

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Racial Stigma in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English

By

Ram Shrestha

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

2015

Tribhuvan University  
Kirtipur, Kathmandu  
Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Ram Shrestha has completed his thesis entitled, "Racial stigma in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*" under my supervision. He carried out his research work from November, 2014 to July, 2015. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

---

Keshab Sigdel

Lecturer

Central Department of English

Date:

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled "Racial stigma in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*" submitted to the central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Ram Shrestha has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Internal Examiner

---

External Examiner

---

Head of the Department

Date:

## **Acknowledgements**

Words fail me to convey my feelings of gratitude to my honorable supervisor Mr. Keshab Sigdel who provided invaluable inspiration and constructive comments to give the final shape to this thesis.

I am profoundly grateful to Amma Raj Joshi, Head of the Central Department of English, for the approval of this research work in the present form. Also, I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Ramchandra Paudel, Birendra Pandey, Badri Acharya, Saroj Sharma Ghimire, Raju Baral and Shankar Subedi for their warm encouragement and suggestion while writing the thesis.

It would be sheer injustice if I do not express my sincere thanks to my friends Mahesh Bhattarai, Indra Bhusal, Mahesh Acharya and others for their academic supports. In course of completing this thesis, I received help and suggestion from various persons, institution, departments and well-wishers. I am indebted to them individually.

I owe a great debt to my parents Mr. Kushal Narayan Shrestha and Mrs. Kamala Shrestha who provided me the light of education despite facing various challenges and difficulties. Also, I am grateful to my Brother Mr. Rabin Shrestha and Rohit Shrestha, Uncle Mr. Deergha Narayan Shrestha and Wife Mrs. Laxmi Jaisi Kharel for their continuous impetus to complete this thesis.

Finally, my special thanks go to Nirajan Sharma who despite of his busy time helped me with typing and providing valuable suggestion.

Date:

Ram Shrestha

## Abstract

Richard Wright's semi-autobiographical work, *Black Boy*, projects the issue of racial stigma. *Black Boy* is about the frustration and humiliation experienced by a sensitive Negro boy; it deals with the depression of the black. Wright uses himself as the protagonist to portray a society where inequality and man's inhumanity is rampant. He openly criticizes the exclusionary policies and the politics of deprivation. For daring to challenge the racial politics and segregations, he is ostracized not only by the white but also by the Black. The narrator of the novel encounters numerous obstacles like ostracism, disappointment even in his house, racism and the highhandedness of the white. In this way, the narrator of Wright's *Black Boy* suffers from double stigmatization. The pang of being ostracized and excluded from the social circle completely makes the narrator stigmatized.

## Contents

	<b>Page No.</b>
Letter of Recommendation	i
Letter of Approval	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Content	v
I. An Account of Racial Inequality in Richard Wright's <i>Black Boy</i>	1-13
II. Racial Stigma in Wright's <i>Black Boy</i>	14-36
III. The Menacing Effects of Racism in <i>Black Boy</i>	37-40
Works Cited	

## **I. An Account of Racial Inequality in Richard Wright's *Black Boy***

Richard Wright's semi-autobiographical work, *Black Boy*, projects the issue of racial stigma. The narrator of the book resembles the novelist. But for the most part, the novelist has presented his own personal history via the fictitious character. There are both the fictitious and autobiographical elements in the book. The narrator happens to cross many boundaries set by the aggressive policies pursued by the white. The prevailing racism constrains the narrator a lot. He wants to transcend the boundaries and limitations set by the racist mentality. But it is not easy for him to cross the boundaries set by the policies of segregation and racism.

While a majority of Blacks are bound to remain satisfied for what they are in the society dominated by the hegemonic values of the white, the narrator dares to challenge the absolute dictations of the white. He openly criticizes the exclusionary policies and the politics of deprivation. For daring to challenge the racial politics and segregations, he is ostracized not only by the white but also by the Black. Though he clearly fights for the abolition of racial inequality and segregation, he falls prey to the parochial vision and inflexibility of the society. For his progressive efforts to transform the society he performs heroically. But the dogmatic and arrogant society treats him as the outlawed and ostracized vagrant. As a consequence, he suffers from racial stigma. Finally, he has no option other than crouching like a man oppressed by the burden of stigma.

