not doing any good that he wished to do to his black people. The effect of white culture runs deeply throughout his work, especially during this time. He even doubted everything he knows especially during

this period. Consequently, Jones started searching and digging into his childhood love and appreciation for superheroes and how they showed and reacted towards wrong and right through their various adventures.

In a poem he said that they taught him that evil needed to be destroyed and that he saw it every weekend. Though now he is old, he still believes in those heroes. He stated:

‘They taught us that evil needed to be destroyed. I saw it every weekend. I heard it on every radio show I listened to. That evil needed to be destroyed. And I believed that impressionable as I was at [that] young age but the trick is [that] I still believe it!’ (Baraka. *The Autobiography of Leroi Jones*. 39)

In Havana, Jones met the real heroes who were struggling to make the social system better. At that point, Jones struggled between the Beats’ life style which was characterized by the prohibited inaction and his belief in heroic action as personified in the action heroes of his childhood and his growing anger over the inequalities in the American society. At the beginning, before he breaks ties with the Beats, Jones believed in the Beats doctrine which is the belief in the life of the soul as the only one that mattered consequently he tried to apply this belief in his life.

After his visit to Cuba he wrote an essay entitled ‘*Cuba Libre*’ in which he describes the moment that opened his eyes on his inaction by a group of Mexican intellectuals. They shouted at him that his Beats based philosophy of intellect was strongly tested by a careful need for social actions. Jones said that one young Mexican poet almost left him in tears because of the way he was stamping his foot on the floor, shouting in wonder at how Jones wants to cultivate his soul while he leads such an ugly life. The

Mexican concludes saying that he has got millions of people who are starving which pushes him to write poems. In Jones own words describing the incident:

‘You want to cultivate your soul? In that ugliness you live in, you want to cultivate your soul? Well, we’ve got millions of starving people to feed, and that moves me enough to make poems out of.’ (qtq. in Al-Otibi. 18)

In this way Jones saw the embodiments of his childhood super-heroes trying to fight the villains of imperialism. The Beats belief in the spiritual self being at the root of awareness did not fit with Jones’s experiences as an African American, and he became aware of the absence of African American characters in the popular culture background, and this awareness became a factor in his inability to go beyond the suffering of the self. However, until this significant trip, Jones had done nothing to confront this fact. Later, he found himself more and more conflicted and forced to take his place on the side of the black community and culture.

Jones was caught and confronted with the injustices in America’s relationship to the black race. These opposing views created a personal and political conflict for the poet. It is said that Baraka found himself painfully caught between black and white cultures, communities, and identities. He gave up on white culture; it was not rash but the result of building personal tensions wherein he grew disappointed and unsatisfied with his friendships, wife, and literary influences.

Moving from White to black culture, it was not easy for Jones to turn from an observer to a militant. For a period of time, the Beats’ intellect and art was enough to Jones. Though still an outsider, he was accepted and embraced on an intellectual level and for his work as an artist. Before Jones’s break with the Beats in the mid-1960’s, he wrote a letter to the poet Ed Dorn. The letter spoke about his feelings toward the

Beat counterculture, about the wrong and right, and about the art of creating words.

Jones stated:

‘Only we, on earth, can talk of material existence as just another philosophical problem...Moral earnestness ought to be transformed into action. I know we think that to write a poem and be Aristotle’s God is sufficient. But I can’t sleep. And I do not believe in this [entire] relative [shit]. There is a right and a wrong. A good and a bad. And it’s up to me, you all of the so-called minds to find out. It’s only knowledge of things that will bring this moral earnestness.’ (Stiles. 115-118)

Jones believed that the struggle was mental and physical. Jones succeeded to leave the Beat movement behind and concentrated his effort to the creation of the black arts movement. By giving up on the Beat generation, his wife, his education behind his racial identity, he allowed himself to be defined by his new identity but this time in his own terms.

By the mid 1960’s, Jones started to understand that the soul that he believed in was a false soul since it was the product of Western culture- that was the Beat’s belief. Jones turned to the ego. He hoped to be seen as a writer not just a Negro writer who based his works on blackness. In a collection of poems entitled ‘*The Dead Lecturer*’ in which he speaks about the changes that he underwent from the Beat principles to what he became. He even began to reject peace with the whites and depicted images of violence as a means of reclaiming black rights. With this collection he participated in the development of national black consciousness. In 1965, Jones fully abandoned the



counterculture and his white family, leaving his wife Hettie and his children, to move first to Harlem and then to his hometown, Newark.

It is essential to mention here that by the mid 1960's; Jones changed his attitude from a jazz lover to a Black Nationalist. He started to understand that the soul, according to the Beats, was nothing more than a product of the western culture which they were fighting against its principles. He saw that such kind of soul is falsified and cannot be a home to the self. Jones explained in his interview concerning his change of ideology from desiring to be seen as a writer not just a Negro:

‘[A Negro writer has to base his work on his blackness], insistence of blackness might be its own worth. The real consciousness of being Black might affect your description of the lamp even if you don't say that. It might affect how you perceive the lamp. That's what I was wrestling with.’ (Ya Salaam. ‘Word Up- Kalamu's Words’. May 9, 2010)

In his conversion to Black Nationalism, Jones began to see that the quality of a person's daily life was of as much importance as, if not more than, that of the soul. His 1964 collection of poetry, *The Dead Lecturer*, reveals the full breadth of the changes he had undergone. Jones started to despise and refuse peace with whites and he even depicts images of violence as a means of reclaiming black rights. (qtq.in Maurice Lee. *The Aesthetics of LeRoi*).

Jones decided to dig deeper into the details of African American reality. He proved his commitment to be part of the development in the creation of the Black Art Movement. This movement investigated as deep as possible into socio-political aspects of society combining art and politics (Ya Salam. ‘A Conversation with Amiri

Baraka'). Its history goes back to the ideological basis of the movement had its roots in the Revolutionary Action Movement, a New York-based Nationalist organization; Ron Karenga's US, and the Nation of Islam.

### **3.2 Baraka's Black Awareness**

With the 1965 assassination of Malcolm X, LeRoi Jones became Ameer Barakat; which means the Blessed Prince. With his name changed, he sought to overcome the heritage of white oppression and re-identify black culture. The movement became, for Baraka and other writers and artists, a means to build a black arts culture separate from the official literature and popular art. They sought to bring the existence of black life not to a wider sphere of America but, rather, to black America. They did not seek to shed light on the black experience for white intellectuals who took an educated rather than personal interest in black American culture. Their work was constructed around ideas and the everyday, drawing on popular images and vernacular language unique to the black culture and community.

Black writers cannot deny the reality that they are the product and a part of the Black community. Whether Jones likes it or not, he draws from that same community his ideas that fill his works. Baraka always uses his racial identity as a source for his writings. If Black artists really wish to construct a Black Nationalist Movement, they have to draw art from the people, by the people and for them. In other words art has to have a purpose, communal and the most important thing is that it has to be committing, i.e. offers fruitful results.

Baraka remarried in 1967, this time to fellow Newark native and African American poet Sylvia Robinson, who later became Amina Baraka. In 1968, Baraka himself went through yet another slight alteration in name when he was given the name of Imamu

i.e.; spiritual leader, by Ron Karenga. In 1967, when Baraka met Karenga, the latter was the spiritual leader of the group US, following a philosophy known as Kawaida, a political philosophy of cultural action. In his essay 'On Black Art', Karenga outlines the strict constructive guidelines that black art should adhere to in furthering the Black Nationalist movement. Among Karenga's points are that Black Art must be for the people, by the people and from the people. In other words, art must be functional, collective and committing. (Karenga. [www.english.illinois.edu/](http://www.english.illinois.edu/)10 March 2009)

Baraka's early efforts to reconcile black and white were a failure, in his mind, and led to his radical redefinition of himself. In these efforts, the poet aimed to not only separate himself from but also destroyed the mythological figures inherent in his mind as a result of his formal and self-education. Baraka gave up on his superhero myth and replaced them with new black heroes.

In 1969, Baraka published *Black Magic*, presenting it as an illustration of his spiritual growth, but, through it, we can also see political growth. In the construction of his poetry, Baraka sought to follow Karenga's example using dialectical and specific language to express and articulate to the black audience the changing political and cultural patterns underlying Black Nationalism. It is necessary to use a new language to break the linguistic of their masters, and their master has to understand them using their dialect and language. Baraka and other Black Nationalists realized the importance of language in defining a culture.

In order to make poetry accessible to all black people, Baraka and other artists thought that it was necessary to recreate poetry. In this, Baraka and other Black Nationalist poets addressed their messages primarily to African Americans and African people all over America and the world and in these messages artists and politicians become one. By this we mean that the activist and the artist are identical

from this stage of Baraka's career onward, when, by definition, his art became political in slant, language, and reference. (Gibbing. Furious Flower. 10 March 2010)

Baraka had an important influence on the development of the black Arts Movement of the 1960's and the one of the 1990's. Baraka used his poetry to unite blacks in a common conscious to make a real effect on social and political change. Through his creative and political works, he was able to spread the message of Black Nationalism to the black community. Baraka's political activism revealed its benefit in changes in his own community, such as the election of Kenneth Gibson, the first black mayor of Newark, in 1970.

In the early 1970's, Baraka had a strong influence on black people and on their participation in the black rights movement on a national level. This is evident through his participation in the Pan African Congress of African Peoples in Atlanta in 1972 and the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana in 1974. Baraka's impact on black arts is of equal importance to that of his involvement in political activism. Amiri Baraka was one of the first people who introduced to black people the possibility that they can write 'Black' which means that they can write without denying their identity. Besides that they can write anything they wanted.

Though this stage of Baraka's life represented a break of consciousness in his denial of the white culture that created and shaped not only his rebellion but his art as well, he succeeded in creating a black standard for literature. When he broke at the end with the Black Nationalist movement, it was not with the same animosity that had accompanied his break with the Beat counterculture. Baraka's movement to Marxism was a smoother transition, as the two extremes met on the middle ground of social

critique that transcended racial identity and popular culture icons. (Ya Salam, 'A Conversation with Amiri Baraka'. 10 March 2010)

Baraka found little persistence in the Black Nationalist movement and its focus on race, with the change to Marxism, moved toward a more unified struggle of class. Besides moving towards Marxism meant moving towards a more united struggle of class, Baraka was deeply influenced by some Black Nationalist. Baraka's actions of the 1960's were based on these influences. Marxism produced new passion in the poet, which is evidenced in his work *Daggers and Javelins*. Baraka's work started to reflect a belief in the economic improvement of a society, which will help and lead to encourage the reception of art. To reach this goal the Marxist ideology was needed.

In 1974, Amiri Baraka shifted this time from Black Nationalist to Third World Marxism. Baraka and his fellow activists realized that Nationalism fixed only part of the problem; the real evils of the world existed in the economic and social organizations of capitalistic and imperialistic notions. The defeat of one race for the financial and social gain of another is, at its root, a class issue that cannot be overcome through the racial isolation instructed in Black Nationalism.

Baraka's works during this period, though less concerned with race than his works as a Black Nationalist, continued to call for an African American revolution. By becoming a Marxist, he began to think universally, with embracing all victims of Western imperialism without caring about their race or where they come from. As a result of his shift to Marxism, Baraka's world view also began to change. Baraka was not simply worried about the role of race in America but, rather, became concerned with the larger injustices designed and perpetuated under the control of capitalism.

Moreover, his work during this period shows a growing confidence in his views toward the federal government and its responsibility in injustice. Baraka indicated a changed view of the enemy from white culture to the United States government. Baraka's work began to show the generality of his new worldview, which believed that the problems of poor blacks are also the problems of poor whites and that capitalism is color-blind even if, historically, its victims have largely been non-white.

After being accused of inactivity, and from his conversion to Black Nationalism to the present, Baraka's poetry has sought to strengthen the development of black arts and consciousness by dismantling the chains of white society. Though the effects of racism on black America still persist, the struggle has extended for Baraka, and the enemy is no longer white America but the capitalist and Christian ideals that have shaped the politics of race. Baraka fought the Christian-imposed values and beliefs by converting to Islam. For him, it was a means of salvation. A new and different religion meant the abolition of the heritage and effect of the oppressor. Oppression was no longer limited, in Baraka's mind, simply to a racial level.

As a Marxist, Baraka went back to this original role as an activist. Cuba's trip opened his eyes and influenced Baraka's ideological change to Black Nationalism, but the experience came full circle in the broadening scope to the injustice that Baraka recognized beyond the problem of race. Baraka used language and art for his fight regardless of the struggle, whether racially or socially motivated. His art, word have been his chosen weapon of protest. Shaped by his experiences as a Beat and Black Nationalist, Baraka's journey into Marxism shows a resolution of political and black consciousness.

As a political artist, Baraka has formed this kind of Marxist approach to be more suitable to the nation as a whole. In the 1980's, the Reagan economy will put the whole nation through severe increase in economic and social inequality. Even at this stage in his career, Baraka's role as a leader for displaced African people was still very much alive. This appears clearly through Baraka's poem '*Somebody Blew Up America*,' in which he speaks about the issue with the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, he shows a global history of white dominant power and the effects of physical and cultural colonization.

This poem does not only reflect the history of enslavement of blacks in America and the responsibility of America for these slaughters but it also takes a worldview of centuries of murder, slavery, colonization, and exploitation. With '*Somebody Blew Up America*,' Baraka's career knew its peak and also marks a time of doubt and fear in America when free speech came under attack. This denial of free speech appears clearly when Baraka was deprived of his title as Poet Laureate of New Jersey for the publication of the poem.

With '*Somebody Blew Up America*,' Baraka once more made headlines and brought a lot of debate. With a list of 'who's,' the poet examines the corruption at the root of the terrorist attacks, the white capitalist power structure that created slavery, demolished minority governments, and slaughtered and conquered people throughout history. Here, Baraka was still tapping into his black consciousness and the historical implications of this consciousness, with the common thread running between the 'who's' of the poem as the role of government and social oppressor. (Ya Salaam, 'A Conversation with Amiri Baraka'). He stated that 'No, I will not apologize, I will not resign. In fact I will continue to do what I have appointed to do but still have not been paid to do.... We feel that this state and indeed this nation and this world is

desperately in need of the deepest and most profound human values that poetry can teach.’

Baraka’s provocative poetry has become so over the years since the first time he joined the Air forces. Then, with the Beats of Greenwich Village, Baraka has insisted on telling it like it is. His poetry shows that Baraka’s career and personality had gone through several moral and political developments in his effort to become clearer politically. But; what is sure is that he has always preserved an oppositional attitude to the status quo while balancing popular and experimental forms. Baraka’s pursuit of black consciousness was an important element not only in his poetry but also in his life. Blackness remained a central principle in his poetic development through imagery, language, and performance. Nevertheless, through his and other black artists’ efforts, forms and function have changed to reflect the realities of black America, decolonizing and reinventing African-American art from within. (Ya Salaam. ‘A Conversation with Amiri Baraka’).

#### **4. Baraka’s Black Maturity**

Through the changes that Baraka had gone through his life and the multiple experiences he had in the air force and the Beats made his ideological change and shift from one wave to another pretty much expected or at least predictable. Baraka’s cooperation with the Beats was many times interpreted as a double faced way that let Baraka separate himself and alienate it from a black sense of self (Amuta. 158-63). Since Baraka had always had a problem with blacks assimilating and absorbing the white culture, he refused completely assimilating whites ideas and culture. Baraka has always seen the white culture as a racial culture which has to be refused by blacks. Through this experience and point of view, he was able to realize himself as part of



the black community and a new black aesthetic tradition and, from this foundation, move to build a consciousness based on realism and action.

Baraka's movements from one movement to another did not stop but he goes further to adopt the values the Black Nationalism and with that he looked for a further exclusion of race, he reached a phase of cultural Nationalism. Baraka was described and remembered at that time as the poet who fights assimilation. Baraka said that African American writers of the times before him had done nothing more than making that events of the past more romanticized using the technic and the philosophy of whites. This makes it clear that Amiri Baraka is opposing completely the idea of adopting or assimilating the whites ideologies that he refused to adopt as a Marxist.

#### **4.1 Baraka's Nationalist Faze**

After he dropped the ideas of the Beat, Baraka joined the cultural Nationalism. Baraka was deeply concerned with sensitizing and communicating the changes that happened during the post-colonial period consciousness. He tried to present it in a language that is understood and comprehended by black people in order to provide a connection to and within the black community. Baraka's works of the period show his deep influence in the post-colonial period which appears clearly in his collection entitle *Black Magic*. This collection proves that Baraka's writings are easily located within the post-colonial context.

When Baraka moved to Newark, he realized that it is necessary that the writer sees and understands clearly the people who are the object of his poetry through investigating their lives. With this new understanding, it became clear that the poet could not go back to the forced colorless nature of the unconventional culture that its values are opposed to the established mainstream; his new political consciousness forever separated and distinguished him from the Beats.

Baraka's movement to the leftist appears clearly through *Hard Facts* and *Wise, Whys, Y's that* demonstrate the expanded efforts of his transferal to Marxism and the economics at the heart of the racial struggle. The transitional nature of his consciousness was necessary to use his past experiences as a basis to build up his future. Baraka's complete development till embracing Marxism was exposed in '*Somebody Blew Up America*'.

Baraka moved from Greenwich Village to Harlem in 1965. Baraka explained later that his movement was inevitable because all his life has prepared him for such separation. He, also, says that his separatism was a kind of restitution for the lies he had lived and believed in when he was supporting the Beat. He felt the world as he knew it was falling apart around him. He distanced himself as far from the Beat writers as possible, attacking and attempting to cut all ties to that past. In cutting his ties with the Beat, Baraka threw his career and reputation to the wind, no longer wishing to exercise and produce any political art form. His migration shows the full choice of the changes in Baraka's attitudes, in particular the change in his views toward Harlem and the black community. At first Baraka saw the Harlem Renaissance and Harlem in general as the Black Bourgeoisie capital city, and using the pattern of bohemian vs. bourgeois he now sees Harlem as a land of Bohemia and describes it even more bohemian than an artist's colony. (Sollors. 387-414)

Baraka had to, in a way, settle his past as a Bohemian with his future as a black activist. Besides integrating into the black community with the message he carries if he wants to build this new consciousness. In doing so, Baraka is risking everything, he is even going to be considered as an impostor whose art misses the devotion to black art due to his involvement and producing a kind of art that suites the Beat, white literary standard. Baraka knew that if he wanted to be recognized by the black

community he needed to rebuild his personal and collective voice. In doing so, Baraka could avoid the fate of being separated from those he wanted to serve and he surely had to be different from those writers he called black entertainers in a clown way. This is a difficulty that often goes along with the work of post-colonial writers. This problem appears especially when writers try to escape from their oppressor's culture, that they have absorbed unconsciously, but with the growth of their conscious they try to form a new voice of their own. The African American writer made strong efforts to create a new voice outside the concepts of the post-colonial colonizer concepts and literature until that moment. African-American literature has been defined by the use of white idioms and certain concepts from Euro-American whites. During this whole time, Baraka tried incessantly and was seriously committed to show to the world, specifically to the black community, the inherited hierarchy and hypocrisy of the black society. He also shed light on those constructing blocks of the white society that was passed successfully to the black society. From the volume *Dead Lecturer*, the poem 'A Contract for the Destruction and Rebuilding of Paterson,' Baraka displays a prototype of detecting the struggle with a particular location and giving it a specific context. In this case, the context is the explosion of the political and social struggle that should be a characteristic to the conditions of the blacks living in Patterson. Through the usage of Uncle Tom-like and middle-class blacks as an example, he draws a line between the stereotypes spread through their submission and wrong understandings of whites and the reality of black character.

With the lines, 'You are no brothers, dirty woogies,  
dying under dried rinds, in massa's  
droopy tuxedos.

Cab Calloway of the soul, at the soul's juncture' (56.ll.14-15),

Baraka successfully distances himself from these stereotypes and misapprehensions. This opens the door for a social approach of interpretation to the text, allowing the reader to see the words as more real by looking at a specific minority community and viewing the larger discourses of the civil rights movement up to that time.

When he uses the expression of the 'white slaves' (ll.20), he does not really or literally mean white but blacks such as Martin Luther King Jr. and other supporters who dream and call for a non-violent way in asking for their rights. Those blacks who hope for assimilation and acceptance through peaceful means not violent ones are the kind of blacks wearing, according to Baraka, white masks. He goes on to say that the proof that those pacifier leaders can bring no change is as they 'pray at the / steps of abstracts prisons, to be kings' (ll.20-21) is a direct reference to Martin Luther King Jr. This poem helps to identify with the dual purpose of not only giving the presentation of the poet's increasingly growing awareness about politics but also concentrating on the new nature of Baraka's poetic style and associations. The context of the poem is changed, but for what concerns the tone and rhythm of the poem they really look like his Beat period works than the language style that came to be a major part of his work during this period. Lines such as 'Flesh, and cars, tar, dug holes beneath stone / a rude hierarchy of money' (ll.1-2) continues to show that Baraka's poetic growth is gradual but exciting in its ultimate results.

Moreover, the reference to Paterson, New Jersey, can be seen as a direct connection to the literary traditions stemming from Paterson. Though these influences would continue to be seen stylistically in the poet's form of work, the change from being a passive observer to an activist is surely one of the biggest basic changes in Baraka's life. To be more specific the incident that influenced Baraka's life deeply was the

death of Malcolm X which pushed Baraka fully into the creation of the Black Arts Movement.

#### **4.2 Baraka's Core of Writing**

The black leader played an essential role in Baraka's understanding of the necessity of a black consciousness; in his poetic homage of Malcolm X. Baraka shows the importance of Malcolm X not only in his own personal development but for black people in general. He said that Malcolm's hands were raised to bless the black people. Malcolm X evoked a sense of pride in black people, a sense of revolution that demanded respect. Baraka appreciated a lot Malcolm's way of protest because he never bowed down to any white power structure. Malcolm did not negotiate or propose compromise but looked directly into the mouth of the beast and asked for what he believed that Black people deserved.

Baraka could not tolerate Martin Luther King Jr.'s method of nonviolence, but when it comes to Malcolm X, to Baraka, he was the black god of their time. Malcolm X wanted the black people to look up, to stop hesitating and drag their feet. He wanted the black man to stop whining and bending down. Therefore, race used to be a minor element in Baraka's works but now it became the very essence of his poetry. Baraka's writing style did not change much since he was very influenced by the Beat Generation but the content of his works became intensely reactionary. He changed the central opposition from black vs. white to revolutionary vs. bourgeois. (Sollors.387-414)

Baraka's view of black culture occurs separately from American culture. He has always made it clear that he distrusted the role of assimilation in the collapse of individual cultures. Baraka believed that culture could not be assimilated and, therefore, was threatened more by oppression than any melting-pot condition. Baraka

saw a real future in a newly created black art that would draw from its own traditions. Nevertheless, Baraka had to let go on the colonial status of Afro-American writing in his pursuit of black consciousness, by having multiple conflicts against white prototypes, friends, and critics, not only black speech and music, but also large areas of the modernist tradition. These personal limitations are attributed as being characteristics of post-colonial literature in which the writer restricts his memory to the grief of the victim. What is worth appreciating is their attempt and desire to honor their ancestor but through trying to honor them they risk to limit their language to phonetic pain, the cry of suffering, the curse of revenge.

It is true that honoring the old black generations is a good sign of self-awareness and recognition among African Americans; the undeniable truth that many of the Nationalists were unsuccessful to reflect the true realities of their individual communities, though they really had some success in creating a common ideal of black consciousness. Baraka as well as some African American artists worked to create a black art that is capable of eradicating the colonial supremacy of slavery that had infected all future generations, no matter how far they detached themselves from the realities of slavery. These lately strengthened black artists sought to render American culture more revolutionary through the creation of a black aesthetic that was necessary for their art.

Baraka thought that African Americans had a poor style of expression, without speaking about music, in which the mark of racism did not taint their voices. The Black Arts Movement's artists did not intend to be recognized by the white society but to present to the black society a path for an African-American artistic expression. Baraka and other artists believed that black art comes from the people, and must be returned to the people. Such kind of art is dedicated to political goals, it is democratic.