The narrator of the novel encounters numerous obstacles like ostracism, disappointment even in his house, racism and the highhandedness of the white. The pervasive hurdles like segregation, dispossession and politics of exclusion from the mainstream platform of education and opportunity constantly discourage and weaken the moral strength of the character.

For crossing the established domains and boundaries of established socio-cultural codes, the narrator of Wright's *Black Boy* is ostracized and excluded not only in the mainstream of the society but even in the community of the Black. The pang of being ostracized and excluded from the social circle completely makes the narrator stigmatized. Since the narrator's stigma is caused by his identity of being a Black, the issue of racial stigma is uppermost in the work.

Richard Nathaniel Wright is an African-American author of sometimes controversial novels, short stories, poems, and non-fiction. Much of his literature concerns racial themes, especially those involving the plight of African Americans during the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. His work helped the change of race relation in the United States in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The hard-hitting works of Richard Wright influence generations of writers. His 1940 novel *Native Son* is about a young black man growing up in Chicago's South Side slums. His 1945 memoir *Black Boy* is concerned about his early years in the South, and other books were changed or cut, mostly because of their sexual, political or racial candor.

Richard Wright identified himself with his racial past wholeheartedly and to this extent reflected the repercussion of the Harlem Renaissance. Wright's background was characterized with a sense of powerlessness of the black towards the white. He came to realize that the white were the superior ones who dictated what happened in the black world. He goes against this by advocating for a sense of cultural consciousness and nationalism among the blacks.

*Black Boy* is written to expose the experience of the blacks. It also exposes the agony and confusion of the slaves. In a nutshell, black American responded to their humanity in a number of ways. The emergence of African literature reflects the centrality of writing to the project of seeking freedom and equality in the United



States. Literature presented a way for the blacks to demonstrate their artistic creation and imagination though in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, African American literature has continued to be a means through which the historical record and African culture are greatly represented. Recent critics have called for a reassessment of Wright's later work in view of his philosophical project. Notably, Paul Gilroy has argued that “the depth of his philosophical interests has been either overlooked or misconceived by the almost exclusively literary enquiries that have dominated analysis of his writing” (26). His most significant contribution, however, was his desire to accurately portray blacks to white readers, thereby destroying the white myth of the patient, humorous, subservient black man.

Patricia Paul Christle is one of the leading critics of Wright. He detects the elements of Wright's former support with the radical spirit of communism in America after the depression era. But soon Wright's interest in communist principle dwindles. Regarding to this particular aspect of the novel, Christle makes the following observation:

Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, portrays his boyhood in the vicious Jim Crow South and his struggles with the Communist Party in Chicago. As such, a sensitive reading of this work depends on an understanding of its social and historical contexts. One of the primary contexts is the body of laws referred to as the “Jim Crow laws” after a crudely stereotypical character in white theater designed to degrade blacks for white entertainment. (17)

The myth of exclusion and dispossession of the minority gives birth to the strong sentiment to the creed of communism. Wright is also no exception to the rule. Taking their cue from the infamous separate but equal ruling, the Jim Crow laws mandated

segregation of black from white not only in physical spaces such as restaurants, trains, movie theaters, and hospitals, but also in social.

Donald Gibson is another prominent critic of Richard Wright. He is of the opinion that the historic-economic realities are reflected in the work. The reality concerning the economic history of depression era is reflected in this work. Gibson puts forward the following view:

Likewise, it is difficult to fully understand *Black Boy* without knowledge of American Communism in the 1930s and 1940s. These years saw the collapse of the stock market, industry stagnation, massive unemployment, and even famine in some parts of the United States. Many American intellectuals were disturbed by the capitalist mode of production, which, in their opinion, brought about these dreadful problems and then did very little to alleviate them. (36)

According to Gibson, strong hankering after economic prosperity and devastation of depression era haunted the narrator of the work. As a black man, Wright was particularly interested in the convergence of confronting racism with Communism. Internal bickering and division plagues other American political organizations. The harshness of depression era tortures the unemployed and jobless as well as the excluded and the marginalized.

Donald R. Hatcher argues that Richard could not help affirming the spirit of humanism despite his occasional belief in radical doctrine. He opines the following views:

Despite his flaws, Richard remains intensely concerned with humanity, both in a universal sense and in the context of his concern for the individual people he meets on his journey. In this way, Richard

overcomes the negative, debilitating, isolating aspects of his environment and channels them into a love for other people. He is an outsider who feels little connection to other people, yet who cares for these people nonetheless. (24)

Hatcher maintains that Richard is humanistic. But his spirit of humanism is not consistent. Richard's traits do not exist in perfect harmony. At certain points, one trait will seem to dominate, only to give way to other traits at other times. He has a self-contradictory appeal that transcends the simple biographical facts of his life.