It celebrates variety, personal, and collective freedom, it has never been meant to be for the elite. (Denzin. 243-68)

This ideal based on culture was also highly political, and the resulting works were more political than artistic. When Baraka became invested in race issues, as a poet, and fought against the injustices, he became more effective than ever. The black poets believed that he should be assisted by an organized political party with the banner of revolutionary ideal. Baraka joined a political party and at times had to use his art as publicity.

It is true that if publicity is not related to art, cannot be advanced in what all the term means. It is true that if it is political it is by consequence powerful but it is also true that a restless publicity can help and can be very beneficial to the people. In addition, every work of art is publicity; every writer, however great or insignificant, is seen as a pastor; he speaks his philosophy; he spreads his faith and tries openly or possibly to change his readers' opinions to his own beliefs.

In supporting the idea that claims that art has to be essentially propaganda, is an encouragement of black aesthetics. Though they are different in context, when it comes to the style, Baraka's poetry was seen as being the same in technical model as his poetry written in Greenwich Village. Nevertheless, the common breaks and syntactic problems are gradually contrasted with lines of intense clearness. [On the one hand one gets ironic comedy, on the other, pure sadness. There are other changes of this kind of image shapes in the poems of *The Dead Lecturer* and *Sabotage*].

(Lacey.71)

Baraka will not be happy with the kind of poetry he provides until he breaks artistically from his past. The works of Baraka became trapped in the unique styles, rhythms, idioms and personal identities of local folk and vernacular culture. These

presentations are a record of the history of inequalities experienced by the members of an oppressed group. He shows how members of a native group have struggled to find places of pride and respect in a violent, racist and sexist civil society. (Denzin. 242-68)The Black Arts Repertory Theatre, the first institution of the Black Arts Movement, was seen as a means by which Baraka and many of his contemporary artists sought to show victims so that their fellow brothers who read black poetry they will be able to comprehend that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are blood brothers. [All men live in the world, and the world must be a place for them to live]. (Lacey.71)

Unfortunately, the experiment was brief. With the struggling and opposing views, went more serious by financial problems when their federal funds were removed because of the truly assumed conservative nature of their work, it fell apart.

It is essential to note that the theater's most central role was to develop a thoughtful black arts culture was lost on the administration of the white government. Instead, their work was seen as a means of provocative violence against the white power structure, consequently limiting the possibility and realization by the white community of the ideas at the heart of the Black Arts Movement. It is only natural that this culture would try to bring into play the history of African-American experience, which has as a part of it the bitterness of the repression that characterized their Americanism. These developments led to the inevitable collapse of the theater, but they could not destroy the sentiments and the morals that were taught in it. It gave a powerful combination of political activism and art that were displayed side by side and continued to exist throughout the nation.

Baraka broke his alliance with the Black Art Theatre and he explains that his break resulted from a mixture of various factors, saying, [there was no particular event or



incident. He said that he had just gotten filled up with all that, that he was stuck with non-productive madness. Because of The guilt that he carried about his life, he goes on to say that, if the Village has always damaged the decisive actions he was supposed to have taken in order to preserve any dynamic and productive development in the Black Arts. He didn't know enough, and he was completely delusional about what he was supposed to know and what not to know]. (Baraka. The Autobiography of Leroi Jones. 71) Only later, Baraka was able to come to realize completely the incomplete nature of his developing nationalist identity. Though the short period in which the theatre had existed, it provided a prototype for similar organizations across the country, including the New Orleans-based BLKARTSOUTH, which followed in the same collective and racially conscious vein as BARTS. (Smethurst.9)

It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that several of the main and ancient Black Arts organizations were founded in the Midwest and on the West Coast. For Baraka, Harlem was only a provisional break that provided him new liberty in both his political and racial consciousness but was unsuccessful to stick on a personal level. It is possible that Baraka's old views of Harlem could not be totally eliminated or the black community in his hometown simply provided a much more personal and supportable model for action.

By 1965, Baraka was back in Newark, this time not to leave it again; from that moment onward, Newark was Baraka's home and main field for political practices that would frequently outline his life and ideology. Baraka's return to Newark was escorted by a consciousness of his past wrongdoings against the black community, as demonstrated in the poem '*Numbers, Letters*' from *Black Magic*, in which Baraka tries to drive a nail in the coffin of his bohemian changing self as not only an artistic approach but as a reconciliatory signal to the black community.

The collective memory of his previous associations forced the poet to make it clear that he is no longer an ally to the Beats. He has opened his eyes, but at the same time he continually felt the influences and deep roots of Western culture in his spirit. The poem is literally a homecoming both physically to Newark and culturally to the black community. He said that if someone is not home where else can he be, where else can he go.

Baraka now had to answer to real people after providing a dense ground for the growing intellectual basis of the Black Arts Movement containing certain artists, many of these artists had the similar shame of a circle of white friends and white women. Because of Baraka's achievements in the Beat world and as a hometown boy, his adventures were widely known as what were you doing down there, freaking off and with white women, hanging out with Queens.

#### **4.3 Baraka's Metamorphose**

Amiri Baraka faced a problem of credibility with his people especially after being a part of the Beat movement. Baraka's evolution and credibility as a black poet depends on the community's understanding for his old work since damaging to become a non-racial poet had complicated Baraka's rejection of his own racial legacy. If they cannot see him and accept him as a voice and representative for their black community then he knows he will fail, in this context he says that he will not be recognized if his people will not forgive his deviation from being his people representative.

Unless you agree I'm real

That I can feel

Whatever beats hardest

At our black souls

I am real, and I can't say who

I am. Ask me if I know, I'll say

Yes, I might say no. Still, ask.

I'm Everett LeRoi Jones, 30 [years] old (ll.22-29).

In this piece, Baraka is not trying to make any promises or prophecies about how would be the exact form his rising black consciousness will be taking, but he is asking for the confidence of the black community because he knows how their hearts and minds feel and think very clearly. Again in this piece, Baraka is placing himself out ready for judgment and placing the legitimacy of his case, he stated that

When I say something it's all of me saying,  
and all the things that make me,  
have formed me, colored' (136.ll.35-37).

After Baraka's moving to Newark, Baraka was able to be closer to the politics and culturalism that were important to the Black Nationalist movement. Establishing the theatrical group *Spirit House*, Baraka pushes himself onward as a protector of the burdened and diminished blacks of Newark through political associations, social and literary complaint, and the production of a Black Nationalism based in African culturalism based on African style. For Baraka and other Black Nationalists, social violence became an obligation for blacks to defend themselves and to build their black nation. Baraka realized early, in his role as a Black Nationalist and artist; that producing a collective black consciousness meant by necessity working at the public and street level by including and employing the community.

To explain more, in order to reach the community's heart and make it believe his works, Baraka assumed that art comes by necessity from the mutual experience of Black people. Art has to be devoted to change, specifically a revolutionary change, it has to have a utility to the lives of Black people. Most of Baraka's attention on

culturalism as a foundation of black consciousness, and the belief came from Nationalist spirituality. Baraka accepted this philosophy and tried to apply and modify it to the black community in Newark; in these beliefs, Baraka found some of the same conflicts that he had seen in the Greenwich community and continued through his own behaviors.

*Black Magic* was Baraka's first complete effort at showing through poetry his new Nationalist aesthetic; '*A Poem Some People Will Have to Understand*' articulates the complexity of his break with the Beat generation and the behavior that categorized him during this period, particularly his artistic expressiveness:

What / industry do I practice? A click

colored boy, 12 miles from his

home. I practice no industry.

I am no longer a credit

to 5 Watts states

Black writers should have seven principles which are: [to think black, talk black, behave black, create black, Buy black, vote black, and live black] (Lacey. 71-80). In one of his lines he made it clear that the credit should go to his race. This means that his race allowed him to recognize his position as a poet. Baraka benefited from his Beat experience and used it as a means of crossing racial boundaries to his new Nationalism that associates him exclusively with the black community. Baraka knows that the intellectual elite-the ones he has honored in his works- will view his new personal arrangement with his African-American legacy as a step back intellectually. The limit in the Beat ideals caused the poet to feel unable to go beyond his role as an individual. Baraka's alliance with the made him escape from responsibility, an escape from reality, and most importantly, an escape from blackness. But after the break with

the Beat, Baraka struggled once more to regain concreteness in the racial lines that have been surrounding him throughout his life. As an African American, he separates himself completely from the white world and deserts the assimilation at the center of his alliance with

‘all the pitifully intelligent citizens

I’ve forced myself to love’ (120.ll.17-1)

which is a reference to the white intellectuals of his old inner circle. (Lacey.71-80)

The Beats kind of resistance was not a resisting one at all but, instead, a philosophy believing that the world will or will not take care of itself without their help. Baraka can no longer admit this, not because he thinks that he can change the old way of speaking about racial domination and result settlement but because he knows that there can be no true reconciliation of cultures without a black culture to stand against the white Western ideals:

We have awaited the coming of a natural  
phenomenon. Mystics and romantics, knowledgeable  
Workers  
of the land.

But none has come.

*(Repeat)*

but none has come. (120.ll.19-25) (Harris. The Sweet and Angry Music of Amiri Baraka’)

Baraka has developed a new perspective; a new artistic ideology. He believed that it was necessary to give the words the power of action and that words guard their violence to create a difference. But instead of that, words have been left disturbed and agitated in favor of intellectual exploration. Baraka used what he learnt when he was

with the Beat as in his reference to ‘mystics and romantics’ a very clear usage of the Beats mentality which speaks and concentrates about the life soul over ego and the living of a life outside the reality of humanity.

The United States of this period is defined socially and politically as being very troubled in what concerns the civil rights movement and anti-war movement. These movements are very important to be ignored and not mentioned in art works. In this way, art can be seen and used as a sophisticated way to express and show the rising powerfulness of the black culture.

In the line ‘Will the machine gunners please step forward?’ (11.126), Amiri Baraka made a clear statement when he called for black people to coordinate and move forward to make black literature and art in general better. To Baraka, he and his fellow writers should transform into warriors and fighters, this is the kind of writers who are supposed to characterize the Black Arts and National movements. These warriors’ kind writers should do their best to eradicate the white culture that infiltrated into the black culture and had a great influence on it. Through the title of this piece, it tells us that there was a huge division between those writers who see that Baraka had abandoned poetry with a higher calling of poetic expression for politics and those who believe, like Jones, that art and politics, for a black man, are inseparable.

Nevertheless, for Amiri Baraka the change can only be called a step forward; he is trying so hard to recover his blackness and his original identity of belonging within the black community. He is, in reality, calling on black people to realize their important and essential roles in the changes necessary in their communities following his own example. In ‘*S.O.S.*’ he calls for an armament of blacks that is needed to make any real change perfect. He says in his poem:

‘Calling all black people, man woman child

Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in’ (1997.II.2-3)

The invitation that he presented in this piece was not at all a physical one but it is; rather, a call for black people to be a part of the movement and to participate in the changes that are to come. This invitation is a way to push blacks to do something that they had always opposed which is to ask for their part of the American political, social, and cultural systems on black terms this time. It is very clear that Baraka is directing his words to black people alone because he dropped on the idea of segregation.

In the poem entitled ‘*Black Art*,’ Baraka appears to the world and proves to himself and others his ability to free himself of the chains of the white influenced discourse of the Beats and literary history to the point of having the capacity to use words as weapons to be used in the revolution as effectively and as dangerously as a gun or knife. Baraka explained that words could achieve freedom of the mind from colonial and neocolonial discourse by trying to exist outside of it. It is state that Baraka’s commencement of revolutionary politics has focused on the power of verbal motions; the power of language itself to transform social reality.

### **5. *Blues People***

Amiri Baraka is not just a poet, he also writes drama, essays, music, and criticism. Baraka spoke in the *Blues People* about African American music; he expressed his passion for the spirituals, the blues and jazz. He considered all of them as the most important factors that compose the African American national identity. What is important about the *Blues People* is that it helped in attracting researchers to investigate on black music.

Baraka has always connected African American national identity to music. He also considered the black working class; which is the most oppressed group in American society, as the blues people. Baraka was smart when it came to music because he used it as a sociological instrument to analyze the role and the function of African American people in the white American society.

In the introduction to *Blues People*, entitled *Negro Music in White America*, Baraka speaks about the most important ideas of the book. He expressed the strong relationship between African American music and African American people history. He said that music, for him, represents the history of his people, Negroes. He continues to say that when he got deeper into the history of music, he felt the importance of studying the history of music alongside with the history of Negro people. He stated:

‘Music is the history. The history of the Negro people...I began to get into the history of the music; I found that this was impossible without, at the same time, getting deeper into the history of the [Negro] people.’ (Baraka. *Blues People*.3)

According to Baraka, it is almost impossible to avoid the study of social and political implications of the African American music. Therefore, Baraka tries in *The Blues People* to point to the importance and necessity to connect the relationship between the development of African American music and political progress. Baraka insists that African American music is by necessity based on African culture and is very important to the definition of black identity.

In *Blues People* Baraka makes lots of statements among these statements a very important idea came to the surface. Baraka stated that a slave can never be recognized as a man. He tried to point with this statement that there was no cultural and social



comparability between blacks and whites. With this idea, as if, he tries to present two different kinds of cultures: a slave culture and a free culture. The only thing that can relate these two cultures to each other is their opposition.

Basically, according to Baraka's statement there is absolutely no relation or communication between the masters and slaves on any human level. Obviously, white masters saw the black slaves as property (Baraka. *Blues People*.63). Baraka also wanted people to break the chains that tied them and held them from progressing. He always wished the slave to break chains and allows himself to be free and no longer accept the fact of being enslaved.

Baraka wrote a book that deals with the sociological, historical and cultural aspects of the so called *Blues People* dedicated to them and having their name. In this book he tries to draw attention to the spirituals and the blues by showing the differences between them. He stated that:

‘The blues is formed out of the same social and musical fabric that the spirituals issued from, but with blues the social emphasis becomes more personal, the ‘Jordan’ of the song much more intensely a human accomplishment.’ (Baraka. *Blues People*.63-64)

Baraka sees that the basic difference between the spirituals and the blues is in the way of presenting the African American experiences in the white society. He usually classifies the spirituals as being communal songs concentrating their themes on God and work, through which these poems express the desire of being free. The blues on the other hand deals with the individual's lives of people and his successes and failures in life.

Baraka sees the blues as a way or means to protest. Since it deals with individual experiences, it is automatically going to be situated in an economical context within

the American social context. The neo-Marxist approach is a very important element in Baraka's study of the blues. To explain it more, Baraka sees that the blues can be considered as a response to the economic, social and material changes in African American life. Besides it sheds light on the oppositional elements in the blues and how it changed in relation to the white society and class.

Country blues is given a great importance by Baraka. He sees that the music symbolizing the separateness of African Americans from the mainstream American culture. He stated that: 'Primitive blues had been almost a conscious expression of the Negro's individuality and equally important, his separateness' (Baraka. *Blues People*.86)

For Baraka the classic blues represents a sense of status and place in the American cultural life for Americans. Baraka stated that the classic blues can be defined as the step taken by Negroes back into the mainstream of the American society (Baraka. *Blues People*.86). In other words, the classic blues went far from Negroes lives because it was seeking professionalism. The latter, is not the only idea that Baraka rejected. He rejects besides professionalism, urbanization and commercialization as well. He always says that the meaning which exists in the blues only for Negroes grew less pointed. (Baraka. *Blues People*.87)

Baraka always says that classic blues is characterized as a form of entertainment. He confirms that the blues in its development meets with the idea of theatre, this movement made it capable of being performed. He believed:

'An idea of theatre had come to the blues, and this movement toward performance turned some of the emotional climate of the Negro's life into artifact and entertainment.' (Baraka. *Blues People*.87)

This fact turned some emotions of the Negro life into art and entertainment. Classic blues became the music that is used to entertain others in a formal way which powers the ability of the blues to represent the real elements of the life of African Americans that disappeared.

Baraka had a little confusion between the word 'acculturation' and 'assimilation'. He observed that the African American music was changed by the influence of the mainstream American culture. But there was acculturation between those two cultures and with both of them we get what is called American music and culture. It is true that the African and white cultures are different. The difference will always be present between the white and black culture and they will keep taking from each other.

Baraka insisted on the idea that African Americans have isolated their real cultural identities after accepting commercialization and urbanization for the sake of pleasing the whites and being accepted and recognized. He stated that the middle class has never wanted to be accepted as they are. They just were ready to do whatever it takes to be accepted even if they have to give up on who they really are. He stated that:

'[Blacks] did not even want to be accepted as themselves, they desired any self which the mainstream dictated, and the mainstream always dictated. And this black middle class, in turn, tried always to dictate that self, or this image of white Negro, to the poorer, blacker Negroes.'

(Baraka. *Blues People*.130)

African Americans were supposed and expected to lose their African identity, and run away from who they really are in order to please the white folks, if they seek assimilation or any sort of acceptance in the American white society. This was so refused by Amiri Baraka, and he made it clear in his work, the *Blues People*. Either acceptance or nothing, he is ready for no compromises.

## 6. Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship*

*Slave Ship* is a play presented by Amiri Baraka and it was performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Theatre from November 21 to January 13<sup>th</sup> 1970. The play was uniquely performed. They have used a wooden slave ship on rockers with an exposed human cargo hold. The play is subtitled as 'A Historical Pageant'. Amiri Baraka wanted to shock the spectacle of historical tableaux. He applied his vision to the play in order to recreate the progression of black history from Africa to America in a marvelous set.

The first scene of the play starts in Africa with an African ritual dance and a religious rite of passage. The play continues to progress through the terror of the Middle Passage, the scenes of the families' separation on the auction block, and a plantation revolt destroyed by a two faced 'Uncle Tom' figure. It reached its peak in a riot that symbolizes the victory of the black power over white America. When Baraka wrote the script he wanted to submerge the audience with an atmosphere full of feelings. During the performance of the play, he used sounds and smells of black history in rapid fire succession. This produced a powerful motion, enough, to push the supporters of the Black Arts Movement to make a move.

*Slave Ship* was the best example of environmental theatre in New York. It presented more than simple entertainment, it went beyond that. It shook the audience and pushed them to action. Baraka wanted to sensitise the black people, to how they were carried over, and how America was just continuation to what happened at that same ship. The play was structured like a novel, a nice staging techniques and it contains new ideas to produce and provide that feeling of being trapped in the slave ship. To be more analytic, *Slave Ship* is a metaphor, a symbol which connected the memory of

African roots with the immoral presence of the present. The ship is the fulcrum from which the slave ship moves both backward and forward in time.

*The slave ship* is considered as the central metaphor or the symbol that controlled the other spaces of the black experience used in the play as the plantation, and the church. Besides the specific strategies of the Revolutionary Theatre, Baraka's play does not only try to include the chaotic situation described by the Slave Ship icon, but it was also successful in bringing it to life in a marvelous way that could penetrate inside the heads and the hearts of the audiences and actors.

Baraka gave his audience a chance to be a part of the play even though not being actors. But instead of remaining still or silent, Baraka's slave bodies were allowed to speak and move about. Through them, he injected the voices, desires, movements and music of resistance that were absent from the static, two-dimensional drawing of the slave ship icon. In a courageous signal then, Baraka re-inscribed the slave ship icon with an updated purpose fitting for the revolutionary times.

Baraka's *Slave Ship* was closer to a recurrence of earlier events of the experiences of the Middle Passage, plantation slavery and revolution, rather than a dramatic production of those events. As Revolutionary Theatre, audience members were an intimate and integral part of the play. They were seated on planks around the set that placed them in the deepest insides of the slave ship, which appointed them as members of the cast.

In fact, in the script, they are listed among the cast and named as the voices and bodies in the slave ship. The other members of the cast included the voices of African slaves, dancers, musicians, children, an Old Tom, played by a slave, and a New Tom, played by a preacher, in addition to the voices of white men, a captain, sailor and plantation owner.

When we watch the play, on YouTube, we notice that the audience members were smartly called upon to join the actors in making the sounds that created the aural setting for the play. They did the cries and screams. Through the participation of the audience in the sounding of the play, they helped in reproducing terror that the slave knew in the slave ship. The special setting, either through sound or smell, made the slave ship memorable. ([//www.youtube.com/](http://www.youtube.com/))

The participation of the audience made it possible for them to share in the creation of the performance and consequently, moved them towards a sense of collective responsibility. Baraka's idea was simple; in order to push his people to improve their life and political conditions it was necessary to situate the events that their ancestors experienced in the hearts of the black audience. To Baraka, *Slave Ship* operated as a liberating experience that passes through the different stages of imprisonment, passage, struggle and release.

The effects of the sounds and smells coming from the set of the slave ship were intensified by carefully controlling the sense of sight. In particular, darkness to emphasize the atmosphere of containment experienced during the Middle Passage and throughout slavery in order to enforce the feeling of domination. A large part of the play was performed in darkness, producing and reproducing the whine of terror. Baraka's use of lighting was specific and intentional. In some cases vague lights pointed to voices or spoken dialogue. Baraka's play improved and re-inscribed the slave ship icon, effectively reshaping the descriptive text of the eighteenth century broadside to include the voices of the enslaved and their stories of pain and suffering as well as their tactics of resistance and survival. For example the play also revived some scenes of suicide and rape:

‘Man1: God, she’s killed herself and child. Oh, God. Oh, God....

Woman1: She strangled herself with the chain. Choked the child. Oh, shango! Help us, Lord. Oh please' (Baraka. *Slave Ship*.5)

In Another scene:

'Woman2: Oh, please, please don't touch me...please...

Man1: What you doing? Get away from that woman. That's not your woman. You turn into a beast, too.' (Baraka. *Slave Ship*.6)

With a dialogue that imagined the conversations between captives in the hold, Baraka created characters and stage directions that reflected a deep, spiritual belief in African, particularly Yoruba, religion. Some of the initial stage directions called for African Drums like some worship scenes. Towards the end of the play, the plantation revolt is brought on by summoning Ogun; the warrior god of iron.

*Slave Ship* also relied upon improvisational music as a compound for action in the play. Baraka recruited the talents of Sun Ra, known for his experimental electronic music, and tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp, among others. Repeated sounds and musical cracks acted as strips of behavior, ritual beats that called upon actors and audience participants to remember. Thus, African music and religion performed a life supporting function, delivering the enslaved Africans from the slave ship to the plantation and, ultimately to the edge of a Black Nationalist revolution.

Throughout the play, drumming, dancing and music stand as symbols of resistance, and deep African memory. As the play opens, the sound of African drums dominate, whereas the plantation scene begins with the lazy sound of the banjo, but later increases with a drum call to revolt. In his seminal text on black music, *Blues People*, Baraka claimed that music presented itself as one of the most significant heritages of the African past, even to the modern black American.

The modified beat which the captive Africans brought with them quickly took root in the New World. Now that beat has been for generations a basic part of American musical entertainment. Throughout the play, the musical symbols of an African past are never silenced, but only transformed, reshaped into popular forms of black American music.

In *Slave Ship*, Baraka made a unique mixture of 'double voicing' that was richly nuanced, where the different layers of the senses and the spatial levels of the set hit and talked with the actual voices of the cast and the audience, their co-opted re-enactors. This process of shaping and reshaping the experience of black Americans encouraged calling *Slave Ship* as one of Baraka's most successful experiments in ritual drama, where history itself becomes a succession of rituals.



## Chapter Four

### The Psychological and the Social Problems in Richard Wright's *Native*

#### *Son and Black Boy*

#### Introduction

#### 4. Bigger's Psychological Fractures in *Native Son*

##### 4.1 Bigger's Black Persona

##### 4.2 Bigger's White Persona

#### 5. Stereotype and Discrimination in *Black Boy*

##### 5.1 Resisting Stereotype

##### 5.2 Alienation and Creation of the Self

## **Introduction**

Richard Nathaniel Wright is known as a controversial African-American author; he presented prominent novels, short stories and non-fiction. The majority of Wright's works dealt with racial issues. His work changed the way America saw race relations in the mid-20th century. *Native Son* (1940), Richard Wright's controversial novel has created a debatable world that shocked the feelings of both Black and White America by presenting the cultural and logical realities behind racism that has been a matter of question in the United States for centuries. In fact, race differences and prejudice attitudes always caused problem whenever Black and White wanted to unite and live together because the racial stereotypical picture held in both groups' mind, made them act in a prejudice way that gave harm to both groups and cultures. Thus, this chapter aims to show how the racial stereotypical picture became destructive to African Americans and built a barrier that kept them away from assimilating. Stereotypical images, psychological troubles and alienation are among different problems that face African Americans if they attempt to assimilate and some are a consequence of their attempt for assimilation.