The researcher makes use of the theory of stigma. The socio-economic and racial factors are liable for the inception of stigmatic condition. Carol T. Miller is the popular theorist of stigma. He studies stigma within the context of racial segregation and alienation caused by troubled race relation. He defines stigma as follows:

Stigma originally meant a physical mark of shame. Now, it's an invisible mark that sets you apart from others. The problem with the word 'stigma' is that it puts the focus on the person's difference instead of on the people who are setting them apart. Using the word stigma makes it seem different than racism, homophobia or sexism. It isn't. So it's time to talk about stigma for what it really is. (56)

Prejudice is holding negative attitudes or beliefs about people who are viewed as different. Miller contends that it is this racial prejudice that creates the racial stigma. Discrimination is acting on these ideas or beliefs. The stigmatized suffers from humiliation and horror.

Cheryl R. Kaiser is another equally important critic of stigma. He demonstrates considerable expertise in studying stigma in the light of the violation of the sacred marks and boundaries of society. He furthermore elaborates:

Many people don't experience stigma for just one reason. They may experience discrimination based on many different prejudices, like sexual orientation, gender, culture or physical disability.

Discrimination itself can lead to mental health problems. And people who already face discrimination for any reason may be even less able to find help for mental health problems or less able to find services that meet their needs. (57)

Research shows that over half of people living with mental disorders said that they were embarrassed about their health problems, and over half felt like they had experienced discrimination. Kaiser's conviction sounds relevant in the study of stigma and its long lasting impact.

Race is a stigma. Conceptualizing race in this way not only sheds light on the operation and contestation of racism, but promotes a critical social psychology of stigma. Caroline Howarth refers to the ways in which stigma operates to produce structural inequalities. With respect to the notion of race as stigma, he makes the following observation:

Defining race as stigma is useful in different ways. First, it highlights the embodiment of race: race is seen in or on the body; while race may inform social spaces, linguistic styles and fashion, it is primarily linked to the body, or more particularly the skin. In ancient Greece a stigma was a mark - burnt or cut into the skin to symbolize the threat or danger of the so stigmatized person. Secondly, conceptualizing race as stigma underlines the dehumanizing nature of discourses and practices that race.(52)

Howarth asserts that stigma reduces the person from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Race reduces the identity and the potential of those seen as 'raced': they are spoiled or blemished by the racist gaze.

Jason Arnold contends that those who are positioned as racial others – those with black and brown skin are seen as less than, different from, unequal to the radicalizing, normatively white, others. He puts forward the following views:

The stigma of race is real because it can be seen, and is dangerous and so should be rejected. Implied is the idea that a blemished person, ritually polluted, is to be avoided, especially in public places. As stigma is marked on the body, stigmatized bodies have to be policed, controlled or excluded in particularly ways in order to minimize the threat. (65)

In this way race invades the self as radicalized expectations and stereotypes mark one's sense of self, one's own expectations, ambitions and fears. Jason treats stigma as the burden on those who stand for the progressive transformation of society.

Although all the critics have examined Wright's *Black Boy* from different angles and perspective, none of them have explored and examined the issue of stigma caused by racial discrimination. Discrimination based on race and color along with other factors cause stigma. The major character of this work suffers from the agony of racial stigma. Thus the researcher probes into the issue of racial stigma by using some of the dominant theories of stigma in general and racial stigma in particular. Hence, the researcher argues that his research topic differs substantially from the issues and topics discussed by other critics and reviewers.

Race is a concept determined by complex social, historical, economic and political factors rather than a static reductionist biological concept. The construction

of race varies according to different geographic and social factors. The meaning of race is a matter of social interpretation not a fact of biology or genetics.

Racial conflicts have plagued the United States from its very beginnings, in particular driven by racial prejudice against Blacks. In this connection, Schuman, H., Steeh, C., Bobo, L., & Krysan, M. write in their book *Racial attitudes in America: Trends and interpretations*: “The civil rights movement triggered the elimination of Jim Crow segregation several decades ago, and Whites’ opinions about many racial issues have subsequently liberalized” (qtd. in Sears 259). However, the substantial disadvantages experienced by Blacks in most domains of life have not disappeared. Proponents of Blacks’ interests have therefore continued to push for further advances, efforts that have often met with substantial White opposition. Such opposition has generated considerable research interest. Theoretical explanations fall into three main categories. The first is that some new form of racism has taken over the political role played in pre-civil rights days by the old-fashioned, redneck, or Jim Crow racism that incorporated social distance between the races, beliefs in the biological inferiority of Blacks, and support for formal discrimination and segregation.

In the other hand, racism is the word used to describe a complex set of attitudes and actions, which discriminate against people on the basis of their skin color, country of origin, religion or nationality. This discrimination can be conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, but is undoubtedly present in many different areas of social interaction.

The white men worked on the psychology of the black men by making them believe they are inferior and also by symbolizing their black sin with ‘bad’, ‘ugly’ and ‘hell’. As such, the black men became afraid and ashamed of their skin colour. It is in

this view that Langston Hughes wrote in his manifesto, *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926):

The young Negro artist, who creates, now intends to express our individual dark skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad, if they are not, it does not matter, we know we are beautiful and ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the to-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad, if they are not, their displeasure does not matter either we build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves.

Langston tries to portray the African culture and tradition in negation to the white man's belief. Black writers had to stand to encourage the blacks to regain self confidence in themselves. Richard Wright, being a black writer was unashamedly black and he thrived to propagate the idea that being a black does not make one a second class citizen. Thus, his works generally centered on insightful view on the lives of the blacks in American and how they were oppressed by the "superior power" (white).

Glenn C. Loury's *Racial Stigma and Its Consequence* deals about the consequences of racism in the lifestyle of black people. "The concept of racial stigma aims to probe beneath the cognitive acts of individuals and investigate the structure of social relations within which those individuals operate" (2). He further adds:

The concept of an enduring racial stigma afflicting African Americans suggests that any successful and consistent theory of racial inequality must account for the processes that systematically block realization of their human potential. . . Empirical work on racial inequality has

focused almost entirely on the differential treatment of individuals, on the basis of race, in formal market transactions. (5)

Here, it becomes clear that a theory of racial economic disparity should begin with some account of the phenomenon of race itself. There needs to explain why people take note of and assign significance to the skin color, hair texture, and facial bone structure of other human beings. That superficial marking on human bodies are socially significant – that agents routinely partition the field of human subjects whom they encounter into groups, with this sorting convention based on the subjects' possession of some cluster of observable bodily marks – is a universal feature of human societies.

*The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* is another important book by Glenn C. Loury which deals with the issue of racial inequality. These lines from the same book are more significant in this project:

Nearly a century and a half after the destruction of the institution of slavery, and a half-century past the dawn of the civil rights movement, social life in the United States continues to be characterized by significant racial stratification. Numerous indices of well-being—wages, unemployment rates, income and wealth levels, ability test scores, prison enrollment and crime victimization rates, health and mortality statistics—all reveal substantial racial disparities. . . . So we have a problem; it will be with us for a while; and it behooves us to think hard about what can and should be done. (3–4)

In this way, racism consists of ideologies and practices that seek to justify, or cause, the unequal distribution of privileges, rights or goods among different racial groups. Race has been a fundamental fact in American society for centuries, since the



sixteenth century with the arrival of African slaves. And many would observe that racism has been a part of that history from beginning to end. The term racism is also taken as an elite discourse. In this connection, Teun A. van Dijk in his book *Elite Discourse and Racism* defines racism in this way:

Racism, thus, is not just in the streets not the exclusive reaction of ordinary white folks in a social or economic impasse. Much of the development sketched above is, sometimes subtly and indirectly, enacted or pre-formulated by various elite groups and their discourses. The racism of the political elites, for instance, has a long tradition and, despite routine disclaimers and official appeals to tolerance, continues even today, and at the very top. (2)

The attitudes of racism include a bundle of emotions and beliefs: a belief in the inherent superiority or inferiority of one race relative to another; feelings of hostility, suspicion, or antipathy towards members of a different racial group; a set of stereotypes about the characteristics of the other group; and a readiness to discriminate against members of other groups when one is in a position to assign benefits, opportunities, or hardships.

From the above discussion, it is concluded that the concept of race is not only a biological term, is also a social and cultural construction. On the other hand, racism includes the beliefs, attitudes, institution, arrangement an act that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation.