Due to race prejudice whites effectively transform blacks into their own negative stereotype of 'blackness'. Whites see Blacks as harmful while blacks see whites as overpowering and hostile forces. In fact, whites and blacks both fail to regard each other as individuals because they are bound by the cultural logic of racism. Namely, the culture both whites and blacks have grown up have shaped the understanding of the concept of racism that culturally, logically, physically and psychologically formed

negative stereotypes in the mind of both groups. Thus, both groups with the cultural logic of racism perceived each other as frightening and untrustworthy.

Throughout the novel, Wright illustrates the ways in which white racism forces blacks into a pressured and dangerous state of mind that turn them to be unconsciously submissive and far from thinking about assimilating into the white society. In other words, fear created in the self of blacks keep them away from threatening the white society by such attempts of assimilation. Blacks under the oppression of poverty are forced to act subserviently before their white oppressors, while journalists consistently portray blacks as animalistic brutes. Under such conditions, the cultural logic of racism forces Bigger to create two different personalities that aid him in living in both societies, white and black. Bigger acts as a gangster around black people because he was told that the survival is for the fittest, and acts submissively in front of whites, his modeled character, to be accepted by whites i.e. as stereotyped by whites.

The writings of Wright could not be so deep in interpreting the racial problem of the south without reading books about criminology, psychology, psychiatry, sociological studies and even contemporary American literature. Through his autobiography, Wright allowed himself to be documented which enables him to exist against the exclusive discourse of the south. Besides this, he shows to the world the difficult conditions that numerous Black Boys grow in. Wright with his special style did not care about anything but depicting the realities that they were encountering. When comparing the writings of Richard Wright to those who wrote during the Harlem Renaissance we find that the writers of the twenties concentrated only on entertaining the white audience not on depicting the real self and character of the African American.

In *Black Boy*, we are able to see that Richard's experience of the South is always present in his subconscious even after he has successfully escaped to the North. In other words, the South has left its print in his subconscious and shaped his personality even though his escape attempt to the North was a success. In fact, young Richard could never leave the South for real or completely. He was able to leave the place where he used to live but that same place, the South, would never leave his mind. For that he states in his autobiography:

‘I could never really leave the South for my feelings had already been formed by the South, for there had been slowly instilled into my personality and conscious, black though I was, the culture of the South.’ (Wright. 30)

#### **4. Bigger's Psychological Fractures in *Native Son***

Richard Wright was influenced by many writers throughout his career and he was deeply moved by their studies and ideas especially about youngster's delinquency and problems that individuals face in the urban environment. Those developed friendships especially with Horace Cayton and St. Claire Drake helped him to write about social problems in a developed artistic way. Thanks to his relationships with people like Louis Wirth, a sociologist at the Chicago School of Sociology, Wright was able to provide a work entitled 'the Ghetto' which is a study of Modern American life in his literary writings.

The assimilation of the Chicago School of Sociology's ideas was very important in shaping Richard Wright's vision of modern urban life, to be more specific, the environmental conditions that surrounded black people's lives. *Native Son* is Wright's tragedy about a Chicago black man whose plight is a symbol to the alienation that he

experienced among his people, and even the harsh experiences lived by his protagonists through their lives among the white racist, discriminating, and segregationist society.

Richard Wright was very influenced by sociological research about race relations. He stated that in *Black Metropolis*, authors have to present more than an analysis about the Negro frustration. They can become different normal people trapped in an abnormal psychological state of mind and being.

In *Native Son*, Richard Wright represented the Chicago of the Jim Crow Era as a logical progression from the slave era of Frederick Douglass. In fact, the sociological fractures of the Abolitionist Era persisted for generations. Slavery was abolished in law but it was replaced with an economic system that enslaved people and was oppressed them and applied a geographic racial demarcation.

Richard Wright always described Chicago as being fractured both sociologically and geographically. He also gave the results of such fractures as slavery, a humanity that was taken away from the oppressed black and the privileged white. He stated that blacks and whites suffered from the psychological consequences of an environment that was organized by ideas of racial injustices. The most important idea that Richard Wright treated and wanted to transmit through his novel *Native Son* is that sociological and psychological problems take the same form which is to separate and divide.

#### **4.1 Bigger's Black Persona**

Wright described the individual harm among African Americans as psychological disturbances of identity. An identity that blacks try to build as an imitation of whites

but whites experience in controlling people used this identity imitation as a way to control blacks. In other words, every time black people imitate whites' mode of living is only a way to fall under their control without knowing that they are caught under the whites' control. Wright tries in *Native Son* to show Bigger Thomas, the lead character in the novel, as he struggles with different formations of his identity. Those identity formations were the immediate result of segregation, unfair life conditions, and common hostile society.

Bigger Thomas is one character, yet he represents the condition of numerous people. Richard Wright manifested his character from various people that he encountered and rolled all of those interactions and emotions into one character. One reason that the name 'Bigger' is very appropriate for this character is that the name prevents the readers from limiting the character to one person. The name represents more of a complex than a person. This complex includes all young colored men who do not see how they fit into the big picture of society.

Bigger does not know what his identity is. He did not receive plenty of love and support as a child to give him the essential confidence needed for him to fight for a position in life. Instead, he followed into the stereotypical roles for a poor black man on the streets of Chicago. Bigger often was in trouble with the law. He stole from stores and carried weapons on him. He got into fights with the guys who he hung out with. He did not have a job even though his family had very little to survive economically. These are all traits of the 'bad Negro,' which is another reason for calling him 'Bigger.'

Because of the psychological delusion caused by the racial terror environment that he was forced to deal with; Bigger ended up with having a completely unstable identity.

He was forced to pretend to be strong because he lives in a tough neighborhood for the reason that in the ghettos the survival is for the fittest. There are also Negroes who became obedient with time to the whites but they try to use an artificial language in front of whites.

Bigger was forced to adopt many identities, one for his neighbor and another in front of whites. He was forced to adopt an identity that he did not favor to please a society that does not trust him. There was also the idea that stuck in the heads of whites; they believed that blacks are rapists. Bigger also feared to show his real identity to both societies his own society and for sure the white society. He was obliged to go back and forth between the obedient character and the aggressive one. Due to all these causes, Bigger could not establish a stable identity.

In showing Bigger's multiple identities, Wright tried to bring at the same time features of psychology and society. He mentions the tension and fractures of society and psychology, in a series of scenes which appear at an early moment in the novel to make it easier for the reader to connect them to each other as a cause and effect. This parallelism was needed to understand the existential and psychological crisis which was happening inside Bigger and in the whole black society at large. These early scenes show Richard's skillful style through which he identified Bigger's problem. The book opens with a scene of fear: Bigger against the huge, slobbering, aggressive rat. Though the rat is just a rat, and Bigger manages to kill it, we instantly recognize how the fight with the rat symbolizes the family's daily struggle to survive, despite overwhelming poverty and their lack of options. It is a powerful demonstration of the fear that pervades their lives. Wright says:

‘There he is!’ the mother screamed again. A huge black rat squealed and leaped at Bigger’s trouser-leg and snagged it in his teeth, hanging on.

‘Goddamn!’ Bigger whispered fiercely, whirling and kicking out his leg with all the strength of his body. The force of his movement shook the rat loose and it sailed through the air and struck a wall. Instantly, it rolled over and leaped again. Bigger dodged and the rat landed against a table leg. With clenched teeth, Bigger held the skillet; he was afraid to hurl it, fearing that he might miss. The rat squeaked and turned and ran in a narrow circle, looking for a place to hid; it leaped again past Bigger and scurried on dry rasping feet to one side of the box and then to the other, searching for the hole. Then it turned and reared upon its hind legs.

‘Hit ‘im, Bigger!’ Buddy shouted.

‘Kill ‘im!’ the woman screamed.

The rat’s belly pulsed with fear. Bigger advanced a step and the rat emitted a long thin song of defiance, its black beady eyes glittering, its tiny forefeet pawing the air restlessly. Bigger swung the skillet; it skidded over the floor, missing the rat, and clattered to stop against a wall.

‘Goddamn!’



The rat leaped. Bigger sprang to one side. The rat stopped under a chair and let out a furious scream. Bigger moved slowly backward toward the door.

‘Gimme that skillet, Buddy,’ he asked quietly, not taking his eyes from the rat.

Buddy extended his hand. Bigger caught the skillet and lifted it high in the air. The rat scuttled across the floor and stopped again at the box and searched quickly for the hole; then it reared once more and bared long yellow fangs, piping shrilly, belly quivering.

Bigger aimed and let the skillet fly with a heavy grunt. There was a shattering of wood as the box caved in. The woman screamed and hid her face in her hands. Bigger tiptoed forward and peered.

‘I got ‘im,’ he muttered, his clenched teeth bared in a smile. ‘By God, I got ‘im.’

He kicked the splintered box out of the way and the flat black body of the rat lay exposed, its two long yellow tusks showing distinctly.

Bigger took a shoe and pounded the rat’s head, crushing it, cursing hysterically:

‘You sonofabitch!’

The woman on the bed sank to her knees and buried her face in the quilts and sobbed:

‘Lord, Lord, have mercy...’

‘Aw, Mama,’ Vera whimpered, bending to her. ‘Don’t cry. It’s dead now.’

The two brothers stood over the dead rat and spoke in tones of awed admiration.

‘Gee, but he’s a big bastard.’

‘That sonofabitch could cut your throat.’

‘He’s over a foot long.’

‘How in hell do they get so big?’

‘Eating garbage and anything else they can get.’

‘Look, Bigger, there’s a three-inch rip in your pant leg.’

‘Yeah; he was after me, all right.’

‘Please, Bigger, take ‘im out,’ Vera begged. ‘Aw, don’t be so scary,’

Buddy said. The woman on the bed continued to sob. Bigger took a piece of newspaper and gingerly lifted the rat by its tail and held it out at arm’s length. (Wright. *Native Son*.153)

The novel is divided into Book One, Book Two and Book Three. Book One is the most important part because of its skillful presentation of the social conditions which are forced upon Bigger and which lead to the crisis of identity. It is worth noting that multiple studies were devoted to treat the problems of Bigger’s identity. But this study focuses on seeing the causes that led to his identity troubles as one of many problems that African Americans

face when they try to adjust their personalities to be assimilated into the white mainstream.

Besides the perfect arrangement of events he gives a thematic example in order to read the images and events of the rest of the narrative. The studies about Bigger's identity claim that it is a product of folk culture, Black Nationalism, racial conflict, and so on. It is important to note that there was prearrangement that Bigger suffers some sort of schizophrenia, which is a mental illness which affects a person's behavior, thinking and emotion, and this has put his multiple personalities in conflict with one another.

If we analyze Bigger's personality, we see that his exchanges with others are controlled by his efforts to be as expected by acting according to the expected type, and Bigger also has the problem of not being able to show his feelings to others. In addition to all these disturbances, Bigger's mixed duality has damaged him at the very center of his being. Few critics claim that Bigger's real problem is that his sense of self is based on artifice that with time he ends with no identity at all. The only emotion that defined Bigger's identity is extreme fear. (Sengova.327)

The hostilities lived by Bigger and the immovable social barriers that forced him to believe that he is nothing, neither a man nor something else. In one passage, Bigger declares that a black man living in white man's world is no man (Sengova.327). Such kind of statement shows that the white society was successful in erasing the black men's personality and identity that threw Bigger, and all those like him, into a long extended period of self-denial.

Bigger's lack of a psychological center is interpreted as a consequence of the strategies of denial employed by a racist white society, preventing them from

assimilating. In other words, forcing the repression of identity in blacks was a means of excluding them from the American narrative. By this, it is necessary to observe the scene in which Bigger and his friend Gus sat together observing a plane flying over their heads. The conversation that accompanies the scene is that these two young men were watching passively the plane shows how they are excluded from modernity and progress. Bigger and Gus notice the plane writing something in the air:

‘That plane writing up there,’ Bigger said,

‘Oh!’... ‘Them white boys sure can fly,’ Gus said.

‘Yeah,’ Bigger said, wistfully. They get a chance to do everything.’

...

‘I could fly one of them things if I had a chance, Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself.... ‘If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go that aviation school, you could fly a plane, Gus said.... It is funny how the white folks treat us ain’t it?’

‘It better be funny,’ Gus said.

‘Maybe they right in not wanting us to fly,’ Bigger said.’

‘Cause it I took a plane up I’d take a couple of bombs along and drop’em as sure hell...’ (Wright. *Native Son*. 153)

Besides being out of modernity and progression, there are other scenes that show how the white society uses delusion in order to banish the real self of the African American. As an example, Bigger is going to be accused of rape. The

rape accusations against him are a way that aims to hide and shed light away from the real identity of the black, and hid him behind the black rapist myth. Imposing the black rapist myth upon blacks has kept them in the most terrifying and disgraceful image. In '*How Bigger Was Born*' Wright says that the rapist myth became a symbol to refer to the Negro's uncertain position in America (Guttman. *What Bigger Killed For*.170) . Therefore, the struggle for identity is a feature that gathers the whole black society. They can never reach the promised status which was reserved for whites.

Additionally, the white society found it necessary to prevent blacks from developing psychologically and holding them in the position of children. To note, the most unifying element in Wright's work is the struggle for self-possession, a struggle to be fully human and free. Through the whole novel Bigger searched for his manliness (Ciner. *Richard Wright's Struggles with Fathers*. 125-27). Since maleness is so central to Bigger's characterization, his quest for self-possession can be easily seen as a quest for manhood. Bigger is meant by Wright as a type that characterizes the whole black society in the Jim Crow Era, and this condition is much applied to the different black males that are just like Bigger.

Bigger knows that he is limited by society, but he does not possess the resources to combat the injustices he experiences. He has no father, which creates the burden of having to support the rest of his family. Bigger is under constant pressure from his mother, who nags and pleads with him to get a job and to become a real man. 'We would't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you,' she says.' (Wright. *Native Son*.153) She has no goals for herself or for Bigger, other than moving out of their rat-infested apartment. Bigger has no significant education, skills, or talents. He also lacks confidence and determination.

Bigger really possesses only the understanding that he is worthless in the white man's world. This is a kind of self-realization, but he still has no ability to make connections with other people. Bigger does not feel morally attached to his girlfriend, Bessie, or his friends. His family and their poor condition anger him: 'He shut [his family's] voices out of his mind. He hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them' (Wright. *Native Son*.9). Bigger's life is full of hatred, coldness, and isolation. Moments after he accidentally kills Mary Dalton, 'Thought and feeling were balked in him; there was something he was trying to tell himself, desperately, but could not' (Wright. *Native Son*.100). Nothing and no one in Bigger's life can help him, so he is unable to mentally flourish and make sense of himself.

Richard Wright's great achievement, artistically speaking, in *Native Son* is in depicting and representing the psychological consequences of those deadly harming disturbances as being equal to the sociological and geographical fractures of the segregated and unstable society. Showing this cultural sickness in Bigger Thomas' self, Wright powerfully and skillfully identifies the form of the psychological separatism and emptiness of identity among the African American population. The most important factor that composes Bigger's identity and was brilliantly captured in Wright's title for the novel's first book: fear.

There was a scene in which Bigger's shows that he can neither fit neither in the white society nor in the black which caused in him a trouble of personality, a trouble that appears in a very clear. It is when Bigger is continually seeking diversion and a way to avoid looking so solid and firm when it comes to racial injustice. He even trains Gus, his friend, to play with him the role a white man. The narrative voice informs us

that this is a reference to [the game played by black in whom a black boy imitates the manners of white people].

‘Let’s play ‘white,’” Bigger said, referring to a game of play-acting in which he and his friends imitated the ways and manners of white folks.

‘I don’t feel like it,’ Gus said.

‘General!’ Bigger pronounced in a sonorous tone, looking at Gus expectantly.

‘Aw, hell! I don’t want to play,’ Gus whined.

‘You’ll be court-martialed,’ Bigger said, snapping out his words with military precision.

‘Nigger, you nuts!’ Gus laughed.

‘General!’ Bigger tried again, determinedly.

Gus looked wearily at Bigger, then straightened, saluted and answered:

‘Yessuh.’

‘Send your men over the river at dawn and attack the enemy’s left flank,’ Bigger ordered. ‘Yessuh.’

‘Send the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Regiments,’ Bigger said, frowning. ‘And attack with tanks, gas, planes, and infantry.’

"Yessuh!" Gus said again, saluting and clicking his heels.

For a moment they were silent, facing each other, their shoulders thrown back, their lips compressed to hold down the mounting impulse to laugh. Then they guffawed, partly at themselves and partly at the vast white world that sprawled and towered in the sun before them.

‘Say, what’s a ‘left flank’?’ Gus asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Bigger said. ‘I heard it in the movies.’

They laughed again. After a bit they relaxed and leaned against the wall, smoking. Bigger saw Gus cup his left hand to his ear, as though holding a telephone receiver; and cup his right hand to his mouth, as though talking into a transmitter.

‘Hello,’ Gus said.

‘Hello,’ Bigger said. “Who’s this?”

‘This is Mr. J. P. Morgan speaking,’ Gus said.

‘Yessuh, Mr. Morgan,’ Bigger said; his eyes filled with mock adulation and respect.

‘I want to sell twenty thousand shares of U.S. Steel in the market this morning,’ Gus said. ‘At what price, suh?’ Bigger asked.

‘Aw, just dump ‘em at any price,’ Gus said with casual irritation.

‘We’re holding too much.’ ‘Yessuh,’ Bigger said.

‘And call me at my club at two this afternoon and tell me if the President telephoned,’ Gus said.



‘Yessuh, Mr. Morgan,’ Bigger said.

Both of them made gestures signifying that they were hanging up telephone receivers; then they bent double, laughing.

‘I bet that’s just the way they talk,’ Gus said. ‘I wouldn’t be surprised,’ Bigger said. (Wright. *Native Son*.22)

As Bigger and Gus ‘play white,’ we begin to realize their conception of the universe: whites have power and blacks have none. Each white person they choose to play has power, which he uses unsparingly against those who are helpless.

In the second scenario, Gus pretends to be an authority figure; by playing the role of J. P. Morgan. This latter order a subordinate to sell twenty thousand shares of United States steel in the market that morning. For Bigger and his friend Gus, these actions are of enormous and similar significance. The actions of Bigger and Gus show that economy and the military represent undeniable institutions of oppression.

In these fantasies, both characters have the chance to play authority figures. The topics of the scenarios dreamed by Bigger and Gus cannot be separated from their conditioned understanding of the racial injustices they have been raised in. For Bigger and Gus, being black, and considered as thieves, are images that are scary and fearsome for whites. Both characters are aware that since they are blacks they will never have the chance to reach descent positions in the white society.

To white society, African Americans having access to the white society was a fearsome idea. And what made it more terrifying especially to white women, is the black rapist myth. The second authority is also a slogan of the larger authority that

keeps the oppression of blacks. For Bigger and Gus J. P. Morgan represent an economy system to prevent any social mobility in black society.

African Americans have no access to the stock market which is impossible to reach and almost mythic as the airplane because the military will never let Bigger fly.

Interestingly, the subordinate in both scenarios integrates the dialect of Negro submissiveness, responding 'yessuh' to the authority's directives, making of these scenarios, which are peopled only with imagined whites, imitations of white and black conflict in which the white is always the authority. The scene follows about a page after Gus makes fun Bigger's claims that he could fly a plane given the chance. [In the response Gus pulled down the corners of his lips, stepped out from the wall, squared his shoulders, removed his cap, bowed low and spoke with an ironic voice 'yessuh']. (Wright. *Native Son*.18)

The varied subjects that treat the ideas of blacks in black society, of blacks in white society, and those of whites in white society, do all meet in these scenarios but the significance is in the unsettling realization that they are all part of a theatrical performance by single characters that move among the agreements at will. Wright presents in this scene a microcosm i.e. a small society of the environments and roles that blacks were forced to navigate. In the last scenario imagined by the two, Bigger acts as the president of the United States ordering Gus, as the secretary of state, to appear at an urgent cabinet meeting.

Having identified two institutions that they see as tools in the oppression of blacks, they now imagine the oppression as more literal and direct. The purpose for the cabinet meeting is to say that the blacks; calling them niggers, are raising sand all over the country, and they had got to do something with them.

The intersection in conversations appear clearly when Bigger and Gus use the word 'nigger' in their conversation; which is a word that African Americans use only to refer to a black who misbehaves, to show fear or irrationality . As the white president, the ultimate institutional authority, uses the term, so does Gus, for example, upbraid Bigger with 'Nigger, you nuts' in response to Bigger's expressing his dreams of flying.

This scene doesn't represent personality confusion so much but simply the psychological pressure of existing in an environment that demands the artificial adoption of so many different roles. The different sets of deviate meetings are suitable to the varying roles become representative of those roles. Since Bigger is forced to adopt the conventions, they add considerable deformation to his psyche when he must submit to them in the right situations, or when situations confuse his ability to adopt the correct roles.

The scene ends with an appearance of the frustration about racial injustices that are continually bearing on them economical and psychological trouble. After the final improvised scenario, the exchange between Bigger and Gus indicates there is no diversion from the constant pressure of racial inequity. In this scenario we read that Bigger took a deep breath and said 'God dammit!' questioning what the matter was, speaking about the white people who let them do nothing (Wright. *Native Son*.21). This scene, of a joking tone for the most part until the concluding expression of frustration, represents the emotion to which Bigger and those like him are driven by their socio-economic circumstances.

Some critics claim that scenes like those that happened between Bigger and Gus when they pretended to be men of authority are seen as typically black males' actions.

Those who are struggling to manage with a society of racial oppression. The function of black male community in *Native Son* is claimed to be as the social grouping among poor urban black males. Such grouping helped to keep Bigger struggling for universal and his humanity as well. The grouping of African Americans in Ghettoes provided them with a feeling of security in their hostile Society. (Ellis. 'Where is Bigger's Humanity? 23-30)

Although this sense of community was supposed to be a stabilizing force for Bigger, but Bigger's relationship with his community is in reality is not a good, on the contrary it complicates his efforts to keep his inner and outer selves in harmony.

Though all African Americans in Chicago's Black Belt would have been forced to modify their discourse in the presence of whites, Bigger, and his friends to a lesser degree, have the added pressure of maintaining a reputation that facilitates their survival in the Black Belt. For Bigger, the exaggerated masculinity he shows as part of his established reputation conflicts severely with what is, in reality, his fearful and anxious state of mind.

It becomes clear that Bigger is not as tough as he represents himself to his neighborhood. Indeed, he even seems confused by the disconnection between his external aggression and his inner fear and anxiety. For the most part, Bigger appears to be a friendly and sociable person until some psychological tension motivates him to show a more aggressive identity. We learn that the group of friends has engaged in small attempts of robbery before, but now Bigger wants something more significant. He wants, this time, to use a gun to rob 'Old Blum's.' This in itself is an indication of his growing aggression and his desire to replace his inner fear and his obedient behavior around whites by his wishes and quest for humanization. (Fisher. *The Delinquent's Sabbath*. 202-212).

Incidentally, Blum is white, so the action Bigger is up to deeply conflicts with his change of behavior in the presence of whites. After Bigger decides to rob, Jack and G.H. equivocate, but agree at the end to participate. Gus, however, hesitates and Bigger must pressure him. Bigger precipitates insults at Gus until he finally intimidates Gus into joining in the plan.

Bigger, however, has an emotional paradox caused for himself. He felt an interested impression; half-sensual, half-intellectual. He was divided; he feels that he must go through with the robbery but at the same time fears the idea of having to go through with it. Bigger acts out his fear by bullying others; when it doesn't work, he grows angry, but the anger is just a way to get rid of his fear.

‘Save for the sound of Doc’s whistling up front, there was silence.

Bigger watched Jack closely; he knew that the situation was one in which Jack’s word would be decisive. Bigger was afraid of Gus, because he knew that Gus would not hold out if Jack said yes. Gus stood at the table, toying with a cue stick, his eyes straying lazily over the billiard balls scattered about the table in the array of an unfinished game. Bigger rose and sent the balls whirling with a sweep of his hand, then looked straight at Gus as the gleaming balls kissed and rebounded from the rubber cushions, zig-zagging across the table’s green cloth. Even though Bigger had asked Gus to be with him in the robbery, the fear that Gus would really go made the muscles of Bigger’s stomach tighten; he was hot all over. He felt as if he wanted to sneeze and could not; only it was more nervous than wanting to sneeze. He grew hotter, tighter; his nerves were taut and his teeth were on edge. He felt that something would soon snap within him.

‘Goddammit! Say something, somebody!’

‘I’m in,’ Jack said again. ‘I’ll go if the rest goes,’ G.H. said. Gus stood without speaking and Bigger felt a curious sensation—half-sensual, half-thoughtful. He was divided and pulled against himself. He had handled things just right so far; all but Gus had consented. The way things stood now there were three against Gus, and that was just as he had wanted it to be. Bigger was afraid of robbing a white man and he knew that Gus was afraid, too. Blum’s store was small and Blum was alone, but Bigger could not think of robbing him without being flanked by his three pals. But even with his pals he was afraid. He had argued all of his pals but one into consenting to the robbery, and toward the lone man who held out he felt 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. Like a man about to shoot himself and dreading to shoot and yet knowing that he has to shoot and feeling it all at once and powerfully, he watched Gus and waited for him to say yes. But Gus did not speak. Bigger’s teeth clamped so tight that his jaws ached. He edged toward Gus, not looking at Gus, but feeling the presence of Gus over all his body, through him, in and out of him, and hating himself and Gus because he felt it. Then he could not stand it any longer. The hysterical tensivity of his nerves urged him to speak, to free himself. He faced Gus, his eyes red with anger and fear, his fists clenched and held stiffly to his sides.

‘You black sonofabitch,’ he said in a voice that did not vary in tone.

‘You scared ‘cause he’s a white man.’ (Wright. Native Son. 171)

The enormous psychological pressure caused by the ambition to commit the crime and the fear of doing it has become more complicated especially after having physically and emotionally to threaten Gus, an action which conflicts with his inner fear and psychic weakness.

‘You black sonofabitch,’ [Bigger] said in a voice that did not vary in tone. ‘You scared ‘cause he’s a white man.’

‘Don’t cuss me, Bigger,’ Gus said quietly.

‘I am cussing you!’

‘You don’t have to cuss me,’ Gus said.

‘Then why don’t you use that black tongue of yours?’ Bigger asked.

‘Why don’t you say what you going to do?’

‘I don’t have to use my tongue unless I want to!’

‘You bastard! You scared bastard!’

‘You ain’t my boss, Gus said.

‘You yellow!’ Bigger said. ‘You scared to rob a white man.’

‘Aw Bigger. Don’t say that,’ G.H said. ‘Leave ‘im alone.’

‘He’s yellow,’ Bigger said. ‘He won’t go with us. ... Gus leaned on his cue and gazed at Bigger and Bigger’s stomach tightened as though he were expecting a blow and were getting ready for it. His fists

clenched harder. In a split of a second he felt how his fist and arm and body would feel if he hit Gus squarely in the mouth, drawing blood; Gus would fall and he would walk out and the whole thing would be over and the robbery would not take place.’ (Wright. Native Son. 171-172)

Wright does not force us to look for different interpretations; the text brightly describes Bigger’s nervousness and tells us directly that Bigger is not nearly as confident as he represents himself to be. The scene is a natural progression from the earlier one depicting Bigger and Gus’s conflict. The tension this time is greater and the stakes are higher, that is surely a part of Wright’s design. As his outward aggression struggles with his inner anxiety, another personality that emerges to the surface, that of submissiveness to whites, raises the tension to an unbearable level.

Bigger’s fear of an automatic obedience to the white people represents a tremendous psychological barrier against which are settled both his social boldness and his real need to express some mysterious aggression. The text concentrates on showing the force of the tension in a sad presentation that foreshadows the disastrous events that are coming. There is a scene that shows Bigger’s and Gus’s frustration about white people.

‘They hung up imaginary receivers and leaned against the wall and laughed. A street car rattled by. Bigger sighed and swore.

‘Goddammit!’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘They don’t let us do *nothing*.’



‘Who?’

‘The *white* folks.’

‘You talk like you just now finding that out,’ Gus said.

‘Naw. But I just can’t get used to it,’ Bigger said. ‘I swear to God I can’t. 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 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....’

‘Aw, ain’t no use feeling that way about it. It don’t help none,’ Gus said.

‘You know one thing?’ Bigger said.

‘What?’

‘Sometimes I feel like something awful’s going to happen to me,’

Bigger spoke with a tinge of bitter pride in his voice.

‘What you mean?’ Gus asked, looking at him quickly. There was fear in Gus’s eyes.

‘I don’t know. I just feel that way. Every time I get thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they being there, I feel like something awful’s going to happen to me....’

‘Aw, for chrissakes! There ain’t nothing you can do about it. How come you want to worry yourself? You black and they make the laws....’

‘Why they make us live in one corner of the city? Why don’t they let us fly planes and run ships....’

Gus hunched Bigger with his elbow and mumbled good-naturedly,

‘Aw, nigger, quit thinking about it. You’ll go nuts.’...

‘Nothing ever happens,’ he complained.’ (Wright. *Native Son*. 166-167)

Bigger continues to express to Gus his fear and nervousness toward whites.

‘Gus?’

‘Hunh?’

‘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 you mean?’ Gus asked, puzzled. ‘Then, where do they live?’

Bigger doubled his fist and struck his solar plexus.

‘Right down here in my stomach,’ he said.

Gus looked at Bigger searchingly, then away, as though ashamed.

‘Yeah; I know what you mean,’ he whispered.

‘Every time 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....’

Bigger’s eyes were wide and placid, gazing into space.

‘That’s when I feel like something awful’s going to happen to me....’

Bigger paused, narrowed his eyes. ‘Naw; it ain’t like something going to happen to me. It’s ...It’s like I was going to do something I can’t help....’

‘Yeah!’ Gus said with uneasy eagerness. His eyes were full of a look compounded of fear and admiration for Bigger.

‘Yeah; I know what you mean. It’s like you going to fall and don’t know where you going to land....’ (Wright. *Native Son*. 165)

Bigger feels lots of hate and fear toward Gus, who hesitates. The inclusion of his various roles confuses Bigger as he transfers his fear of the whites to Gus. When Bigger transfers his hate for Gus, the latter feels Bigger’s hate for his own self. Bigger hated Gus because he knew that Gus was afraid, even as he was; and he feared Gus because he felt that Gus would accept and then he would be forced to go through with the robbery. Bigger, clearly, is unable to fully mask his inner fear.

Gus finally softened and agreed to participate in the robbery. He said that he will help just like he always helps. But he will never accept orders from Bigger because ‘he is

just a scared coward, Gus shouted' (Wright. *Native Son*. 29). This truth shocks Bigger and the psychological tension that had been growing nearly explodes in violence as Bigger rushes at Gus. Jack and G. H. intervene to prevent further violence, but the scene, as each scene of Wright's well-planned does, anticipates more unpredictable shattering actions that are to come.

When the group meets later in the day to execute their plan, the pressure has become too much for Bigger and his fear overwhelms his force of will. Instead of proceeding with the robbery, he plans a scheme to avoid it. Bigger attacks Gus, clearly because Gus is late for the meeting, knowing this will cause Gus to quit the plan. For the moment at least, Bigger is able to release some of the psychological tension caused by the forced communication of conflicting identities. Such relief is needed usually through the novel which is a special motif about Wright's style.

When Bigger attacks Gus in order to avoid going ahead with the robbery, the fight is described in vividly sexualized language.

'Bigger's hand moved so swiftly that nobody saw it; a gleaming blade flashed, threw out his left foot and tripped Gus to the floor. Gus turned over to rise, but Bigger was on top of him, with the knife open and ready.

'Get up! Get up and I'll slice your tonsils!'

Gus lay still.

'That's all right, Bigger,' Gus said in surrender. 'Lemme up.'

'You trying to make a fool out of me, ain't you?'

‘Naw,’ Gus said, his lips scarcely moving.

‘You goddamn right you ain’t.’ Bigger said.

His face softened a bit and the hard glint in his bloodshot eyes died.

But he still knelt with the open knife. Then he stood.

‘Get up!’ he said.

‘Please, Bigger!’

‘You want me to slice you?’

He stooped again and placed the knife at Gus's throat. Gus did not move and his large black eyes looked pleadingly. Bigger was not satisfied: he felt his muscles tightening again.

‘Get up! I ain’t going to ask you no more!’

Slowly, Gus stood. Bigger held the open blade an inch from Gus’s lips.

‘Lick it,’ Bigger said, his body tingling with elation.

Gus’s eyes filled with tears.

‘Lick it, I said. You think I’m playing?’ ....

‘Put your hand up, way up’ he said.

Gus swallowed and stretched his hands high along the wall.

‘Leave ‘im alone, Bigger,’ G.H. called weakly.

‘I’m doing this,’ Bigger said.

He put the tip of the blade into Gus's shirt and then made an arc with his arm, as though cutting a circle.

‘How would you like me to cut your belly button out?’

Gus did not answer. Sweat trickled down his temples. His lips hung wide, loose.

‘Shut them liver lips of yours!’

Gus did not move a muscle. Bigger pushed the knife harder into Gus’s stomach.

‘Bigger!’ Gus said in a tense whisper.

‘Shut your mouth!’ (Wright. *Native Son*. 40-41)

In the latter scene Bigger harasses Gus because he was late for the meeting to make the robbery. This scene is described in a more likely sexual way because Bigger enjoyed what he was doing to Gus, supposedly his friend. Bigger pushes Gus and fixes him next a wall, takes a knife and Gus’s shirt at the same time Bigger was cursing him. But Gus, though frightened, replied to those curses by telling Bigger to shut it up.

The symbolic rape of Gus matches the expected rape of Mary Dalton and the later rape and savage murder of Bessie Mears after the pressures have finally overcome Bigger and he is no longer able to manage the situation. The term ‘rape’ will take numerous meanings as the novel develops, and the understanding of its thematic introduction may in fact be central to our understanding of the novel’s message. It

also allows a unique relation to each of the roles Bigger finds himself forced to negotiate.

Before the rape has become literal when it happens to Bessie, it is a result of the forced impact of his concern provoked by scaring, masculine aggressive mistreatment, and timid, white fearing selves. The conflicts are only shown in these early events, but they become more concrete as Bigger moves into the white society and we witness the disturbing change in his behavior and speech. The black community is not an environment of comfort and support although occupied with people who have similar life conditions and share the same experience. This community is for Bigger only another stage for which he must devise a role in order to survive, as if he wore masks and was changing them according to the stages he performed on.

Although Bigger's tightness appears in the violence against and metaphorical rape of Gus, more disastrous effects are, for the time being, avoided because of the violent sexual release he finds in the abuse of Gus. The descriptions of the scene employ some key verbal indications that permit us to attach the thematic meaning of this scene to other events in the book. Bigger's tightening muscles are a symptom of the tension resulting from the conflict of his different selves he was showing. We saw the same tightening a few pages earlier when Bigger threatened Gus in order to intimidate him to force him to participate in the robbery. Bigger's muscles remain tense until he is satisfied.

Obviously the satisfaction he needs is not too different from that he seeks from Bessie after his communications with the Daltons. The signals help us to locate the source of Bigger's psychological disorder and to connect the serious effects of that turmoil directly to it. The lines that conclude these opening scenes indicate to us that

the scenes can be used to help for a better understanding of the significance of all that follows. He said that this was the way Bigger lived his life trying to defeat the world he feared. Book One works out as a manuscript that defines Bigger's tensions and provides a reference source for the causes of his later actions.

#### **4.2 Bigger's White Persona**

Social and sociological conditions are nicely and artistically brought together side by side, and each scene is designed to be as a continuation of earlier scenes and a foreshadow of later ones. After the morning full of emotions and tensions with his friends, Bigger prepares nervously for his walk into the white neighborhood; a neighbor that is deeply inspired by the racial injustice with which he will be forced to deal with.

‘[Bigger felt] Inside his shirt he felt the cold metal of the gun resting against his naked skin; he ought to put it back between the mattresses. No! He would keep it. He would take it with him to the Dalton place. He felt that he would be safer if he took it. He was not planning to use it and there was nothing in particular that he was afraid of, but there was in him an uneasiness and distrust that made him feel that he ought to have it along. 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 the Dalton 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. *Native Son*. 44)



Through analyzing this extract, we read that before he goes to the whites' neighborhood he should take with him his knife and gun; taking these weapons with him symbolizes the power he wishes to have. Taking the weapons with him to the white's territory would make Bigger equal to whites and give him a sense of completeness. This suggests that he is aware of the difficulty that lies ahead in integrating the identity he would be forced to adopt at the Dalton house with that of his life in the Black Belt.

What the passage really suggests is that his secret possession of the knife and the gun would, in the face of the humiliating obedient behavior he was forced into, symbolize his gathering for manhood and shrinks the gap between his proud, arrogant identity in his neighborhood and his modest, prideless identity in the white society. When Bigger arrives at the Dalton house, one is presented with a character nearly unrecognizable as Bigger. This Bigger is silent and repeats 'yessuhs' and 'nawsuhs.' The unexpected change in Bigger's behaviour is very much different from his earlier attitude when he was with Gus.

Bigger uses the simple dialect that whites expect of him and which suits the role that white society has confined him. Due to the stereotyped image of blacks, Bigger believed that he had to play the role of the obedient if he wished to have the chauffeur job. He believed that if he does something wrong, white people will kill him.

'Timidly, he lifted the latch in the gate and walked to the steps. He paused, waiting for someone to challenge him. Nothing happened. Maybe nobody was home? He went to the door and saw a dim light burning in a shaded niche above a doorbell. He pushed it and was startled to hear a soft gong sound within. Maybe he had pushed it too

hard? Aw, what the hell! He had to do better than this; he relaxed his taut muscles and stood at ease, waiting. The doorknob turned. The door opened. He saw a white face. It was a woman.

‘Hello!’

‘Yessum,’ he said.

‘You want to see somebody?’

‘Er ...Er ...I want to see Mr. Dalton.

‘Are you the Thomas boy?’

‘Yessum.’ (Wright. *Native Son*. 46)

Wright has put his Bigger in a deterministic economic and social environment. In this environment, even with Bigger’s artifice of his planned roles, he could be anything but ‘organic’. The paradox of Bigger’s consciousness being both organic and artificial accounts for the earlier dilemma in which Bigger felt alienated and dragged against himself. In an emotional paradox, he knew that he has to rob Blum but he could not, a sort of tension that can lead only to catastrophe. (Tremaine. *The Dissociated Sensibility of Bigger Thomas in Wright’s Native Son*.63-76)

The conflict between what might be called Bigger’s encircled and prohibited identities is evident in his meeting with Mr. Dalton and his communications with the other members of the household. The obedient and susceptible tone of his discourse with the Dalton family contradicts the bitter and vulgar interior monologue that takes place while he speaks with Mr. Dalton, Mary, and Peggy.

‘[Bigger] was conscious of the effort to breathe; he licked his lips and fumbled nervously with his cap.

‘Well, I’m Mr. Dalton.’

‘Yessuh.’

‘Do you think you'd like driving a car?’

‘Oh, yessuh.’

‘Did you bring the paper?’

‘Suh?’

‘Didn’t the relief give you a note to me?’

‘Oh, yessuh!’

He had completely forgotten about the paper. He stood to reach into his vest pocket and, in doing so, dropped his cap. For a moment his impulses were deadlocked; he did not know if he should pick up his cap and then find the paper, or find the paper and then pick up his cap. He decided to pick up his cap.

‘Put your cap here,’ said Mr. Dalton, indicating a place on his desk.

‘Yessuh.’

Then he was stone-still; the white cat bounded past him and leaped upon the desk; it sat looking at him with large placid eyes and mewed plaintively.

‘What’s the matter, Kate?’ Mr. Dalton asked, stroking the cat’s fur and smiling. Mr. Dalton turned back to Bigger. ‘Did you find it?’

‘Nawsuh. But I got it here, somewhere.’

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 himself out. He had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton’s face once since he had been in the house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped; and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things. There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be when in their presence; none had ever told him that in so many words, but their manner had made him feel that they did. He laid the cap down, noticing that Mr. Dalton was watching him closely. Maybe he was not acting right? Goddamn! Clumsily, he searched for the paper. He could not find it at first and he felt called upon to say something for taking so long.

‘I had it right here in my vest pocket,’ he mumbled.

‘Take your time.’

‘Oh, here it is.’

He drew the paper forth. It was crumpled and soiled. Nervously, he straightened it out and handed it to Mr. Dalton, holding it by its very tip end.

‘All right, now,’ said Mr. Dalton. ‘Let’s see what you’ve got here. You live at 3721 Indiana Avenue?’

‘Yessuh.’ (Wright. *Native Son*. 49)

Bigger’s growing tension is produced by his unnatural discursive dialectic signified by the pulsing repetition of his frustrated swear ‘Goddamn!’ He worried whether the Dalton’s. ‘Would they expect him to come in the front way or back? It was queer that he had not thought of that. Goddamn!’ He walked the length of the picket fence in front of the house, seeking for a walk leading to the rear. But there was none. Other than the front gate, there was only a driveway, the entrance to which was securely locked. Suppose a policeman saw him wandering in a white neighborhood like this? It would be thought that he was trying to rob 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. Well ...Goddamn! There was nothing to do but to go in the front way. If he were doing wrong, they could not kill him, at least; all they could do was to tell him that he could not get the job. (Wright. *Native Son*. 260)

For sure; no one is completely the person inside he represents himself to be to others, but the distance and dislocation between the inner and outer selves proved that Bigger

Thomas would be considered unnatural, and, indeed, sociopathic which is to be anti-social in modern society. (Ellis. *Where is Bigger's Humanity?* 23-30) Bigger swells far beyond the bounds of the traditional 'bad nigger,' Wright make him clearly the result of the forces that molded the urban Negro's body and soul. In *Black Metropolis* (1945), for which Wright wrote these in an introduction, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Both from the University of Chicago of sociology, apply these sociological principles to Chicago's Black Belt. Drake and Cayton lay out the details of the comparative death rates, demographics, real estate covenants, employment limitations, and economic exploitation that are the sociological basis for *Native Son*; they also point out that the 'stirrings of revolt' to be seen in Chicago are part of world-wide movement among peoples of color in China, Africa, India, and Asia no longer willing to tolerate the colonial oppression of the white Europeans. (760)

The sociopathic rage that drives Bigger is thus not confined to the African American male. It is a world- wide phenomenon. Like the masses in Nazi Germany and Communist Russia, Bigger 'is a product of a dislocated society . . . a dispossessed and disinherited man,' groping through violence toward dignity and meaning.' (Wright. *How Bigger was Born*) What Bigger does to Gus and Doc and then to Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears is a psycho-social issue, to be studied and understood like a laboratory specimen, with Wright working 'like a scientist' inventing 'test-tube situations' for Bigger in order to work out the resolution of this problem. This attitude connects him with the Zola-Dreiser school of literary naturalism, whose quasi-scientific method of dealing with character and event assumes that the ambient background is at least as important as the figures whose actions and fate are determined by that background. '[A]n understanding of Negro expression,' says

Wright 'cannot be arrived at without a constant reference to the environment which cradles it.' (Bryant. 'Born in Mighty Bad Land'.63)

The language of Bigger's inner thoughts does not resemble the shy tone of his artificial language with the white characters but it shows his real self. His dual identities are in constant conflict, and when he goes to his room, alone far from the whites, he relieves the tension in an act that has vaguely erotic overtones. He goes into his room and 'He lit a cigarette and stretched himself full length upon the bed. Ohhhh.... This was not going to be bad at all.' (Wright. Native Son. 60)Such behaviour is believed to be very much like Bigger, the impolite vulgar Negro.

Bigger lit a cigarette and stretched his body full length upon the bed. The next scenes represent the climax in Book One of the problem of personality that troubles Bigger. Mary and Jan, perhaps well meaning, but more naïve even than the self-satisfied and self-congratulatory Mr. Dalton, have no idea of the true plight of African Americans, a plight they view as primarily economic. As Addison Gayle explains 'believing that they were able to look beyond race and color, succeeded not in regarding ass as equal but in regarding blacks as fantasies, images chosen from the imagination.' (Gayle. Richard Wright: Ordeal of a Native Son.117) In their naïve liberation of blackness as a personality, supportive white people do not see Bigger as a human but as a social experiment, and for that they are playing the role of an intentional complicit in the effacement of black personality.

To Bigger, every white man is blind and is not able to see the true personality of the black people. Mary and Jan were just as blind to him as the Dalton family and the rest of the white society. Their attempts to abolish race separation in such an environment, rather than humanizing Bigger they make him feel like an animal; like a dog (Gayle.

Richard Wright: *Ordeal of a Native Son*. 350). Even since Bigger arrived at the Dalton's house, he felt insecure. The Daltons' white maid Peggy is the first white person that Bigger meets when she opens the door to him. Though Peggy is polite to Bigger, he senses that she is looking down on him even though she, like him, is only hired help. While Bigger waits for Mr. Dalton, he stares at the splendor of the home, with its elegant furnishings and paintings. He feels intimidated by the vast difference between this world and his own. Assailed by insecurity, tension, and fear, he becomes awkward and clumsy.

Mary's first instruction to Bigger forces him into an action that conflicts with his white society persona.

'Hello, Bigger,' [Mary] said.

Bigger swallowed. He looked at Mr. Dalton, then felt that he should not have looked.

'Good evening, mam.'

The girl came close to him and stopped just opposite his chair.

'Bigger, do you belong to a union?' she asked.

'Now, Mary!' said Mr. Dalton, frowning.

'Well, Father, he should,' the girl said, turning to him, then back to Bigger. 'Do you?'

'Mary....' said Mr. Dalton.

'I'm just asking him a question, Father!'



Bigger hesitated. He hated the girl then. Why did she have to do this when he was trying to get a job?

‘No’m,’ he mumbled, his head down and his eyes glowering.

‘And why not?’ the girl asked. (Wright. *Native Son*. 53)

He must do something of which Mr. Dalton would certainly disapprove which is to pick up Mary’s boyfriend and he has to keep it a secret. When Mary and Jan talk with Bigger, they put huge pressure on him to neglect the personality that he has developed to communicate with the white people, which confused Bigger enormously and caused his principle pressure because he had no idea of or preparation for, the type of behavior expected of him in such a situation.

The tightening and the fear should help in making a connection between this situation and the earlier one that shows the conflict between Bigger and Gus. Jan drives the car instead of Bigger who is forced to be out of the role he knows how to manage; his inner thoughts begin to boil with the same violent tone as when Bigger threatened Gus and when he spoke with Mr. Dalton.

‘[Bigger] flushed warm with anger. Goddamn her soul to hell! Was she laughing at him? Were they making fun of him? What was it that they wanted? Why didn't they leave him alone? He was not bothering them. Yes, anything could happen with people like these. His entire mind and body were painfully concentrated into a single sharp point of attention. He was trying desperately to understand. He felt foolish sitting behind the steering wheel like this and letting a white man hold his hand. What would people passing along the street think? He was

very conscious of his black skin and there was in him a prodding conviction that Jan and men like him had made it so that he would be conscious of that black skin. Did not white people despise a black skin? Then why was Jan doing this? Why was Mary standing there so eagerly, with shining eyes? What could they get out of this? Maybe they did not despise him? But 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 a 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 hate. (Wright, *Native Son*.68)

He displaced Mary and Jan because they force his identities into confusion. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a strong hatred. Bigger is further disoriented when Jan orders him not to call him *sir*. Bigger was very confused how he would not call him *sir* while he did it for all his life.