The researcher makes use of the theory of racial stigma. The present study has the close proximity between discrimination and stigma. Stigma refers to the embarrassing and humiliated condition of a victim who violates the established social and cultural codes and convention in the name of being radical in his or her approach

to socio-cultural reform. The researcher argues that discrimination based on race and color cause stigma. This work will furnish important insights into the nature of the proximity between stigma and discriminatory practices. Hence, the researcher applies the theory of stigma to conduct the research. The thorough analysis of the text is another crucial component of the methodological framework. Regular library visit, consulting proper websites and external links facilitate the research, the present researcher take advices and guidelines from the respected teachers and professors.

The major thrust of this research is to explore the extent to which the constant racial discrimination produces the virtual condition of alienation, humiliation and embarrassment. Such an embarrassment creates extreme pang and anguish. The repeated expose to racism leads to the beginning of stigmatic condition.

This research dwells upon the psychological effects of an individual's radical move and the restrictive measures of society. When an individual Black seeks to sabotage the lingering vestiges of racism and segregation which are deep rooted, the society will chasten him by condemning his radical steps. The present research concentrates on this aspect only. In this way, the central theme of this thesis is no longer the struggle of the blacks for survival and rights to meaningful living, but also a more philosophical approach to the struggle for emancipation, self-determinism and cultural self-identity. This led to the emergence of modernism in black American literature.

The thesis has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work—a short introduction to Richard Wright and a short literature review. Moreover, it gives a overview of the entire work. On the basis of the theoretical framework of Racism -- the concept of racism discussed by Langston Hughes, Richard Wrights himself and others; the second

chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how the novel *Black Boy* deals with the resistance of the Black people against the hegemony and interpellation of themselves and search for their space. So, this chapter tries to prove the hypothesis of the study – For crossing the established domains and boundaries of established socio-cultural codes, the narrator of Wright's *Black Boy* is ostracized and excluded not only in the mainstream of the society but even in the community of the Black. The pang of being ostracized and excluded from the social circle completely makes the narrator stigmatized. Since the narrator's stigma is caused by his identity of being a Black, the issue of racial stigma is uppermost in the work. Moreover, it attempts to analyze how the individuals are suppressed and subjected to ruling ideology. And finally, the third or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research.

## II. Racial Stigma in Wright's *Black Boy*

The relationship between the whites and blacks has always been that of master and slave. Whites as a member of privileged class have valorized the color of their skin i.e. whiteness. Whiteness has been associated to beauty and happiness whereas blackness with ugliness and despair. As a member of distinct race, black becomes 'the other' in white men's eyes. And when the economic status and the color of skin are labeled as a measuring rod of social acceptance the blacks get systematically deranged. The social structure has become so complex that the members of both communities feel lack of love and co-operation. As a result a deep rooted hatred is born in their heart.

In shaping the social interaction between black and white communities, color, caste and social- economic status plays the vital role. The racial hostility emerges not only in course of social dealing between the blacks and whites as a member of two distinct racial communities but it extends even to the level of intra racial hostility as the 'chain of oppression' always operates in course of social interaction. The practice of discrimination and oppression upon the weaker members of the community is the root cause behind racial hostility between blacks and whites.

In the lives of blacks, social marginality has become the permanent condition. They teach their children the middle class white standard as the ideal way of life which is beyond their reach both in terms of color and family structure. This is the point from where the tragedy begins in their lives. In such unhealthy social environment, discrimination and prejudice are born.

The same type of condition of the blacks presented in the above paragraphs is presented in Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy*. Richard, the narrator of the novel, is a major victim of the racism and other characters like Granny and Ella are also the

representative characters of the other repressed and oppressed people due to the race. The novel *Black Boy* examines Richard's tortured years in the Jim Crow South from 1912 to 1927. Richard relates his painful and confusing memories that lead to a better understanding of the man, a black.

The story begins when four-year-old Richard sets fire to his grandmother's house in Jackson, Mississippi, and, as punishment, is nearly beaten to death by his mother. He recovers, and the brutal punishment establishes in Richard an ability to survive any circumstance. The family then moves to Memphis, Tennessee, where Richard's father eventually deserts the family. In Memphis, Richard learns about racism both from what he observes in the world and how his family members humiliate themselves in front of whites. It is also here that Richard becomes alienated from God and the Christian faith, developing in its place an abiding love of the natural world.