Asking Bigger to call Jan by his name was an indirect way to disregard racial barriers. After the three park the car outside Ernie's Kitchen Shack, Bigger thinks shortly that he will have a chance to rest while Mary and Jan are eating. Mary and Jan forgot completely that they are causing Bigger greater terror than he normally experiences rather than comforting him especially when they asked him to join them to the

restaurant. Bigger knew that it was abnormal to see white people hanging around with a black boy. (Sengova.332)

In this place Bigger cannot segregate his personalities, which have a natural dislike and hatred toward one another for the simple reason because they are the opposite of each other. Jack salutes Bigger in the restaurant, but Bigger cannot show his cautious boldness to Jack while his submissiveness to whites is in effect with Mary and Jan present, a mode that has already been frustrated by Mary's and Jan's naïve misunderstanding of Bigger's true plight. To make matters worse, Bessie, Bigger's sometime girlfriend, also greets him, but Bigger is nearly paralyzed by his inability to determine an appropriate identity to show. (Sengova.332)

These personalities in conflict with one another are again forced into communication here; in a scene that is a progression of those that have come before and that have prefigured the tension of a situation such as this. Bigger's ability to project the right role at the right time is automatic, described by Wright with a term, 'organic,' that is a key verbal cue guiding us in connecting all these scenes together.

In an action of symbolic significance, Bigger picked up a piece of chicken and bit it. When he tried to chew he found his mouth dry. It seemed that the very organic functions of his body had changed. (Wright. *Native Son*. 67) Bigger's ability to alternate among identities, as revealed in the scene with Mr. Dalton, is an 'organic' operation, which refers not to a fundamental, a 'natural' identity, but rather ironically to the tragic capacity in showing artifice that Bigger has developed. (Tremaine.63-67)

The interference Mary and Jan with that process disrupts Bigger's psychological functioning, which is paralleled by the disruption of Bigger's physiological functions. The result, once again, is anger, fear, tension, and hatred. But after the implied

narrator reveals that to us, Bigger's interior monologue goes mostly silent, as if the extreme tension arising from the forced communication of his separate personalities, as well as Mary's and Jan's denying him one role he can comfortably manage, removes any sense even of artificial identity; literally he is nobody. (Tremaine. 63-67)

As the three sit in the restaurant, there are some awkward attempts by Jan and Mary to integrate themselves into the black culture they have stepped into. Jan, the revolutionary and surpasser of social boundaries, asks Bigger if he liked fried chicken in a gesture to be friendly with him. Jan later attempts to talk to Bigger in his dialect, but his attempt was just making things worse. Jan's attempt proved that he has no idea about the real problem that blacks were living.

While riding in the car later, Mary extravagantly declares her affection for the feelings of Bigger's people. She sings a spiritual with Negro dialect. These examples seem planned to be equivalent to the earlier scenes of Bigger's and Gus's playacting in which they imitated white people. Wright's formal design with that parallel concludes the series of scenes meant to depict for us the circumstances of Bigger's psychological disorientation and to analyze his several identities. After leaving the restaurant, Mary, Jan, and Bigger ride in the car for several hours while Bigger, driving, is basically silent. When they finally arrive at the Dalton house, Mary pushes Bigger to speak and his reaction is one with which we have become familiar till the end, Bigger tightened with hate.

### **5. Stereotype and Discrimination in *Black Boy***

The South of twentieth century United States is one of the most impoverished and racist parts of the United States. Richard Wright was born in Natchez, Mississippi, in 1908. He experienced racial violence and lived under the white domination He used

what he had experienced during his early life and used it as a source of inspiration for most of his writings from *Uncle Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, and *Black Boy*. Richard Wright depended on his personal experiences to show the hostile nature of the Southern discriminatory policy of racial separation. Wright's works were seen by most critics as sociological studies of the dangers that African Americans face in the South and the consequences of such segregation on their lives.

For a better understanding of *Black Boy*, it is necessary to read Richard Wright's non-fictional work '*Twelve Million Black Voices*'. A work that tracks the African American history in the south with a particular emphasis on folk culture and the role it played in decreasing the imperative of racism. Many critics believed that '*Black Boy*' was a sociological though it was not meant to be one. The thing that is common between sociology and '*Black boy*' is that they both do not only analyze social problems but they offer solutions to them. Richard Wright's works do contain words and ideas that reflect the problems of the society of his time. Violence and crime are the most important themes treated in '*Black Boy*'.

### **5.1 Resisting Stereotype**

'*Black Boy*' is presented as an autobiographical narrative that tracks Richard Wright's strong desire for freedom and journey to self-discovery. Since the white strategy was to fix the African American in the stereotyped figure, obedience and servitude with no questions or refusal. Richard Wright had a different vision in his most famous works '*Native Son*' and '*Black Boy*'.

In *'Native son'*, he expressed the idea of not seeing any chance to escape from the domination of the white supremacy. In *'Black Boy'* on the other hand, he sees that there is a hope and a chance for self-liberation from the white's power. His own life is a living proof of this discourse of escape. He lived in the south where he had no right to speak and then moved to Chicago, New York and at last Paris. Richard Wright was strong enough to defeat the white supremacist control over the lives of African Americans and became one of the controversial writers who helped in the reshaping of the American view of the African American social, psychological, and economic troubles they were facing.

Wright's personal experience gave appropriate example about the hardships and challenges that encountered those who tried to rebel against the southern white domination. *'Black Boy'* and *'Native Son'* represent a testimony that tells the experience of resistance that put in question the established representations of his fellow African Americans'. Wright was alienated from his black community. This alienation appears clearly when he fails to identify with black culture and his journalistic view of black life, compromises his otherwise noble plight to witness the lives of the black boys of the south. (Fabre. *'The Unfinished Quest of Richard wright'*. 81)

To explain more, it is known that African Americans' who get a western education are usually torn between two opposite worlds, The world; or the culture of their people or ancestors and the culture of the colonial master, in the case of Wright the master is the white man. These people, such as Wright, cannot fully or completely identify themselves with the western culture because they are born and raised in a different oppressed culture. In addition to that confusion, they can no longer identify with their own culture because of the western education that they have acquired so

far. Richard Wright tries to play the role of the enlightened and trusted one whose job or mission is to guide his people and enlighten them. But the education he acquired from westerners has liberated and trapped him. (Hogue. *Can the Subaltern Speak*. 9-39)

The novel opens with young Richard's, the protagonist, strong desire for adventure. This yearning for adventure reaches its peak when he accidentally burns his grandmother's house. Evidently, young Richard's little act of criminality is a way to express his rebellion against the suffocating environment he lives in, i.e. his grandmother's house. For Richard Wright, the grandmother's house is an incarnation of the South. Wright says at the opening of the autobiography:

'One winter morning in the long-ago, for-year-old days of my life I found myself standing before a fire place, warming my hands over a mound of glowing coals, listening to the wind whistle past the house outside. All morning my mother had been scolding me, telling me to keep still, warning me that I must make no noise. And I was angry, fretful, and impatient... I was dreaming of running and playing and shouting, but vivid image of granny's old, white, wrinkled, grim face, framed by a halo of tumbling black hair, lying upon a huge feather pillow, made me afraid.' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 1)

*Black Boy* shows clearly Wright's inability to become a part of the black community as it has been built by the white dominating policy. The absolute restrictive power of his granny's household keeps him away from any sort of social communication.

Richard lived in his grandmother's house which is small and very restrictive for a young boy who has a great desire for adventure. Wright says 'The house was quiet. Behind me my brother- a year younger than I-was playing placidly upon the floor

with a toy.’ (Wright. *Black Boy*.1) The problem was not only in his granny’s house but in the whole society of the South. Richard’s grandmother is a loyal Seventh Day Adventist who does everything strictly to the letter. Her house is like a prison for the young adventurous grandson. Due to his young age, he wanted to play, scream, run, and evidently make a mess but his grandmother would never allow such behaviors in her Christian house.

‘[Richard’s brother tells him that]‘ you better hush’

‘You shut up,’ I said.

My mother stepped briskly into the room and closed the door behind her, she came to me and shook her finger in my face.

‘You stop that yelling, you hear?’ She whispered. ‘You know granny’s sick and you better keep quiet!’ (Wright. *Black Boy*.1)

Richard’s guardians are not completely aware of the gravity of what they are doing to that little boy’s childhood. They do not know that they are helping unconsciously the discourse of discrimination through denying him a voice, the only way he can express and register his thoughts and feelings. They were unconsciously recruited as agents of discrimination. They are, to say it differently, followers of the larger oppressive system.

Through limiting young Richard’s actions, they unconsciously keep alive the Southern legacy of fear and submission by teaching its instructions. It is known that authoritarian religious practices are found even in a non-racial society, but being present in a society that is already racially polarized does nothing but make it worse in Richard’s situation. His family did the white Americans’ job which is to put him in



his proper place. In other words, it is clearer that once the colonized mind has been colonized, the colonizer does not have to be physically present to repeat his instructions to his subordinates. They will automatically choose an inferior space for themselves. This is to say that mental control can change not only how people look at one another but how they look at their relationship to those controlling them(Hogue.26).

There are other actions which made Richard feel inferior not only to white people but he is inferior as well to his family and his own people. This inferior status appears clearly when Richard was given a strong blow by his grandmother for interrupting elders' conversations. Richard looking for space and speech are ways to show his resistance, but these actions made his granny mad and always finish by harsh punishment. The granny's acts are ways to teach Richard the culture of fear and silence, the same culture that limited Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*.

At this early stage in the text, one can see that the socio-economic atmosphere of the grandmother's home is a center for structural domination. The environment is so hostile that one is not surprised when Richard later takes to the streets. Like his protagonist, Richard Wright likes to see himself as an individual who was born in a poor black Natchez family and had to work very hard in order to shape himself not only his identity through rebellion but he wished to reach a chosen place, a place of freedom against servitude, knowledge versus cultural void, action versus coldness. (Fabre. *The unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*.77). He is a man seeking a place where he can be fully human from Mississippi to Memphis, to Chicago, to New York. In other words, he follows that journey to seek a dream, the dream of being a writer. He wishes that he will find a place in which he will be seen as a full human being, a place where he can be what he really is; an independent individual.

In *Black Boy*, Wright shows that the South environment does not support any individual progress. Richard Wright addresses a kind of culture that is marginalized by the dominant discourse of white racism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In '*How Bigger Was Born*' Wright speaks about how the culture of blacks is so exclusive and people have no authority and state controls everything. He describes it as containing lots of rules, taboos and penalties which are all designed to keep blacks in their submissive place. The issue is that the black culture is not a very supportive environment by itself.

Due to the limiting atmosphere of the house, Richard ends up burning the curtain and consequently the entire house in his search of more space and something to do. He is simply bored by this cold, restrictive environment without recreation. As a metaphor of resistance to apartheid oppression, Richard's response is rather unproductive in that it is self-defeating. Through analyzing this behavior, one will find that it is a typical attitude of the people who are prevented from expressing their rage. They are also unable to express their frustration in front of their oppressor, but they take revenge on the oppressed themselves (Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*.16) The violence that takes place in the grandmother's house is an example of what happens in the whole South.

Those little acts of resistance that Richard has presented can be seen as declarations of rebellion in his grandmother's eyes. They are considered as challenging actions to the ruling Adventist ideology. Ideologies like the communism in Wright's work *The Outsider*, the racial ideology of the South especially that the Adventist ideology in particular seems to grow on the exercise of absolute power to crush their enemies, either blacks.

After the beating scene, Richard suffers from fever and a nervous breakdown, submerges into hallucinations that keeps him abed for a week. Richard describes the scenes as follows:

‘I was beaten so hard and long that I lost consciousness... I was beaten out of my senses and later I found myself in bed...my body seemed to be on fire and I could not sleep. Packs of ice were put on my forehead to put down the fever’...Whenever I tried to sleep I would see huge wobbly white bags, like the full udders of cows suspended from the ceiling above me. (Wright. *Black Boy*.8-9)

According to Frantz Fanon, Grandmother’s exercise of violence on Richard is not only a way of disciplining a naughty grandchild but also a complex way of negotiating her frustration within the hegemonic structures of the South. (Fanon.16)

Starting from this point of view, one sees that she is blocked too and she finds herself unable to see anything beyond the borders of religion. For her reading and critical self-reflection are taboos. ‘I want none of that devil stuff in my house.’ She bared her teeth and slapped [Richard] across his mouth with the back of her hand.’ (Wright. *Black Boy*. 16)Nevertheless, grandmother’s condition seems to be much more complex than that. The grandmother is described as being so white in complexion that she could have passed for white yet she is classified as colored. To be classified as colored in a world where skin color is a mark of privilege and a criterion for determining one’s station in life, is a difficult thing to experience.

The violent actions of the grandmother can be seen and interpreted as a response or a reaction to the way she has been fixed by the racial discourse of the South. She embraced and absorbed the ideas and principles of religion for strategic purposes. In

other words, the grandmother uses the principles of religion in order to control the lives of those who surround her. Like the white oppressor the granny sees that everything that can open the mind of Richard to new realms is considered as a blasphemer or a shameful thing and unacceptable. Maybe this reason lies behind Richard Wright's views about the culture of the South and sees it incapable of nourishing the individual. Bill Ashcroft, a postcolonial theorist, believed that there is no discourse which is totalizing in its exercise of power. The oppressed find and capitalize on certain fractures or points of weakness within dominant regimes of power.

Richard starts resisting the domestic violence when he realizes that his guardian's unleash violence against him not to correct his bad manners but only to relieve their own personal stress. Consequently, when he realizes this, he goes to violent ways to change the cruel exercise of power that his guardians have done to him. This appears clearly when he defends himself against his aunt Audie when she tries to punish him for eating at class, he takes a knife. 'I leaped, screaming and ran past her and jerked open the kitchen drawer... I grabbed a knife and held it ready for her.' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 164) Richard's action literally alienated him more from his family; this shows the growing gap between Richard and the granny, Aunt Audie and Uncle Tom.

In most of Richard Wright's work, including *Black Boy*, we notice the presence of religion. He says that every time he found religion, he finds a group of people trying to control other people's lives in the name of God. He stated in *Black Boy*: 'Whenever I found religion in my life I found [conflict], the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of God. The naked will to power seemed always to walk in the wake of hymn.' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 167)

There are other scenes in the book; one of them is when his Uncle Tom tries to correct his actions. It is evident that besides being a frustrated retired teacher, Uncle Tom has internalized the language and behavior of his white masters. In beating Richard, he is metaphorically disciplining a sassy nigger as any white man would do. Uncle Tom says while correcting Richard ‘never heard a sassier black imp than (him) all (his) life.’ (Wright. Black Boy.167)

This behavior can be seen and explained as follows: if the colonized is always oppressed and beaten by his colonizer, it is very natural to see the colonized subject drawing their knives at the slightest look from another colonized. Another misunderstanding happens between Richard and his aunt, he immediately runs to the kitchen and grabs a knife and hold it ready to fight. These violent actions happen always among the oppressed. (Wright. Black Boy. 106)

In other scenes, Richard’s grandmother attacks him to punish him for expressing his mind. But Richard is quick enough this time to avoid the attack which makes his grandmother fall down the stairs. Such kind of struggles among African American benefited nobody but their oppressors. This violence is a vicious cycle that circulates among the oppressed. It is a state of rage as Frantz Fanon calls it, which the colonizer instills in the colonized and prevents from ‘boiling over’ through maintain internecine feuds. These conflicts are not progressive because they divert the attention of the oppressed from the disease, the oppressor; to symptoms, other victims of oppression.(16)

In another scene, Richard and his co-worker, Harrison, are pushed to fight for five dollars by their employers Richard says that ‘We were not really angry with each other; we knew that the idea of murder had been planted in each other of us by the

white men who employed us' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 228) This can be interpreted as a version of the neo-colonial unfortunate condition in which the Third World is torn between adopting Western orders for financial help, or to hold to national pride or melt in poverty and underdevelopment.

Harrison needs the money to buy clothes. He says 'I want to make a payment on a suit with those five dollars' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 227). Some questions come to one's mind: is it possible to survive in this sense, where do we place values of self-worth, identity and personal integrity in the pursuit for survival. Is survival so crucial that one can pay his humanity for it? While Richard and Harrison fight for the five dollars, their white employers smoke and yell rudeness. It is explicit in this incident that the white employers and their compatriots enjoy the spectacle of black people fighting among themselves.

In fact, in this story, Richard's employer goes to the extent of purchasing a knife for him so that he could 'protect' himself, but when we discover that Harrison has no intention to fight Richard, we come to the understanding that the fight is a creation of the white employers. Through this incident, Wright affirms that mutual destruction disputes among African Americans are, at least on this occasion, determined from without. Perhaps, this is a system of divide and rule designed to divert black people from serious issues that affect their lives to petty conflicts among themselves.

## **5.2 Alienation and Creation of Self**

Through leaving the South, Richard takes the proverbial African American journey to the north, a journey which symbolizes a quest for freedom. Wright states: 'I was taking a part of the South to transplant in alien soil, to see if I could grow differently, if I could drink of new and cool rains, bend in strange winds, respond to the warmth

of other suns and perhaps bloom.’ (Fabre. *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*. 82)

The act of travelling is a self-liberating experience; however, it suggests an aspect of escapism and selfishness. Richard’s travel to the North is solely for personal and individual freedom. This freedom is only momentary because it is new, and fed by Richard’s longing for new and broader horizons of self-expression and imaginative freedom. He states ‘There was the teasing and impossible desire to imitate the petty pride of sparrows wallowing and flouncing in the red dust of country roads’ (Wright. *Black Boy* 9). The sparrows are an enviable sight because they are exercising the kind of freedom that Richard needs. (George. *The Horror of Bigger Thomas*.497)

One sees similar scenes in *Black Boy* and *Native Son* when both protagonists admire the freedom of birds. The segregationist system of the South is physically restrictive for mobility among blacks. There are areas that blacks are not allowed to penetrate unless they are servants or in the company of a white man. The black boys of Wright’s novels are prohibited from crossing to the white section. As a result, Richard and his friends team up to fight and protect their territory from white boys who walk on their private property.

Black boys fight to protect their territories, while white boys; have been instructed in the principle of white authority also to protect their supremacy. Conceptual of fundamentalism, synopsised in these childish conflicts, divides society and makes violence on the basis of group prejudice. Richard Wright tells us in his introduction to *Native Son*, that the protagonist in *Black Boy* represents the sounds of those Negro boys of the South who cannot express themselves. Richard is alienated from his family and the rest of the black community, not because of his Western education, but

because he is not satisfied with the space that has been fixed for him by his environment.

Bigger Thomas and Richard share the same feeling which is a need for a whole life and he acts out of that need. Wright considers the African American society as having accepted the values of the white society for fear of the cruel violence of apartheid that seeks to eliminate the black boys of the South (Fabre. *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*. 231). The violence in *Black Boy* is encouraged by the conditions of racial discrimination in the South. In *Black Boy*, the African American community works together with the larger white society to disturb the African American and keep him in his place.

To explain it better one has to consider two aspects. The first thing, black Southerners have absorbed the values of the colonizer. The second thing, black on black violence may, in a psychological sense, be the colonized subject's way of negotiating the disturbance associated with the 'fact of blackness' (Fanon.170). In the same way, apartheid concepts are vital social places for the African American. Richard Wright's '*How Bigger was born*' informs us that black boys are often gunshot, hurt, broken, hanged or mostly chased until they are either dead or their spirits broken. Being black means being satisfied with the given. However, for Richard, the home environment is suffocating.

Richard's first childish quest for adventure was by burning the house, killing the cat is indeed his first effort at completing his rebellion. No wonder that this criminal act, petty though it may appear, is taken seriously and faced with harsh punishment. Richard's mother obliged him to bury the cat and he later suffers from his guilty



conscience as if he has committed murder. In a sense, this incident was the first which means that we can expect him to commit bigger crimes.

Richard's father, in his sleepiness, tells Richard to kill the cat. Richard says 'I know that he had not really meant for me to kill the cat but my deep hate of him urged me toward a literal acceptance of his word.' (Wright. *Black Boy*.13) So for Richard, killing the cat is metaphorically an act of killing his father. In his deep self, he knows that his father did not mean by his order to kill the cat literally, he just meant to silent him.

Richard hates his father particularly because he is not a model to follow. He has absorbed the fear that Southern whites instill in blacks. As a representative of Negro boys of the South, Richard has ambitions that have been and are being crushed by his environment; these ambitions find expression in acts of destruction. This explains why he is deeply satisfied by killing the cat, he felt as if he had killed his father. By killing the cat, Richard has challenged his father's authority and by implication the authority of the South.

Killing the cat is Richard's first act of insubordination which prevails. It gives him the courage to confront bigger challenges. He has prevailed against domestic authority symbolized by his father and grand-mother who does not allow him to express himself in her house, though perhaps with good intentions for the young boy's future. However, making noise, which is taboo in granny's house, is, for young Richard, a means of self-expression and action to prove that he exists. Talking about his father, Richard tells us that his father gives nothing to his family and Richard has never laughed in his father's company. Richard has never felt any filial love between him and his father.

Firstly, Richard's father behaved in such a tyrannical way in order to prepare his son for the tyranny of the South. Secondly, Richard's father is also a victim in that he has no time to perform his fatherly responsibilities. When he comes home from a long day's work, he is so tired that he has no time for his children. Bessie Mears in *Native Son* tells us that blacks in the South no longer have a life of their own. The life they live, they live for their white masters. Richard was pushed to feel guilty because he killed the cat but white people engaged in more hideous actions. White people engaged in very cruel actions but never felt guilty or regret it.

In reality, when Richard is thrown off a moving truck, the criminals make it a subject of laughter. The astonishing thing is that in America at that time, a crime is not considered a crime unless the victim is white. Richard's mother accuses him on moral grounds, and orders him to go out into the dark, dig a hole and bury the kitten. The irony is that although apartheid America commits criminal acts of violence against the African American community, it is never held responsible for it or made to suffer a guilty conscience.

Yet Richard is forced to bear psychological torture. It must be noted that Richard is being tortured by his own people and not by whites. His mother forces him to make a prayer asking God to forgive him for killing the cat yet whites commit worse crimes and not pay for it. Although we cannot excuse the fact that Richard killed the cat, but bearing a guilty conscience gives us a picture of how the racial ideology of the South functions. White violence in the South is authorized by religion which functions as an ideological state device.

Richard's leaving the racist South is seen in a way as a rejection of religion which is representative of Wright's existentialist thought. He says 'Wherever I found religion

in my life I found strife, the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of God. The naked will to power seemed always to walk in the wake of a hymn.' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 136) Richard does not trust anyone or anything, a feeling that he had acquired after the experience he has gone through when his sick mother is denied medical treatment because of her skin color. Another issue that pushed him to distrust America is the suffering that he sees through his mother's sickness besides the uncaring attitude of white America. His mother's continuous sickness and the attitude that he faced when his mother was sick and nobody wanted to help her marked him deeply and shaped his actual relations and his future relations as well.

Richard's violent behavior is also determined by these hurting experiences of his life. His failure to overcome the psychological torment of violent caused abnormal behavior including violence. In *Black Boy*, Richard's experience in the South has left its print in his subconscious even though he escaped to the North. He could never really leave the south. He states that his feelings have already been formed by the South.

Richard Wright was very convinced that he will never escape the South. To generalize, the colonized can never escape from what he lived during the colonization. *Native Son* and *Black Boy* deal with the dilemma of African American in the tough racial ideology of the South. There is only one difference between the novels' protagonists that is Bigger's struggle is a failure but Richard's search for a better life is successful.

Richard Wright's analysis of the racial problem of the South was based on his personal experiences. This appears clearly through the social problems that Richard faces hunger, unemployment, poverty and lack of money for better education. At a

certain point of his life, Richard and his little brother and mother were deserted by his father who created a hunger complex in his life. He says that he always feels hungry. He stated 'now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at bedside, staring at me gauntly.' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 18) With this statement Richard shows that hunger is depicted as a reality and a companion that Richard had to live with Richard and his brother spent many days on a loaf of bread and tea. He explains that '[He] knew hunger, hunger that made [his] body aimlessly restless, hunger that kept [him] on edge that made [his] temper flare, hunger that made hate leap out of [his] heart like the dart of a serpent's tongue, hunger that created in [him] odd cravings.' (Wright. *Black Boy*.98)

Besides the hunger complex and problem that Richard had to live with there was the psychological shock that he had to go through when his father decided to desert the family for another woman. Richard hated his father till wishing that if somebody had suggested to him to kill his father, he would have done it. All this was because of his father's behavior at the court, laughing while his wife was crying. The ironic thing is that Richard's father was allowed to desert his family by law because the American law does not cherish to preserve the black families.

The question that is worth asking here is why does Richard's father do not have the feeling of loyalty and tradition. The answer is very clear; such kind of values could not be passed on to Richard's father because he has been brought up in the legacy of his masters, the legacy of slavery. Many sociologists believe that the oppressed tend to repress their own people as a way of discharging their submissive behaviour towards the whites, so they take advantage and harass each other.

Twenty years later when Richard met his father, he could not identify with him completely. He explains his emotions when he met his father:

‘my mind and conscious had become so greatly and violently alerted that when I tried to talk to him I realized that though ties of blood made us kin, though I could see a shadow of my face in his face, though there was an echo of my voice in his voice, we were forever strangers, speaking a different language, living on vastly distant planes of reality.’ (Wright. *Black Boy*. 35)

Richard’s rejection of his father is a metaphor for rejecting his past. In rejecting his father, Richard also rejects the South and everything that is associated with servitude. After so many years, his father is still a sharecropper breaking his back on a white man’s land. Since his father is part of this repressive environment, Richard rejects him together with the environment.

The meeting of the deserter father and his deserted son can only help Richard to forget his father. Forgetting his father does not mean by necessity to forgive him but at least it would help Richard to bury his memory alive which would allow him to move on with his life. It is imperative to note that Richard’s rejection of his past, particularly his father, has an implicit message of intellectual prejudice. There is an element of snobbery in his attitude. Perhaps because he is educated, Richard feels better and smarter than his father. It is also possible that Richard has not forgiven his father and the rest of the South in general, for neglecting and denying his childhood.

From the father’s desertion of the family and other hardships in Richard’s life, he was pushed into the violence of the streets. The surprising thing is that his mother is the

one who took charge to train him to surpass his fear from street oppressors. Life for the fittest, a hard lesson that Richard had to learn in the hard way.

As Richard narrates the story of his encounter with street gangs, we see that gang life in the black belt is a subculture one must embrace in order to survive. He says that a group of boys kicked him, took his money and send him back home. His mother's actions are not as expected from a loving mother but she gives him a stick and tells him not to come back into the house without the groceries. After beating the boys with the stick, Richard gains the battle and wins the right to move freely in his new neighborhood.

Richard Wright describes the fight as if his entire life depends to that fight, he says that 'I fought to lay them low, to knock them cold, and kill them so that they could not strike back at me. I flayed with tears in my eyes, teeth clenched [and] stark fear making me throw every ounce of my strength behind each blow.' (Wright. Black Boy.19-20)

Therefore by winning the fight, he graduates into the world of delinquency even though he is still a child. After this incident, Richard is part into a gang to protect their territory from white boys. He says that whenever they catch a white boy on their side they stone them and vice versa. The white and black gangsters are formed against the background of racial segregation.

Any child in a normal society can have little fights but with those conditions of life in the South it becomes a way of life. Although Richard promises his mother that he will not fight again, he cannot stop because he is bound by loyalty to the values of his gang. He says 'I promised my mother that I would not fight, but I knew that if I kept

my word I would lose my standing in the gang, and the gang's life was my life  
(Wright. *Black Boy*.19-20).'

Though the mother wants to punish Richard for fighting out in the street, she is the one who sent him to fight in the first place; she is considered as a complicit in gang violence. On this point, Richard Wright's interpretation of criminal behavior reflects the influence of the Chicago sociologists of the 1930's to 1940's. Chicago sociologists analyzed crime within the context of the social environment that supposedly bred criminals. Frantz Fanon notes that the kind of social curricula a child is exposed to has a bearing on his behavior and attitude to life.(144)

Violence can be seen, in this case, as the only way to compete if Black boys desire to find a place within the unfriendly, oppressive white society. Violent actions continue even more when Uncle Clark takes Richard to school, he has no choice but to fight his way into an unfamiliar school environment. He says 'I fought tiggerishly, trying to leave a scar, seeking to draw blood as proof that I was not a coward that I could take care of myself.'(Wright. *Black Boy*. 88) he wanted to show that he can take care of himself and no-body can harass him.

The right to the streets of Memphis is acquired through violence. However, the fact that his own mother orients him to violence implies that she has accepted the situation and expects her son to master it in order to survive. One way or the other, one is forced to conform. Wright differs from some naturalist writers like William Faulkner and Theodore Dreiser who celebrated what they perceived as the African American's ability to endure hardships. Ralph Ellison says that although Richard Wright presents the South as miserable *Black Boy* is like a blues. Ellison says 'The blues is as an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's

aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it near-tragic-near comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically'(103)

It is the circumstances of the racilized South that isolate Richard to a kind of existential individualism. Some critics, like Michel Fabre, have thus argued that Wright became an existentialist through his lived experiences not from the influence of Sartre. Although Richard, the protagonist, is only twelve years old, the racism of the South forces him to question the status quo. He questioned himself 'why could I not eat when I was hungry? ... I could not understand why some people had enough food and others did not'. (80)

Richard was pushed towards theft and criminality because of poverty and desperation. His father deserts the family, the money earned by his mother is not enough for him to eat and attend school. She ends up sending him to an orphanage where he is once again subjected to hunger. He says that many times he could not get up from his bed because of hunger. The fact that Richard is separated from his mother too early in life and exposed to the cruel environment of apartheid makes him a stranger to his own people, an outsider.

The lives of Richard and Bigger are clearly controlled by fear. It is obvious that Richard's tragedy is, from the beginning influenced by racist America that creates barriers to prevent them from thinking of assimilating into the white society. Apart from his childhood adventures, his real trouble starts when he gets confused upon the racial divide through the story of a white man who beat a black boy. In his childhood innocence, Richard had taken the story for granted because he thought that the black



boy was the white man's son. The scene was simple; a black boy was bitten by a white man. Richard thought naively that the black boy was the white man's son.

Richard's noticeable disintegration from an innocent normal childhood to be turned into a drunkard and a thief cannot in any meaningful way be attributed to his personality. What Wright tried clearly to show is that the more Richard becomes familiar with his society, the more he becomes delinquent. Consequently, he consciously decides to liberate himself through engaging in a criminal act. Richard resorts to theft because all the legitimate means of self-realization are closed. Wright states in *Black Boy*: 'I knew that the very nature of black and white relations bred this constant thievery. The Southern whites would rather have Negroes who stole, work for them than Negroes who knew however dimly the worth of their humanity.' (191)

Richard decides to steal because all the permitted means of self-realization are closed in his face. He was conscious and knew deep down in his mind that due to the nature of relations between blacks and whites that led to the continuity of the theft cases.

Richard chooses to steal because it is the fastest way to gain money to finance his journey to the north. Nevertheless, one should note that Richard only considers crime as a last resort, at that point where he feels he has nothing to lose. He thinks that if he is caught he will go to the chain gang but he adds that his life is already a chain gang.

However what is clear in Wright's argument is the African American's disturbing experience of living trapped as colonized (Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. 48). The African American living condition in the white society with no rights at all forced them to look for twisted ways like theft and violence to find a proper place to live in. As Richard Wright argued in '*How Bigger was born*,' the black boys of the South respond to those harsh life conditions by twisted ways because they were never given

the chance to learn good things from western civilization. Some take to drugs, alcohol and women while others go for religion.

As Richard puts it, the real trouble with Jim Crow Laws is that deny the very humanity of the African American. He says [I would have agreed to live under feudal oppression, not because he appreciated it but because he saw that feudalism made use of at least one part of persons and saw them as humans.] (253) Although this is a clear exaggeration from Richard's part, the point that he is making here is that because of segregation black people cannot express themselves and have no chance to evolve. 'Hated by whites and being organic part of that culture that hated him, the black man begins to; in turn hate in himself that which others hated in him.( 253)' What Wright says here is that the violence of the black man is therefore the struggle within himself caused by his rationalization of the way he has been constructed. 'A good part of the Negro's energy is spent in keeping control of his unruly emotions; emotions which he had not wished to have, but could not help having'(253).

'Culturally, the Negro represents a paradox. Though he is an organic part of the nation, he is excluded by the entire tide and direction of American culture' (Wright. *Black Boy*. 253). America categorizes black people so as to mark them subhuman and thus suitable for exclusion. Homi Bhabha states in his work *The Location of Culture* that to be known is to be fixed. The colonizer claims to know the colonized and thus fixes him in a particular, predictable representation. (123)

Violence in African American literature has always been associated with the colonial system of suppression, stereotyping and exploitation. Beginning with the historic kidnapping and transportation of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the forced labour of the slave era, as presented in the slave narratives, through the regular dehumanization of apartheid; racial violence has always come from the white man's

attempt to define the African American and subject him to the condition of that definition. In *Black Boy*, we see tension coming from Richard's refusal to accept the white man's representation.

On two occasions, Richard narrowly escapes lynching for not behaving as he was supposed to i.e. as a submissive Negro in the presence of his white masters. At one point he is thrown off a moving truck for failing to say 'sir' to a white man. White America has created and prepared the African American to be nothing but a servant and to consequently he gets involved in violence. In fact violence between black and white is also intensified by the fixed place or social status that African Americans are subjected to.

In a different scene, Richard's employer tells him that he will never become a writer and on another occasion Richard laughs when his future employer asks him if he were a thief. The white woman says that they don't want a sassy nigger around them indicating that a sassy nigger is the one who thinks or expresses his thoughts and emotions therefore moving away from his designated place. In saying so, the white woman expressed the hidden fear from the idea that one day black people will claim their rights. This shows the fact that white people do not want the African Americans to leave the place that was designed for them. Any desire to leave his stereotyped place is not accepted or allowed.

This story shows explicitly that white people believe in the stereotypes made and created by white America to define and represent black people. A sassy nigger is one who justifies his agreed identity while a good nigger is one who confirms the image of the white man's construction. Richard has different ways of responding to Southern domination. Richard's attitude is too challenging and dangerous in the face of white

violence, but other Negroes approach is indirect and consequently a way of opening survival spaces within the racist regime.

The African American people were stereotyped; Richard's ambition to become a writer is a wild dream to the whites. When he tells his white employer that he wants to write stories, she made fun of him and told him that he will never become a writer, she even wonders how he could think of such thing. The white woman is stereotyping Richard to a determined position by projecting what he, as a black man, is capable of doing. She speaks about Richard's destiny as if his life was down and nobody can change it.

When Richard is selected to be the speaker, the principal of the school does not allow him to write his speech and does it by himself. The principle told him to throw his speech away and read the principle's speech because the latter, the principle, knows what is best for Richard. In this case it is very clear that whites keep on stereotyping African Americans to the point that even African Americans start believing to the position they were put in.

The woman that Richard has talked to about his dream and desire of being a writer, he says that he faced a wall in her mind that she did not even know that it exists. The wall is a metaphor to the lies and stereotypical representations behind which both blacks and whites hide and exaggerate false roles. In another scene, Richard was faced by another situation that he faces another wall. His boss tells him that a Niger cannot be hurt from a dog bite.

## Chapter Five

### Amiri Imamu Baraka's Stereotypes and Assimilation

#### Introduction

#### 5. Dutchman and Stereotypes

#### 5.1 Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*

#### 5.2 Stereotypes in *Dutchman*

## 6. The Conflict between Assimilation and Identity in the *Dutchman*

## 7. *The Slave* and Baraka's Anti-Assimilationist Views

### 7.1 Amiri Baraka's *The Slave*

### 7.2 Amiri Baraka's Anti Assimilationist Views

## **Introduction**

The contemporary legend of black assimilation has been experienced by many of the black middle class in America. It consists of adopting the values and norms of the dominating society through white education. The black people continually struggle to accomplish what can never be achieved i.e. to be completely accepted into the white society. African Americans are conscious of their positions and also the contradictions inherent in it. On the one hand, they try to accept America on white terms and on the other hand to accept their own identity. W.E.B. Dubois defined this problem most concisely over three quarters of a century ago as the crisis of 'double consciousness':

‘It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness ... one ever feels his two-ness – 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.’(3)

Various African American writers have experienced this issue of double consciousness as a result of their attempts of assimilation into the white society. Amiri Baraka is one of those writers who explored it extensively. Double consciousness appears in Baraka’s career and works for his attraction to both black and white culture. Baraka is a controversial writer whose works contributed in the development of contemporary African American literature. He comes after James Baldwin and Richard Wright as one of the most prolific and persistent critics of Post-World War II America. After he rejected white values, Baraka worked hard to create art with a firm didactic purpose of forge a viable art form that reflects the true values of the African American community and of the oppressed people throughout the world (Shankeswari. ‘Assimilation vs. Identity. 361)

The present chapter deals with two major works of Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* and *The Slave* in an attempt to show that assimilation is very hard to achieve due to the white society’s obstacles put specifically to keep African Americans in a submissive position i.e. stereotypes and identity conflicts. Through these works, we intend to show that no matter how African Americans try to appear assimilated; the white society will not save an effort to remind them of who they really are. They remind them of their forced past, enslavement. Besides showing that neither African Americans nor white Americans are proud of adjustments they, African American, have done to fit the white society’s standards.

*Dutchman* is a sharply focused accusation of those African Americans who desire to assimilate into mainstream American society. In doing so, these individuals deny all vestiges of racial past and make every effort to distance themselves from the reality of black existence in America. It results in a savage destruction of their cultural identity. The play is an attack on the Negro who instead of affirming his negritude and revolting against the culture and values of a white bourgeois society suppresses his rage and adopts the dress, speech, manners, and even the literary aesthetics of that society. The problem in the play is the Black's search for a distinct identity and dignity without posing a threat to the life-style of the whites.

Through giving a symbolic analysis to the character Clay, such individuals seek validation in the acceptance of white America, as symbolized by the character of Lula. As his name implies, Clay is the black America, who allows himself to be formed into the image of the white middle class society. Clay's disastrous finale at the hands of Lula is an indication of the suicidal nature of his desires.

*The Slave*, the second work focused on in this chapter, is most meaningfully interpreted as a companion piece to *Dutchman*. Walker, like Clay, has been an aspiring black middle-class and well-educated man but he manages to 'break loose' (Lacey.qtd.in Al-Otbi. 83). Unlike Clay, who chooses to calm his rage and preserve the stereotype, Walker tries to escape from racial conventions and to reject the values of his oppressors. Though they are brothers, Walker made a certain growth along the path to self-definition. Clay and Walker are presented as characters not fully developed yet. Walker is a man who must be brought to see the contradictory forces within his own anguished mind. Although Walker holds the gun during the long night in Easley's home, it is the white couple who are on the attack. Finally, Clay and



Walker are similar in that their attachments to the dominant culture are symbolized in their relationship to white women.

*The Slave* is a depiction of actual revolution. Despite the surrounding explosions, it is not a play comprising much action. Spectators are presented with a debate over the kind of man Walker has become since he rejected his integrated life and the nature of the revolution he has instigated. Baraka investigates in this play not only the very values and meaning of racial revolution but also his own attitude to them. Sollors notes that '*The Slave* argues the case for Black militancy, but ultimately denounces its fictive realization as an absurd, circular, and enslaving situation' (138). Walker, the lead character, is like Baraka at that period, devoid of the illusion of the feasibility of assimilation but investigates as how blacks should achieve a respectable position in the society.

Baraka suggests that stereotyping is a particularly deceptive form of deceit because a stereotype has just enough valid characteristics to support its creators in their belief in its legitimacy. Stereotype is a powerful weapon white America uses to control its black citizens, helping to keep them in a subordinate position. At the same time, it blinds them to the nature and motivations of those who are stereotyped. Leslie Sanders argues in 'The Development of Black Theatre in America' that 'What makes the stereotype doubly dangerous for the black man is that he is tempted to hide behind it' (142). Stripping the stereotypes of their value is thus important not only for their elimination but also for blacks who may be tempted to hide behind them. In this sense, Baraka exposes the stereotypes to the eyes of blacks to make them realize their mistake in remaining bound by something they should at least try to shatter. There is no one going to help blacks in doing this except for the blacks themselves. Another major point is that no matter how hard an African American works to turn himself

into a black man with a white mask, he will never be seen by the white society as a complete human who has rights. He will always be considered as the descendant of slaves, not more nor less.

## **5. *Dutchman* and Stereotypes**

### **5.1 Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman***

Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, written in the early 1960s near the beginning of the author's involvement with the Black Nationalist movement, was his final major work under the name of LeRoi Jones. *Dutchman* thus represents a critical stage in Baraka's legacy, and separates his Beat-influenced work from the politically minded productions that would define his subsequent career. *Dutchman* stands as a sharp valuation of race relations through the sexually charged interaction of two characters, Lula and Clay, on a subway.

In one hand, Lula is a beautiful white woman who enters the subway eating an apple. An allusion to the Biblical Eve, the apple identifies Lula as a seductress and implies her understanding of her actions. Though she reveals little personal information, Lula's knowledge of stereotypes allows her to guess a great many details about Clay in an exercise of her authority. Lula reveals her cruel nature through mockery of Clay's clothing and intellect, and implies that he can never approach her on equal footing. Overall, Lula is a symbol of prevalent racism, since her status as a white person gives her power over Clay and makes her the sexual aggressor.

Clay, on the other hand, represents the African-American male at a cultural crossroad. No longer legally repressed, Clay still deals with rooted racism and self-consciousness over his identity. Clay reveals knowledge of French literature, has a college education and wears a suit and tie, yet is easily manipulated and appears pleased over Lula's attentions. Despite Clay's cultured appearance, Lula's mockery and accurate casting

of him in various stereotypes makes Clay defensive and angry. Clay stands as a symbol of frustrated gains, a self-possessed, educated individual who cannot escape the stereotypes and power dynamics of his racist society.

Clay and Lula's mockery represents the complicated nature of racial relations in 1960s America. These two figures cannot escape from one another or their history, and act out traditional roles. Clay charms Lula, who derives pleasure from her power over him. She reduces him to a sexual object. When Clay does not directly approach her for sex, Lula begins to mock his appearance, speech and passivity. This inspires a lecture from Clay, in which he characterizes black cultural segregation as an empty tactic. Clay's hypothesis that racism can only be solved through a refusal to acknowledge it pushes Lula to stab him to death.

Amiri Baraka was famous in his time and all times for being a revolutionary writer; a nickname that is related with his play *Dutchman*, which was performed for the first time on stage at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York on March 24, 1964. The play involves principally of discussion between Clay, a twenty-year old black man, and Lula, his white female complement who is about thirty years old. The play when you read it you will feel that it lacks some action within most of its duration. But this shortage in action is made up in the last minutes when both of the characters present a strait and excited speech, later on Lula stabs Clay with a knife she carries in her bag. Therefore she prevents him from further revealing his black self and from exploding his middle-class ambitions surrounded in assimilationist efforts. At last Clay dies on stage.

*Dutchman* is a representation of Baraka's personal view of the world as he detained it in the middle through his dramatic career and development as a critical and political intellectual. Baraka of the first half of the 1960's is anti-assimilationist, revealing the

immorality of trying to melt into something he thinks is corrupted and pushes black people to trade their nature for such an uncertain recompense as the recognition of whites.

In the first scene, *Dutchman* takes place 'in the flying underbelly of the city:' in a subway train. Throughout the play, the audience is made aware of the setting through the roar of the train and the flashing lights as it speeds and slows and occasionally stops for passengers. Twenty-year-old Clay, a black man, is riding the train. At first, only his seat is visible. Before the action of scene gets underway, he exchanges a brief smile with an unknown face on the platform and then goes back to reading his magazine.

Lula, a thirty-year-old white woman with long red hair wearing a small, revealing dress, boards the subway, daintily eating an apple. After momentarily awaiting his acknowledgment of her presence, she takes the seat next to Clay. Her manner and mode of conversing with Clay swings from boldly flirtatious to strangely low and distant as they share more apples than Clay wants, and fence around the possibility of a sexual encounter. Some of her comments surprise him with their strangely insightful knowledge of his private life 'You tried to make it with your sister when you were ten' (Baraka.3), while others seem downright psychotic 'You're a murderer, Clay, and you know it' (Baraka.21). Lula claims that she only knows so much about Clay because he is a well-known type, that type is a socially ambitious black man.

She invites herself to the party to which she correctly guesses he is on his way, and he accepts her company, given that she has been actively seducing him. Despite the fact that her conversation is nervous with aggressive racist comments and sudden lapses of attention, he allows this strange seduction and continues, with forced sociability, to

chat with her. She refers to him as ‘the Black Baudelaire,’ ‘My Christ and a black nigger.’ At the end of the scene she asks him to ignore their separate histories and pretend to be ‘anonymous beauties smashing along through the city’s entrails’; then she yells, ‘GROOVE!’ and the scene ends. (Baraka. 8)

In the second scene, more seats are visible and other people are either sitting or boarding and disembarking from the train. Lula and Clay are oblivious of them. As the scene opens, they are discussing how they will act at the party. Lula describes a slow public seduction, which intrigues Clay. Along with the implicit promise of a sexual encounter, Lula also promises that they’ll be eating apples along the way to her tenement apartment. As they continue to talk about Clay’s ‘manhood,’ Clay briefly notices the others on the subway, but soon he is once again submerged in his intense interaction with Lula, ignoring his surroundings.

Traces of morbidity in Lula’s description of her home ‘like Juliet’s tomb’ give Clay pause. He asks her if she is an actress because she is exaggerates too much. She denies this, but warns him that she lies. Clay demands the whole story from her. She answers mysteriously saying that her life consists of ‘apples and long walks with deathless intelligent lovers;’ Lula characterizes his life as ‘change, change, change.’ She accuses Clay of being ‘even too serious to be psychoanalyzed.’

A few more people board the subway and again, Clay notices them. Lula claims to know them all, and then inexplicably asks if they frighten Clay because he is ‘an escaped nigger.’ Struggling to maintain his composure in the face of another hostile jibe, Clay makes light of the comment, turning the conversation to plantations, the source of the blues. Lula launches into a hysterical blues song, during which she

shudders rhythmically and bumps into the other passengers, punctuating her act with vicious profanity.

In front of the shocked audience of passengers, she invites Clay to ‘do the nasty.’ Clay is now desperately clinging to his dignity, yet he is still fascinated by her boldness. His conservative side wins, however, and he refuses her invitation to dance. She responds with a string of vicious insults:

‘Lula: Clay! Clay! ‘You middle class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let’s knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain’t no nigger, you’re just a dirty white man.

Clay: Lula! Sit down, now. Be cool.

Lula: ... Be cool. Be cool. [...] That’s all you know ... so full of white man’s words. Christ. God. Get up and scream at these people. [...] Clay, you got to break out. Don’t sit there dying the way they want you to die. Get up.’ (Baraka. 13)

## 5.2 Stereotypes in *Dutchman*

Baraka considers stereotype as a powerful weapon that white America uses to control its black populations, facilitating to retain them in a subordinate position. In *Dutchman*, he proposes that stereotyping is a predominantly deceiving system because a stereotype has effective features to support its creator in his belief in its legitimacy. Simultaneously, it blinds them to the nature and inspirations of those who

are stereotyped. Leslie Sanders argues in 'The Development of Black Theatre in America' that '[What makes the stereotype doubly dangerous for African Americans is that they are attracted to hide behind it]' (142). Stripping the stereotypes of their significance is, vital not only for their abolition but also for blacks who may be desirous to hide behind them. In this sense, Baraka discloses the stereotypes to African Americans to make them comprehend the mistake in remaining bound by something they have to, at least, try to break. African Americans have to bear in their minds that if they desire freedom or dignity, they will never get it only by their own effort.

As the subway continues its journey, the conversation between Clay and Lula continues to sway between sexual strategies and Lula's guesses on Clay's identity. The most prominent among these signs is Lula's offer of an apple to Clay, revealing that eating apples together represents always the first step. This shows clearly that Lula is clearly attempting to seduce Clay, but what is curious is why an attractive young white girl would seduce a black boy. The relationship does not only serve to remind the audience of the world of myth i.e. no one can imagine a relationship between a seductive young white woman and a black boy.

The trick here is that Lula wishes to seduce Clay, but in reality she desires to decoy him from behind the safe to pull him out of his safe place. To say it differently, this is an assimilationist front which Baraka believes that black people have used as a shelter. Lula checks the way that Clay represents himself as an Ivy League graduate with middle-class ambitions while simultaneously the audiences are going to realize that self-awareness is not at all what Lula desires Clay to have. Actually Lula implies a lethal danger to his effort to express his self.