As Richard grows up, he begins to see how easily he might repeat the patterns that have trapped black men for generations. When his mother becomes ill, however, Richard moves with her back to Jackson to live with his oppressive grandmother. There, sees opportunities for breaking out of his preordained life and avoid becoming trapped in it. He also recognizes how religion can unite people along lines other than skin color. Prayer also brings added value: Although Richard is unable to talk to God when he prays; he does find ideas for stories, thus beginning his life as a writer.

By age of twelve, Richard has alienated himself from most of his family, which reinforces his role as an outsider; a role he later finds is shared by many American writers. Throughout the next several years, he excels at school but feels detached from his classmates; he also lands a few part-time jobs but feels alienated from his supervisors and coworkers. Because Richard behaves differently than other

black children, the community tries to shame him into submission, which he refuses. By age of sixteen, Richard is determined to be a writer, yet he is cognizant of the dangers of a black youth having that aspiration while living in the South, so he dreams of getting away and going north.

After graduation and another failed stint at a job, Richard steals the money to go north. He is horrified by his crime because it fulfills the expectations his extended family holds for him. He also recognizes that crime produces additional suffering in the world, and Richard wants to be a part of social good, not social ills. With his stolen money, Richard is able to move part-way north, back to Memphis, where life is not radically different than in Jackson. After an especially degrading incident at a new job, Richard throws himself into reading novels and other works by American and European writers. He realizes that he is destined to become a writer and soon flees to Chicago. He knows that the South will always be a part of him, but he is determined to flourish in his new life, thus exacting revenge on the Southern social system. By the story's end, as Richard comes of age, the voice of the narrator and of the nineteen-year-old young man he has become, merge into one.

Racism is a broader term which consists of the elements of history, culture and ethnicity. It involves the superiority of one group, ethnicity or its cultural practices over the other because the entitled inferior group lacks the set of criteria as prescribed by the privileged group. Racism exists both in conscious and unconscious level. Its effect is very much disastrous or damaging both to the victims and the perpetrators if it is practiced in an unhealthy manner. In fact, it is a false concept to associate the genetic traits to social characteristics. Therefore Gerzina has rightly said: "Racism at individual level involves a misguided personal belief that an ethnic racial group is deficient or superior because of a set of moral, intellectual or cultural traits

that are thought to be indicated by the group's biological origin" (126). These beliefs in practice result in more complicated racial practice that is cultural racism.

Domination of one culture over the other by imposing cultural values or by restricting the possible improvisation of cultural behaviors of the latter one leaves psychological disintegration. Racial issues aroused by the whites were considered to be unquestionable because the white race and its cultural products were considered to be superior to the black ones.

It is crucially important to distinguish between racial discrimination and racial stigma in the study of this problem. Racial discrimination has to do with how blacks are treated, while racial stigma is concerned with how black people are perceived. It is argued that a so-called reward bias i. e. unfair treatment of persons in formal economic transactions based on racial identity.

In *Black Boy*, Wright and other black characters are treated by the whites as or even worse than animals. Wright recounts how he lost his job on the basis that he called a white man by name without adding Mr. to his name. The whites deny the blacks what is considered "a white man's job", thereby depriving them a means of livelihood. Blacks are treated as animals even right from the time of slavery.

Richard's Granny was named by her slave master:

'What was Granny's name before she married Grandpa?'

'Bolden'

'Who gave her that name?'

'The white man who owned her'. (44)

This conversation between Richard and his mother makes him know that he is actually a descendant of slaves. Another incident of this dehumanization is the one Wright witnesses in his Granny's place. Black slaves are held together by iron chains.

Wright on seeing them mistakenly refers to them as elephants because of the way they are held and bundled together. “As the strange animals came abreast of me, I saw that the legs of the black animals were held together by irons and that arms were linked with heavy chains that clanked softly and musically as they moved” (49). Richard’s mother explains to him that the elephants are slaves made to work. “It’s just what you see”, she said; “A gang of men chained together and made to work” (49). The blacks, even in Richard’s days are still used as slaves. They are seen not just as slaves but also for amusement. Wright asserts that “I suppose it’s fun for white man to see niggers fight” (260). He captures an incident where Mr. Olin, one of the foremen in his office instigated a fight between him and Harrison, another black boy. Mr. Olin promises the winner five dollars just for the two boys to fight themselves while the whites watch them and laugh.