Rapidly after the conversation about apples, the instant comes when we first acquire something about Lula; she declares that [her hair is turning gray. A gray hair for each year and type [she's] come through. But it's always tender when it starts](Baraka.4). Unexpectedly we see an aged, shabby woman; she is no longer the strong, supervisory invader she seemed to be, at the beginning of the play. Her image of an all-knowing and self-confident woman is further crushed by another word game she plays with Clay. She dares as far as trying to guess his name but she is not able to do it:

‘Lula: I bet your name is... something like... uh, Gerald or Walter.

Huh?

Clay: God, no. Lula: Lloyd, Norman? [It is for sure] one of those hopeless colored names creeping out of New Jersey. Leonard?

Gag...

Clay: Like Warren? Lula: Definitely. Just exactly like Warren. Or Everett. Clay: Gag...

Lula: Well, for sure, it's not Willie.

Clay: It's Clay.’ (Baraka. 4)

It is crucial to note here that the audience is once more retold that nothing can in actual fact be foretold exclusively on the foundation of one's appearance. However, the identification of the protagonists of the play is noteworthy. Clay represents a black man who can be showed as a person who accepts others' models but also as the man who was shaped from this material. Lula is the woman made from the material of Clay; dramatically, she appears on the stage as the second figure. Lula also presents herself to Clay as Lena the Hyena at the beginning, which is an association to the animal living on dead flesh, signifying that she may be of greater danger than one can imagine at first.



‘Clay How can I ask you when I don't know your name?’

Lula Are you talking to my name?

Clay What is it, a secret?

Lula I’m Lena the Hyena.

Clay The famous woman poet?

Lula Poetess! The same!

Clay Well, you know so much about me ... what's my name?

Lula Morris the Hyena.

Clay The famous woman poet?

Lula The same.

*[Laughing and going into her bag]* You want another apple?

Clay Can’t make it,lady. I only have to keep one doctor away a day.’

(Baraka. 5)

Starting from this point the spectators were supposed to be informed of Clay’s death and that the relationship between Lula and Clay is going to destroy him. Through this artistic way Baraka leads his spectators to realize that the signs are there to be detected.

It is significant to note that in *Dutchman* Amiri Barak makes a great effort in an attempt to convince both black and white spectators that the warnings of the deadly relationship between black people and white people are all there before them. What Baraka designates is that if one does not remark these signals it is the fault of their vision. When they are unable of seeing through the very stereotypes, the play convicts not the absence of cautionary. Moreover, the signals continue to appear.

*Dutchman* characterizes a meeting of white and black America as they interrelate in everyday life. In these terms, another game Lula plays with Clay is important. Lula

wishes that Clay repeats her exact words; from such act we see that the mainstream society pushes black people to become pacifiers and imitate them if they wish to be accepted as a part of the white society. Through repeating Lula's lines, Clay overpowers to Lula's who, in this case, represents the supremacy of white America:

Lula: Now you say to me, 'Lula, Lula why don't you go to this party with me tonight?' It's your turn, and let those be your lines.

Clay: Lula, why don't you go to this party with me tonight, Huh?

Lula: Say my name twice before you ask, and no huh's. (Baraka. 6)

At the same instant she needs Clay to repeat her lines, Lula seems to provoke Clay to approve and assume that the white culture is superior:

Lula: And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard. (Baraka. 7)

Though Clay behaves like a gentleman, Lula's observation points toward that underneath his clothes, his educated manners and language, he will always be and remain a nigger and, even more importantly, that she knows this but Clay is completely ignorant of it or he might know it but avoids admitting it. This is the basis and the foundation for her position of power. What Baraka proposes here is that whites know better and are aware of the real identity of blacks and who they really are than blacks themselves.

Blacks will never be able to release themselves from white supremacy. Lula further improves the impression that white America will be always evading the grip of the black man. From the very beginning of the play, Lula continually refutes her previous lines, and never let Clay's explanations be accepted as correct. [She conveys to him that she tells lots of lies which allow her to control the world; she said it in a smiling way] (Baraka.14). What is clear is that what Lula is trying to do is simply one of the methods of controlling others. Lula and the mainstream society employ such kind of methods to weaken Clay in his confusion and hesitation. It is apparent that no matter what Clay says, Lula always disagrees in a way to show him that she knows best.

Through this we understand that Baraka is giving a warning to black people against their irrational efforts to do everything that the white people are expecting from them. Behaving such way only reinforces the whites' feeling of authority. In other words, no matter how blacks change their behaviour to perform as the mainstream expects them to do in order to receive its acceptance; they will never be accepted. At the same time, the black society as a whole does not tolerate such behaviours, submission.

Different figures appear on stage at the opening of the second scene. Baraka kept the same setting, but the presence of other passengers adds naturalism to it. This addition makes a new effect on the audience in that their attitude changes from that of an observer of an isolated act to that of a witness to a more public and ordinary situation. The riders of the subway remind the audience of the social context which is the world in which Clay and Lula live. They, the same black and white audience, will later help Lula to bury Clay as her team as if they support her acts.

Though it is hard to acknowledge, what Lula has been accusing Clay of being an imitator of the white men with no disloyal consciousness wearing white masks to face the society. It is as if they are hiding behind it, or even worse embracing the white

mask to turn white by every means possible even if they will give up on their black identity. Lula speaks in a very bold way because she believes in the idea that whites are the power structure. Strangely, the passengers turn out to be contributors in what happens between Lula and Clay by being silent observers of what happens.

Symbolically, they represent the society who watches passively the racial tension but they do not try to release it or prevent the developing conflict.

The beginning of Scene II depicts Lula and Clay who are fantasizing about the party to which they would go together. There is a noteworthy difference between the way in which Lula and Clay are now relating to each other and their conversations in Scene I. Until the very end of Scene I, each one of them was an enemy to the other in his or her various games. Now, making a game together, they come to appear as being one team. What is worth remarking is that the fantasies are Lula's, not Clay's. Clay plays a strong part in the sexual conversation, he and Lula talked about that they are talking about, but it is Lula who produces the scene. We may note that her fantasy is one of subjugation, of a superiority achieved through the defeat and humiliation of others. This shows that she always wants to be in control and Clay is pacifically following. Most threateningly to Clay, she sees herself determining his way and leading him on it. Lula's need to control is then another important signal the audience is offered as to the nature of her personality and the danger she presents to Clay. Lula's need for control is seen as another imperative signal that the spectators are offered to see better the nature of her personality and the menace she represents for Clay. Progressively, the play becomes Lula's attacking Clay's personality and identity:

Lula: Clay! Clay! You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay,

you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man. CLAY: Lula! Sit down, now. Be cool.

Lula: ... Be cool. Be cool. [...] That's all you know ... so full of white man's words. Christ. God. Get up and scream at these people. [...]

Clay, you got to break out. Don't sit there dying the way they want you to die. Get up. (Baraka. 13)

Lula's violent attacks on Clay's social status comprise some truth. In assuming a middle-class role, he adopts a history, a culture, and a misery that are not his. In accepting a strange culture Clay adopts unconsciously the values of whites which are not his. Lula continues her verbal attacks on Clay; she uses even more ethnic insults and draws the attention of the other riders of the train. Clay loses his patience and answers her back in what are seen as his best lines in the whole play, revealing his opinions for the first time:

Clay: You telling me what I ought to do. [...] Well, don't! Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man... let me be. And let me be in the way I want. [...] Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device.

Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don't ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats. [...] I mean if I murdered you, then other white people would begin to understand me. (Baraka. 13)

The rhetoric and diction of Clay's forceful speech powerfully propose that it is his effort to complaint to the white world when he carries on:

'Clay: And on that day, as sure as shit, when you [whites] really believe you can 'accept' them [blacks] into your fold, as half-white trustees late of the subject peoples. With no more blues, except the very old ones, and not a watermelon in sight, the great missionary heart will have triumphed, and all those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious, and sane, and they'll murder you. They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations.' (Baraka. 15)

Baraka's situation at the time of writing *Dutchman* was shown through Clay's words. He inspires blacks and encourages them to recognize their own importance and find self-importance in their racial background and history while he retells whites that this course might not persist without pain and sacrifice forever. Nevertheless Baraka does not order blacks openly to use violence as a principal means in the course. To conclude, astonishingly it is Lula who chooses physical violence when she dares to stab Clay as a reply to his speech just before the end of the play. Lula's assassination of Clay is shocking but in review, the spectators have been prepared for it. If the viewers have ignored the signals that the playwright has presented to them then they have let their expectations to stop them from seeing what was before them. The contradictory reaction of white and black spectators to the murder is that it is terrifying or maybe unpleasant for the black because it proposes that he or she can never feel safe. Baraka prepares to board on his voyage to the black revolutionary fighting for liberation by any means necessary.

Lula demonstrates by her brutal reaction to Clay's self-proclamation that the last thing she wishes him to show is his self-knowledge. At best, she needs him to interchange one part for a more thoroughly humiliating one, that of the sexual object. By reversing the stereotype of the white-woman-raped-by-bestial-black, Baraka not only draws attention to its artificiality, but he also 'emphasizes his principal assertion that the real perversion and animalism reside with the insensitive dominant culture' (Lacey. 80). Through allowing Lula to murder Clay, Baraka affirms his opinion that it is the white majority which becomes dangerous for anyone violating its standards in effort to self-definition.

Amiri Baraka made it clear through Dutchman that Clay as a successor to the tradition of assimilationist is different from his descents in the fact that he is brought to the understanding that no matter how many African characteristics he gives up, no matter how assimilated he becomes, he is still Black, he is still an African American the descendant of slaves. Therefore, Baraka made it very clear that you can never become white; an African American is always African American. He learns that despite all the clothing and the education, he can still be ordered to drop back into his old role.

The play finishes with a clue that this catastrophe will be repeated; the stage directions instruct that after Clay's dead body is thrown out of the train,

'very soon a YOUNG NEGRO of about twenty comes into the coach, with a couple of books under his arm. He sits a few seats in back of Lula. When he is seated she turns and gives a long slow look.'

(Baraka. 15)

The ending highlights those elements of the play which make it the depiction of a desperate condition in which the Clays and Lula's of America are stuck.

*Dutchman* describes the course that Baraka's art would take toward Clay's speech and real action. In his following play *The Slave* Baraka inspects the reason of a revolution and the explanation of the use of violence before location on a journey to black freedom completed by any means. In *Dutchman* and *The Slave* Baraka produces a world where somewhat heroic characters pursuit for their true selves within a strange and aggressive white world. Clay and Walker, the protagonist of *The Slave*, are black men in change, determined by a desire for freedom from the control of a repressive culture nevertheless unsatisfied in their efforts because of a residual loyalty to this damaging power. (Benston. Baraka: Renegade and the Mask.23-71)

#### **6. The Conflict between Assimilation and Identity in *Dutchman***

African Americans were always attracted to the myth of assimilation but if an African American seeks assimilation into the white society, he has to accept and embrace the standards, morals, and customs of the dominating society. It is known that the black people have struggled continually and to achieve what can never be achieved which is to be completely acknowledged and recognized into the white racist society. Black people are aware of their locations and also the ambiguities characteristic of that same white society.

It is worth noting that African Americans try so hard to adapt themselves to take America on white terms. They fight to accept their own identity and preserve their Black culture. W.E.B. Dubois was able to define this problem the most brief as the calamity of double consciousness (Dubois. *The Souls of Black Folks*. 2). W.E.B Dubois says about double consciousness:

‘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 two-ness, 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. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face' (Dubois.4).

Dubois sees the feeling of double consciousness a strange one, how can one live with such a burden in his consciousness, one feels his twoness, one acknowledges the feeling of being an American, at the same time being a Negro, a black man. One feels that he has two souls, two feelings and opinions, two unfriendly struggling, two combatant principles and standards in one black body, whose strong-willed strength on its own preserves it from being in a dilemma apart.

Two elementary cultural philosophies have presented different resolutions to the duplicity of being black living an American life. On the one hand, there is the pro-integrationist or assimilationist school of belief, which believes to take the customs which are peculiar to the United States of the black man as undeniable. Followers and enthusiasts of this opinion contend to say that black Americans will understand and comprehend their entire human and civil rights only by becoming completely and

entirely contributing affiliates and supporters of the American mainstream, and that the substitute to assimilation is the madness of segregation and exclusion. On the other hand, there is the anti-integrationist or nationalist viewpoint which continues to see that assimilation represents simply an extermination of cultural identity through the acceptance of white behavior, standards and morals.

The existence and endurance of the Blackman in America, or the western world, is established upon his own ability to preserve his thoughts and his true identity from appearing and keeping it hidden. Negro America humbly agrees to take whiteness as the custom despite the fact that white America looks down on Negro America and treats them lowly and considers them as imitators of whites. What is very sad and immoral is that African Americans are insulted if they are identified with Africans. The Negro violence and the Negro political struggle are not fully formed efforts to achieve social equality. Many African American writers have explored this problem and psychological issue of double-consciousness. Even Amiri Baraka has explored and experienced this issue of being black and trying to adopt the white principles and standards extensively.

It is necessary to say that the issue of double consciousness appears in the works of Baraka as a kind of masochism; i.e. receiving pain in a joyful way, for his attraction to both black and white culture is associated and related with pain. Baraka has always been known for being a provocative writer and who is considered as a significant figure in the growth and development of modern black literature. To draw attention, he comes after James Baldwin and Richard Wright as one of the most innovative, creative and strong-minded critics of Post-World War II America. He is superbly famous for rejecting white values; Baraka attempts and works ferociously to generate art with a stable and fixed didactic determination of form a practical art form that

reproduces and shows the true standards and morals of the African American community and of the oppressed people throughout the world.

When looking into the content of the play, one sees that *Dutchman* is concerned with two people; a Negro male named Clay and a white attractive female called Lula. The latter is the one who started and took a chance for a social interaction on a subway train. Both train riders; Lula and Clay, assess each other. To Clay, Lula represents a white open-minded, bohemian type, a rather flirty. To Lula, Clay is seen as a typical middleclass, intellectual young Negro who would give anything to gain an opportunity to accomplish success in white America. Besides that, she sees him as the kind who had better feel grateful or satisfied and so she offers him company. The two young actors take part themselves in a playful and flirtatious small talk. Through ongoing teasing during the first parts of the scenes, they enjoy good-natured, playful exchanges. Then Lula teases Clay about compromising himself for the only reason and sake to progress and survive within the white society. Clay turns out to be angry naturally. Lula continues and reproaches him for escaping and avoiding his identity as a black man, and by this avoiding who he is really.

Lula continues with her teasing insults to the point where Clay loses his tranquility. His reaction was by angrily rejecting Lula, announcing and making it sure to her that it is his right to be whatever he is or wants to be whether she likes it or not.

Undeniably his method of living is a way that gives him the ability of monitoring his violence. He continues to talk until Lula in a furious action unexpectedly stabs Clay to death while other subway riders were watching passively without even reacting to the white girls' action. But what is more shocking is that she orders them to throw Clay's body off the train, and they do so, silently. At that point when an alike young Negro

boards the subway train at the next stop, Lula initiates what seemingly is going to be a comparable inducement routine.

*Dutchman* is a play that is a severely attentive complaint of those African Americans who wish nothing more than to assimilate into conventional American society.

Through doing this, these individuals, these African Americans reject all the remains of racial past and make every effort possible to distance themselves from the reality of black presence in America and their hard temptations and fierce struggle to survive the white hegemony would go in vain. This denial of the African American heritage resulted in a violent demolition of their cultural identity. The play is a clear attack on the Negro, and shows clearly Baraka's opinion about the assimilation myth or legend, who instead of confirming his black identity and revolting against the culture and standards of a white middleclass society overpowers his anger and accepts the white's uniform, way of speaking, how they behave, and even the literary aesthetics of that white society. The problem in the play is that African Americans were trying so hard to find a new way of life; blacks looked and searched for a new identity without cause any tension to the white society.

Clay was granted a representative treatment; such kind personalities search for evidence in the reception of white America, as represented by the character of Lula.

As his name suggests, Clay is the black America, who permits himself to be shaped into the image of the white middle class society. Clay's disastrous death at the hands of Lula is an indication to the desperate nature of his desires and wishes.

Clay is a twenty-year-old young black male, he is a university student or what Baraka simply called him; a Negro man. According to Baraka the distinction is that a Negro is the one who negotiates his own identity in order to preserve a nonviolent passive relationship with his white persecutors. Clay is everything but an evocative of the

subjugated, troubled and oppressed Negro. The way Clay dresses gives the impression that he is a middle class young man and he has clearly espoused the thoughts of his white colleagues. He has pursued his education in discourse of the white society; he has been shaped by it like clay. His interests are clearly knowledgeable and related with an academic degree.

Clay demonstrates his recently learned talent when he jokes civilly with Lula, because well-mannered joking is one of the signs that prove that a person is a sophisticated member of the intellectual American society. Though Lula uses aggressive comments, he attempts to disregard her because antagonistic or aggressive comments are not adequate in a sophisticated society, and because Lula is attractive to him, he wants no matter what to impress her. One can say that he has been trained to find her gorgeous and to consider that a charming woman like her would increase his social position. The fault that he makes is that he denies his blackness and makes it almost very clear that he wishes to be white. It is agreed that Clay deserves to be insulted because not only he surpasses his apportioned place in the social order, but similarly because he turns back upon Black people.

Clay holds books and he dresses as a well-educated man. Lula appears to dislike Clay at the first time she saw him and this appears clearly when she says that she has already seen a lot of people like Clay. Lula is ten years older than Clay which makes her more conscious to the point of, if we can say wisdom. She proves that she is knowledgeable about everything that concerns Clay's life, for example she knows about his place of origin, and his destination on the train and his friend's names. She concludes:

‘Lula: You look like you been trying to grow a beard. That’s exactly what you look like. You look like you live in New Jersey with your

parents and are trying to grow a beard. That's what you look like  
 you've been reading Chinese poetry and drinking lukewarm Sugarless  
 tea. [Laughs, uncrossing and re-crossing her legs] You look like death  
 eating a soda cracker. (Baraka. 3)

She declares that he looks like 'death eating a soda cracker,' which is a black jargon for a white man and that Clay, is killing his black identity by his assimilation. She also infers that he has a 'skinny English friend too.' (Baraka. 4) Lula says: 'you are a well-known type,' (Baraka. 4) and 'I know you like the palm of my hand.' (Baraka.4) Baraka gives the audience the impression that Lula is like America; she does not know the Negro apart from being a type.

Clay is a problem not a man; he does not acknowledge what he is. Lula dislikes Clay not just because he is black, but because of his understandable efforts to reject his racial legacy and tradition. She hates him for his obedient reception of assimilation as a wanted and anticipated objective. Since Lula is being used as a personification of western civilization, she starts her provocative actions by criticizing his clothes. She takes hold of his jacket and shouts:

Lula: What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat  
 for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? . . .  
 Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you  
 ought to feel oppressed by a three-button suit. What right do  
 you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie?  
 Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard.  
 (Baraka. 6)

When Lula tries to make fun out of Clay's grandfather was a slave who for sure has never been to Harvard, Clay's answers lamely that his grandfather was a night

watchman. In other words, he attempts to distance himself from his slave legacy, even if he has to neglect that he is black, the grandson of a black man and slavery is part of his history. In his pretentious middleclass character, he accepts with it a history and a culture that are not his.

When Lula says ‘And you went to a colored college where everybody thought they were Averell Harriman,’(Baraka. 7) Clay states that he is the only student at a ‘colored college (Baraka. 7)’ who does not imitate Averell Harriman; who is a white statesman, but he is Charles Pierre Baudelaire; a white French poet. This proves that he is very concerned to show himself well-intentioned to Lula’s white cultural standards. He desires to differentiate himself from his people, but he restricts himself to a shallow artificial alteration through selecting art over politics.

Clay’s responses embarrassingly rather humorously, such kind of reaction energies Lula’s attack, and she says ‘I bet I you never once thought you were a black nigger (Baraka. 7).’ Clay’s aspiration is not about turning himself to an educated black; in fact he appears to seek to be white, or at least to immerse himself in white intellectualism that his skin color will not matter. For sure Lula will remind Clay of who he really is and she does. At a certain point Lula reminds him that he is black, and, when she calls him a murderer, it is apparent that it is his black self that he murders. Clay’s exaggerated literary interests are not very understood unless they are seen in his terms of his assimilationist dream. His creative participation, however, like his whole life is completely forged.

For Lula, Clay is seen as an ‘escaped nigger (Baraka. 12)’, whose suitable and appropriate place is the plantations. But then Clay reminds her that the Afro-American plantations have given the very fine tradition of the Blues. At this time Lula starts singing a song and dancing in an overexcited style and she summonses Clay to

dance with her, Clay to a great extent stand by his dignity. His traditional side successes, nevertheless, and rejects her offer to dance. She replies with a series of brutal nasty insults:

‘Lula: You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let’s knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would be Christian. You ain’t no nigger, you’re just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay, Dance with me, Clay.’

(Baraka. 13)

Lula gives vent to her erotic needs and tries to convert Clay to the other role, possible for the black man in her scheme. Her mistreatments turn into a crazy lyrical demand to rebel: Lula: ‘Clay. Clay you got to break out. Don’t sit there dying the way they want you to die. Get up.’(Baraka. 13) She teases Clay and reproaches him of being an Uncle Tom, although Clay would like to see himself as a black revolutionary young man. The verity and the problem is that Clay could not identify himself with either cultures; he is neither a black revolutionary nor a white oppressor or a white scholar. He shows nothing but a problem with his identity; in other words lack in his personality and identity.

When Clay was challenged with Lula’s tougher insults, after a series of insults about her Uncle Tom attack, and with her masses and tons of insults against his mother, at this point we see Clay lastly gets up. Clay takes hold of Lula and slaps her as hard as he could through the mouth. Clay for the first time appears in control, he bursts out into a long, tortured, emotion-releasing speech that uncovers his nice-nigger disguise and tries to put on a new, powerful identity.

‘...With all his prefabricated, protective masks of white philosophy, white religion, white language, and white law stripped away, Clay faces for all black people, as if for



the very first time, the essential facts of their existence'. (Benston.23-71). Clay assumes the role of Baraka's contemporary mouthpiece. In his three page speech, the most famous section of *Dutchman*, he led out his aggression and repressed violence. He speaks as though the whole generation of black who suffered from segregation lynching and murder for generations has used his voice to speak out and unleash their hidden screams. He gains the upper hand. He threatens to kill them all:

'Clay: . . . I could murder you now. Such a tiny ugly throat. I could squeeze it flat, and watch you turn blue, on a humble for dull kicks. And all these weak- faced of squatting around here, staring over their papers at me. Murder them too. . . . It takes no great effort. For What? To kill you soft idiots? You don't understand anything but luxury.' (Baraka. 13)

Now the strings of power move from Lula's hands to Clay's. He controls the language and the action and with it the interpretation of his life and identity. He shouts at her through compressed teeth. He tells her that if he is a middleclass forged white man so let him be. And let him be in the way he wants, let him be who he feels like being. Through refusing the white woman 'You great liberated whore (Baraka. 14)', Clay makes public that the attraction that black men have for her and criticizes her seductive affectations. Whoever that may be he assures Lula, she cannot possibly understand his true nature, for she is blinded by the very surfaces she controls: 'You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don't ever know that.' (Baraka. 14) His manner of living is a way of controlling his violence.

'I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats.'

(Baraka. 14) Clay himself is a poet whose art lacks, in his opinion, the ethnic integrity of black. He sees his works as if he is western imitative literary man whose own writings are immature, and his poetry is just an escape from taking action and direct rebellious actions, in his own words a 'kind of bastard literature' (Baraka.14). He says that violence alone would establish rationality for the Negro. Clay continues his lines and says that a whole people who are marked by an overly anxious life, struggling to keep themselves away from being rational. And the only thing that would remedy the neurosis would be your murder.

Clay recognizes the compromises he made, nevertheless he evades from committing the slaughter of whites that would relief him of the compromise that he has made so far. He takes sanctuary in the fortress of his words. It is significant that Clay, in rejecting the murders and violence that would make him and all blacks sane. His refusal to accept his racial identity is reflected in his bitterness. He said that

'I'd rather be a fool. Insane. Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts, urging me to new conquests. My people's madness. Hah! That's a laugh. My people. They don't need me to claim them. They got legs and arms of their own.'(Baraka. 14)

He says that it is a necessity that whites leave blacks alone and especially to stop that tireless support of the advantages of the great white intellectual achievements. He enhances a warning that on the day when all the black crowds understand and comprehend accurately what the whites have been saying, they will stand up and murder the whites. He confirms his belief in the strength of the blues people and challenges the whites to understand the message communicated through the black music. He ends his speech with a warning to Lula that the cultural conditioning of

blacks could rebound, since they soon may be able to justify their manslaughters as whites do.

In his most important speech, Clay realizes how much his spirit is deeply revolutionized. Nevertheless he remains hideously detached from his people, he is imprisoned and stuck in a deep-rooted personality, which he has nearly, but not quite expanded and matured. Clay retreats from this idea, he make some efforts to go back into his old self, he desires to return to his buttoned-up uniform, assemble his books, and leave the train in which he has traveled in time as well as space. 'His retreat from participation in this solution is again a denial of his identity. But once having shown himself to the white world, he learns that there is no retreat and he becomes just another dead nigger.' (Shankeswari. 172)

Clay is not the first or the last African American who believes that in order to be part of the white American society, Blacks need to give up on some parts of their identity and distance themselves as much as possible from their black culture. Clay represents many blacks who dream to be assimilated but they have used the wrong way. To be clearer, Clay is only an heir of the assimilationist dream. But Clay is different from his successors because he has learned his lesson the hard way. He has learned that no matter how many African American characteristics he drops and gives up, even if he becomes very assimilated it has no importance because he is Black and remains Black , he will never changes his status of being nothing but a subject. He realizes furthermore, that even with all the arrangements of prestige, the clothing, the education he can still be commanded to go back and keep his old position and role and more importantly to be satisfied with it. But even this knowledge which he is motivated into obtaining is imperfect because he was not informed or even worse he

has learned too late that it is impossible to show his newly found learning to his oppressors and live.

In Comparison to Clay Baraka's real life was a successful version of Clay's.

Nonetheless, he awoke from his dream of assimilation in the proper time to save himself from what happened to his protagonist's destiny. Only a year later after the production of *Dutchman*, Baraka would reject his entire white world including his wife and children, to start a new black life in Harlem. To a certain extent, Clay bears a resemblance to Amiri Baraka himself. Both Black men are middle-class poets who in variable points communicate disillusionment with their assimilationist way of life.

The play can be read as an experimental of Baraka's assimilated period, in which he convicts himself through Lula's words and actions. Baraka; the playwright metaphorically murders his submissive white self through the imagined account and is reborn in real life.

As a black writer and intellectual, Clay is trapped in a cultural battle which paralyses him, moreover; it limits his capacity to take some rebellious action. On the one hand, we cannot deny his attraction to Lula's ethnocentric white culture, but on the other, he responds to the black civilization characterized and embodied by the black. Clay is constantly but innocently moving toward acknowledgment of his own nature, toward knowledge of the scars and recognizes the strength of his black humanity.

Consequently, his death denotes the self-destructive significances of this kind of moral and intellectual paralysis.

In effect, Lula's attack on Clay shows an expression of Baraka's disapproval and dislike for the assimilationist perspective. But Amiri Baraka does not leave the black people with no solution; he suggests a substitute way to gain dignity with guarding

and keeping the African American values, culture, and heredity. He proposes the idea of developing a separate detached black value system with new black aesthetics.

## **7. *The Slave* and Baraka's Anti-Assimilationist Views**

### **7.1 Amiri Baraka's *The Slave***

Amiri Baraka wrote *The Slave* as a legend in an opening and two acts. It came to exhibition with another play that Baraka presented that time; it was entitled *The Toilet*. In *The Slave* the curtains open with an introduction of a man named 'Walker Vessels', who comes out dressed as an old field slave. The audience is immediately drawn into the action through his reflections that lead the viewers directly into the play, in which he appears to be a black revolutionary who decides to give up on battles for the only reason of visiting his previous white wife 'Grace', their two daughters, and Grace's new white husband 'Brad Easley'. Both Grace and Brad are astonished when they see Walker at their front door and their astonishment rises little by little into absolute disbelief when they comprehend that he has come to claim the right of having his children.

Surprisingly, and completely different from his *Dutchman* play, Baraka presents action from the first scenes of *The Slave*. Before Brad and Grace can discuss anything with Walker and reach any kind of clarification to the condition Easley is shot to death by Walker and later Grace dies too, the poor woman will be buried later by a fallen beam after a bomb explosion near the house. At the end of the play, Walker is the only one who survives and the spectators are left to wonder about the fate of the little daughters whether they have survived as well or died; there will be no answer. Walker gives some indications that he killed them while he was waiting for Grace and Easley to come back home, but at the very end of the play the stage instructions instruct that there is a kid whom they hear crying and even screaming which pushes

the audience to hope that they are alive. But there is always that doubt and wonder if it is the screams and cries of the daughters of Walker or just any other youngsters crying in the disturbance of the racial war.

The *Dutchman* was not meant to be written as a separate piece of work so it was companioned with *The Slave*. Walker, the lead character of *The Slave*, is in many ways like Clay the lead character of the *Dutchman* an aspirant black middle-class and well-educated man but he is able to free himself. Walker is different from Clay, who has made the choice to calm down his anger and preserve the stereotype. From another angle one sees Walker as a man who tries to escape from racial settlements and throw away the standards and morals of his oppressors. They are brothers but Walker has achieved confident development and growth alongside the pathway to defining his self and finding his true identity. Clay and Walker, share something else, are demonstrated as characters that have not really developed their identity. They are the kind of men who have to be brought to see the conflicting forces within their own tortured mind.

Concerning the similarities and the differences between Clay and Walker one finds that although it is Walker who carries the gun all night long in the house of the Easlies, it is the white couple who are on the attack. On the one hand, he is seen as a strong-minded seeker of personality and identity. On the other, he is seen as an empty container into which a carefully dedicated and revolutionary black consciousness must be filled with. Clay and Walker are very comparable in their connections to the dominant culture which is represented in their relationship to white women.

*The Slave* is seen as less a portrayal of actual revolution than an examination of the awareness and realization of the black revolutionary. Regardless of the explosions that happened here and there, *The Slave* is not a play that contains a lot of action. The

audience is shown a discussion on what type of man that Walker has developed into from the time he rejected his assimilated life and the nature of the revolution he has started. In this play, Amiri Baraka examines the principles, significance, and importance of racial revolution besides his own approach to them. It is important to see that *The Slave* discusses the case for Black aggressiveness, but eventually criticizes its unreal understanding as a ridiculous and dominating condition.

## 7.2 Amiri Baraka's Anti Assimilationist Views

Walker and Baraka are pretty much like each other at that period of time, they disillusioned with the possibility of assimilation but investigate how blacks should reach a suitable spot in the society. The examining nature of the play is made clear in its early scenes when Walker, as the slave in the preface, exclaims:

Walker: ... [I]deas are still in the world. They need judging. I mean, they don't come in that singular or wild, that whatever they are, just because they're beautiful and brilliant, just because they strike us full in the center of the heart... My God! (*softer*) My God, just because they're right... doesn't mean anything. (Baraka. *The Slave*.12)

To explain the meaning of violent revolution in the name of race and probable significances of turning over of the racial order are inspected. The conversation and debate about the approach and predictions of violent racial revolution establishes one of the most important components of the play. It is Easley who challenges Walker in a very open way on the objectives of the rebellion and revolution:

Easley: [...]What can you change? What do you hope to change? Do you think Negroes are better people than whites... that they can govern a society better than *whites*? [...] Will there be more love or beauty in the world... more knowledge... because of it?

Walker: Probably. [...] But that's not the even the point. [...] The point is that you had your chance, darling, now these other folks have theirs. (Baraka. *The Slave*. 11)

The audience and even Easley undoubtedly do not have faith that this is not the kind of answer that is strong enough to be suggested. The fact of having a chance does not mean necessarily to bring a change. To this accusation Walker is no longer able to give or present any reasonable answer: '[...]The complete ugly horseshit cruelty of it is that there doesn't have to be a change. It'll be up to individuals on that side, just as it was supposed to be up to individuals on this side.' (Baraka. *The Slave*.13) In this declaration Walker does not belittle the revolution but he acknowledges and admits that a better world may not be produced. He is conscious of the deficiencies of the revolution but he carries on fighting in its name.

An additional instant that illuminates and gives him a wakeup call and made Walker's reasoning better is when he debates with his ex-wife the basis on which she divorces him. Instead of trying to convince her that his detestation of white people does not comprise her Walker exposes his inability to understand the consequences of his belief, especially for those who are close to him:

'Walker: [...]I guess you never did know what was going on. That's why you left. You thought I betrayed you or something. [...] I was preaching hate the white men...get the white man off our backs...[...] But those things I said... and would say now, pushed you away from me. I couldn't understand. [...] We'd been together a long time, before all that happened. [...] I knew you, if any white person in the world could, I knew you would understand. And then you didn't.

Grace: You stopped telling me everything!



Walker: I never stopped telling you I loved you... or that  
you were my wife!' (Baraka. The Slave 11)

With this argument he could not convince neither his ex-wife nor the audience that was anticipating his arguments, Walker's arguments does nothing but add more distortions to the revolutionary reason. The task here is making people wonder what would make anyone stick out of the crowd makes it very disturbing to the viewers. This kind of disturbances appears many times through the play. The problem appears accompanied with the fact that it is not irrelevant thoughts struggling with each other but real persons:

'Grace: You were preaching the murder of all white people.

Walker, I was, am, white. What do you think was going through my mind every time you were at some rally or meeting whose sole purpose was to bring about the destruction of white people?

Walker: Oh, goddamn it, Grace, are you so stupid? You were my wife... I loved you. You mean because I loved you and was married to you... had had children by you, I wasn't supposed to say the things I felt. I was crying out against three hundred years of oppression; not against individuals.

Easley: But it's individuals who are dying.

Walker: It was individuals who were doing the oppressing.

It was individuals who were being oppressed.' (Baraka. The Slave.12)

In the meantime one is a human being above everything and it will continuously be problematic to find something that causes the division of people. It is certain that there are more things that make people alike and very similar in many ways than

things that can make them different. In other words, people do have more things in common than those which make them different. During the course of the play, Walker gives the impression, if not obviously skeptical then at least questioning the determination of the revolution as well as his position in it. Nonetheless, Walker is eager and enthusiastic to use violence and sacrifice other people's lives to strengthen something which he does not accept completely and is not convinced with. Walker proves his inability to get rid on his shallow ideals.

Consequently one sees him falling under the control of his own revolutionary ideas and turns to be their slave, and even worse he becomes unable to break loose from those ideals that he himself had put in existence. Two souls live within his breast; the double identity appears one more time in another character of Amiri Baraka. The struggle now is not between the black American and the white American but the struggle is within the soul of the black American who has developed an inner enemy. The struggle is between Walker the rebel, separated, detached and tortured fighter, and Walker the slave, haunted personification of history, whose disturbing existence Walker Vessels cannot run away from.

It is sure that Walker Vessels will never have the chance to develop his self or take new positions in life unless he becomes courageous enough to fight his inner problems or selves and to defeat the one who is mostly against or opposite to his ideals. Despite the fact that Walker shows a superficial strength of intelligence and determination to start a revolution, he gives the impression of not being strong enough to continue and be on the top of his revolutionary army toward a triumphant end. The action of the play is fundamentally and basically based on this struggle of identities.

Regardless of everything which was talked about and of the assassination that he has committed, love has always found its way to Walker's heart, at least for his children:

‘Walker: In spite of the fact that I, Walker Vessels, single-handedly, and with no other adviser except my own ego, promoted a bloody situation where white and black people are killing each other; despite the fact that I know that this is at best a war that will only change, ha, the complexion of the tyranny... (*laughs sullenly*) in spite of the fact that I have killed for all times any creative impulse I will ever have by the depravity of my murderous philosophies... despite the fact that I am killed in my head each day and by now have no soul or heart or warmth, even in my long killer fingers, despite the fact that I have no other thing in the universe that I love or trust, but myself... [...] despite the fact that all my officers are ignorant motherfuckers who have never read any book in their lives, despite the fact that I would rather argue politics, or literature, or boxing, or anything, with you, dear Easley, with you... (*head slumps, weeping*) despite all these things and in spite of all the drunken noises I’m making, despite... in spite of... I want those girls, very, very much.’(Baraka. *The Slave*.9-10)

Through discussing the destiny of the daughters more, Grace and Walker fall upon a worrying question of their race. Walker tries to use it as one of the arguments to justify his action of taking the daughters away with him and his wish to make them a part of the black community.

He has faith in that his daughters will always be strangers in the white society:

‘Grace: Do you want those two babies to be with you when you’re killed so they can witness the death of a great man? So they can grow

up and write articles for a magazine sponsored by Walker Vessels Society?

Walker: Which is still better than being freakish mulattoes in a world where your father is some evil black thing you can't remember.'(Baraka. The Slave. 12)

Walker also argues that the girls will always be considered black:

'I mean, after all, only you [Grace] and your husband there are white in this house. Those two lovely little girls upstairs are niggers. You know, circa 1800, one drop makes you whole?'(Baraka. The Slave.5)

All these clarifications seem to be very true but they would not present a problematic should the revolution be efficacious and white rule occupied and oppressed. But what Walker does not realize that through arguing about his daughter's race is, in reality, he is very doubtful about any developments that will be brought by the black rule that he is fighting for.

Grace is very skeptical about the claim to the children by Walker but she is very suspicious also about the time that he has chosen to come and claim them especially that he never showed interested for many years about their raising or education and then unexpectedly decides to come to take them away. Walker replies impatiently that he has always loved them all their lives. He continues to say that there was so much to do before this moment that is why he left them with their mother. At this point Walker also expresses more honestly and clearly that he is not persuaded that the revolution will succeed.

He states his suspicions clearly when he comments:

‘Walker: Look, I was going to wait until the fighting was over... (*reflective*) until we had won, before I took [the girls]. But something occurred to me for the first time, last night. It was the idea that we might not win. [...] I’d sort’ve taken it for granted... as a solved problem, that the fighting was the most academic of our problems, and that the real work would come necessarily after the fighting was done. But...’(Baraka. The Slave.10)

Despite what was said earlier, it does not mean that Walker or Baraka is not ready to give up on their militant position and adopt a reasonable and probably integrationist perspective. In this period of his career, Baraka supports the assimilationist ideology but he is not ready to give up on his revolutionary stance. Baraka has proven being imprisoned in his suspicions of revolution, powerless to either discharge them or give up on his current attitude and position. Critics say that regardless Amiri Baraka’s revolutionary passion and enthusiasm, at that period of his career, definitely proposes that if someone becomes the slave of his hatred to whites or to the assimilationist ideology is as much cause for crying at the same time for joy. For this reason, Walker believes that he has to work if he wants to guarantee the victory of a revolution that will change the appearance of oppression, but at the end he finds himself trapped in hatred.

In spite of the determined talk of violence and revolution, Walker’s rebellion has some shortages of social vision. At the place of evolving a political perspective of Black liberation, Walker simply tracks the instincts of his own love and hate feelings. This mistake decreases Walker’s political ability to a pessimistic form of action. Despite the fact that Walker has no confident idea for a revolutionary future, he is

completely conscious of the errors of the present time. Being an intellectual allows him to see the faults of the present condition and attempt to recover it. It is worth noticing that at the same time he is aware of the unfeasibility of making clear cut limitations between decent and wicked and of the insufficiencies of the revolutionary solutions, therefore not able to embrace them unthinkingly and without asking questions about the matter.

Nevertheless, Baraka and his writings do not give up on their missions; Baraka himself and his protagonists will be appearing as tough, strong leaders of revolutionary nationalism in later *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*. The liberal open-minded education of all the characters in *The Slave* cannot be veiled. This targets the audience that is a middle-class, liberal and educated, not really the black crowds that Baraka would later assert as his anticipated spectators to whom he desired to demonstrate black consciousness. In the early scenes of the play Easley and Walker refer to the world of poetry and later Walker quotes Yeats to be recognized by Easley, and seemingly by the audience.

Baraka can be courageous to include such allusions since a great percentage of his readers are white intellectuals, the black university students. Besides the moderately small group of black cultural nationalists and other African Americans who are not identified as being a part of the majority of the black crowds. In spite of the fact that Easley is a previous teacher of both Walker and Grace therefore they all share the same education, Easley condemns early in the play Walker's previous arty expression as well as his present activities and way of thinking:

‘Easley: Can you understand that anything and everything you do is stupid, filthy, or meaningless! Your inept formless poetry. Hah.

Poetry? A flashy doggerel for inducing all those unfortunate troops of

yours to spill their blood in your behalf. But I guess that's something!

Ritual drama, we used to call it at the university. The poetry of ritual drama. [...]

Walker: Ritual drama... (*half musing*) yeah, I remember seeing that phrase in an old review by one of your queer academic friends...'

(Baraka. *The Slave*. 5)

Easley refers to it even in his last words: [After being shot by Walker and dying]

'Ritual drama. Like I said, ritual drama...' (Baraka. *The Slave*.15) Additional

observations on the world of theater appear previously in the play when Walker is remembering the time before his failed marriage to Grace: 'I was Othello... Grace there was Desdemona... and you [Easley] were Iago...' (Baraka. *The Slave*.5)

The power of language plays a double role in, *The Slave*. First, Walker replicates the Irish accent, Indian, and Japanese consequently containing these collections in the domination originated by white society in America. Language, nevertheless, works as well as an alienating aspect. Since it is forced on its operators, it makes them follow its instructions and does not give them the opportunity to express what they wish.

Walker is conscious of that when he says:

'I swear to you, Grace, I did come into the world pointed in the right

direction. Oh, shit, I learned so many words for what I've wanted to say. They

all come down on me at once. But almost none of them are mine.'

(Baraka. *The Slave*. 819)

It is worth noting that in order to accomplish total revolutionary freedom and liberation, it is necessary to develop original ideas and new linguistic forms for their organization. Then, language is and will always be an additional aspect dominating its users. After Baraka's return to Newark, New Jersey in 1965, he started giving up on

his white spectators and he tried to build a relation with his black audience and try to stabilize it as much as possible. Baraka's objective was to interconnect with his black people and to educate them, to bond them in one celebration and ideal of unity.

Baraka tried to make clear that the celebrity that *Dutchman* has brought to him and elevated up in him was that unconditionally trustworthy and profound desire to express what should be enunciated for all of the black people. He recognized the nonsenses that filled his life, its screws nevertheless he sensed, at that moment some heavy duty. He said that if those whites think that they are supposed to teach black people so they have to pay for their belief. He made it clear that he will do his best to make the white people realize the black's strength even if he does not have the power to react.

Baraka showed that he is ready to make his words stronger than his power of action; he will use his power of voice to say what has to be said for the sake of the black people, principally for black people. Because they were the origin and source of his belief, but for anybody anyplace who required justice. For that reason, the importance of his plays has started to be modified from examination of the problem to understanding of the solution.



## Conclusion

The present work deals with '*Issues of Assimilation of African Americans in Selected Works of Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka*'. Assimilation is among domestic issues that shape controversy in American history. This thesis examines the struggles that African American writers go through in their attempt to assimilate into the white mainstream with particular focus on Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka's. This research investigates two major points: the causes that prevented African Americans from assimilating into the white mainstream in the 1930s besides the implications of such attempts on the African American self, focusing on Richard Wright's history, cultural background, and writing. The second point is what made African Americans of the 1960s question the idea of assimilation and refuse it through concentrating our attention on Amiri Baraka's history and works.

Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka were investigated thoroughly. It was necessary to consider their background if we intend to understand their views about the idea of assimilation and its restraints as well as effects on the African American self. Through investigating their background we came to understand why they saw assimilation as a harmful process.

The feeling of being an outsider, not just the feeling but being treated as an outsider pushed Wright to break with the Communist party and Baraka from the Beat Movement. They learnt that though being an important member, not much had changed. They felt isolated, abused and misunderstood as always.

Wright and Baraka were able to surpass the weaknesses, alienation from their own society and the white society and turned their effort to expose the real face of assimilation to the Black community. They used their personal experiences, their

personal struggles to show to the world the real African American who faces different obstacles that were created by White America in his way to look for assimilation.

They showed that no matter how educated or assimilated you may look, in America, a black intellect will always be a black boy, a servant, and a submissive person that has to do and say what he is told to do and say.

Wright, on one hand, desired to give a clear protest religious, political, or personal.

Wright desires to shake the souls of Black and white people in doing so he desired to articulate common experience and common attitudes. He wished that blacks will be better equipped to deal with their own destiny and whites will see the disturbance they created in the souls of black people.

Baraka, on the other hand, has a simple-minded understanding of black cultural assimilation. Baraka believed that assimilation is a moral failure because it is the result of a decision to break away from the masses of black folks and a denial of black cultural authenticity. Baraka believed that no moral quality is linked to assimilation or its rejection.

Wright's literary works were immersed in the literary naturalism of the Depression era. In his work of the period, he tried to present to the world the real brutal face of white society's oppression of African Americans. In order to expose the injustices of racism, economic exploitation, and exploitation, Richard Wright's anger and protest served as a substance for literature intended to promote social change. Though the pains alienation, Wright used his art to turn those pains into a voice calling for human solidarity and racial advancement.

Through *Native Son* Wright exposed all the lies that the white society spread, Richard Wright's works exposed the hatred, fear, and violence that have crippled American culture. Through his works, Wright made the white man recognize himself as an oppressor. His works made also the black man know the cost of his submission. *Native Son* destroyed the false hopes of the American society: they wished that the accumulated injustices would not bring with it permanent consequences, African American unrealistic belief that in his humiliation he somehow reserved a sexual strength that made it necessary to envy and still more to suppress him. Wright insisted on one idea: history can be punished.

Baraka believed a lot in creating art that would shake the souls of his people. He believed in taking dreams and replaces them with reality. It must isolate the ritual and historical cycles of reality. But it must be food for all these who need food, and daring propaganda for the beauty of the human mind. But it is a political theatre, a weapon to help in the slaughter of these foolish white people who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to harass.

Amiri Baraka's life on the other side prepared him to experience the myth of assimilation by himself. Even though he was part of several artistic waves, he always felt as though his attempts of assimilation were not accepted, he even felt despised by those he wanted to be part of. After a lot of ups and downs he discovers what he fought for the rest of his life; a black culture based on black experiences by black people. A non-assimilationist writer who, through his works, worked to show to his fellow people what was at stake if they pursue with the idea of assimilation. At the end of chapter two and three, we see that Amiri Baraka and Richard Wright followed different ways to come to the same conclusion; assimilation is more harmful than

beneficial to African Americans. The damages can appear as psychological disturbances in the self of African Americans or as experiencing the power of stereotype exercised by white people on black people.

The last thing that can be said about the idea of assimilation of African Americans is that these people during the 1930's were concentrating on securing their social and economic status. They had no self-esteem that could help them in asking for more than food and shelter. They were treated as sub humans, stereotyped as being servant, submissive and comic, even African American writers during the Harlem Renaissance depicted their fellow people as such. The exception came with writers like Richard Wright who was deeply influenced by Western writers, and culture. Though he was deeply assimilated into the white mainstream, adjusted to fit in, he did not give up on his liberating ideas but was always accused of being too assimilated and not respected for that. After his visit to France and being treated as an elite by his peers, he knew that the problem is in the mind of white Americans and that they have to see the reality of African Americans through the eyes of an African American writer. He wished that his own people, African Americans, understand how different they are from white Americans and should accept who they really are.

During the 1960s, civil rights ideas were spread in the air and African Americans accepted their difference from the white majority and became more aware as well as confident of their own distinct identity, they began questioning assimilation. Amiri Baraka as a writer of the 1950s though being much assimilated in his early career into the white society he was able to recognize the cost an African American has to pay. Issues as stereotype and double identity accompanied African Americans since they were ready to compromise their black identity to join the white one. *Dutchman, Black*

*Boy*, *Native Son*, and *the Slave* show how assimilation vision spread all over the society and how it successfully misrepresents a culture. The identity confusion which is experienced by lots of African Americans might be a result of this pressure. They escape this social pressure by leaving their own culture and follow the oppressor's culture, the oppressor which eventually kills them. This play might be a miniature of what is really going on with these communities on the street from the looking-glass of the black men.

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