Shorty, a black boy who works in the same office with Wright once tells Richard that he will do anything nasty just to get a quarter from the white men. Shorty, to amuse the whites never hesitates to pole out his buttocks for them to kick, Shorty even goes to the extent of calling himself degrading names, “But this black son of a bitch sure needs a quarter...this monkey needs the peanuts” (200). Wright witnesses these kinds of situation a lot of times and says he feels no anger, just hatred, wrath and disgust for the black race. To the white men, the blacks are more or less animals and they treat them as such.

Shavar Jeffries in his article “Black Men: Stigma, Status and Expectations” published in *New York Times* writes that Racial stigma was thus the precipitating cause for racially differential treatment. He further adds:

Although America has made tremendous progress in its struggle to overcome its tragic racial history, much work remains to be done. This



ongoing challenge lies in the degree to which the root cause of racially differential treatment — racial stigma — is resistant to the formal tools generally available to combat racial subordination. (6)

He further provides the evidence that in the last 40 years, since the formal end of Jim Crow, the people, in partnership with government, have pushed the nation forward by prohibiting various forms of racially discriminatory conduct. But these tools focus on symptoms of stigma, not stigma itself.

In *Black Boy*, all the black characters in *Black Boy* are constantly rejected by the society. Richard's Grandfather waits for many years for his pension allowance which he is rightfully entitled to, but all he keeps getting are the rejection letters through which they deny him all his benefits.

And I would read him the letter – reading slowly and pronouncing each word with extreme care telling him that his claims for a pension had not been substantiated and that his application had been rejected.

Grandpa would not blink an eye, then he would curse softly under his breath. (122)

Also, Richard's mother is rejected in the hospital because the government makes no adequate health provisions for the coloured people. The hospitals provide good health care for whites, leaving the blacks who live in abject poverty to take care of themselves. The narrator is also rejected by his white employers most of the time. He goes from one job to another as a result of racial discrimination.

The blacks have problems with the issue of accommodation. Richard's family has to be ejected from their several homes often because they could not pay the house rent. This creates Richard's exposure to early street life culminating in child crime and psychological imbalance and suffering of the worst kind:

Inability to pay rent forced us to move into a house perched atop high logs in a section of the town where flood waters came. My brother and I had great fun running up and down the tall shaky steps. Again, rent paying became a problem and we moved nearer the center of town where I found a job in a pressing shop... yet again we moved, this time to the outskirts of town, near a wide stretch of railroad tracks to which each morning before school, I would take a sack and gather coal to heat our frame house. (72)

Richard and his family move from one bad place to a much worse place, because they were being constantly ejected. This also affects Richard's education, he has to do menial jobs to keep his family together. In Richard's society, there exist no health facilities for blacks, no legal coverage, no justice, no freedom, no decent jobs all as a result of the society which rejects the black race.

In Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy*, racism is described as a problem among individual people. Moreover, *Black Boy* depicts this serious problem as a strange opinion which is held by some people. Another level of this novel speaks about racism as about a crucial problem which sunk in society as a whole. Some characters in the novel are depicted as very bad and full of evil, but these characters are also shown as lead actors in one big play which is full of dread and oppression. Many readers ask a question whether the roots of racism can be destroyed because it is obvious that they have set so deep in American culture. Euro-American people are not very kind to Richard in this novel and they are not kind because he is different. The problem which they have is that Richard Wright is an African-American. This causes that Richard Wright is quite unable to get on well even with those Euro-Americans who are kind to him and who respect him and do not feel any hate towards Richard.

Blacks have always been subjected to subordination, sometimes in terms of the color of their skin and sometimes in the name of inferiority in their cultural patterns. Their voices go unheard in the mainstream politics. Codes of law do not grant them their fundamental rights. Thus they become subject of violence and suppression. In order to be in a position to subdue, one has to be a member of a politically dominant group, which in America means white. This is the reason for the blacks always becoming the victim of discrimination. This compelled the blacks, after concluding that it is impossible to live in the old way any longer, to realize that it is a time for them to revolt. Scholars do not always agree over the fact that change is initiated by those who have found their old ways of life impossible. Instead they try to understand the form and elements of revolutionary forces by drawing a line between revolution and revolt. The former is usually characterized by the use of physical force and material destruction. Whereas revolt is concerned with an individual who raises his voice against some established authority with an intention that his ideas may change the lives of the many who are forced to live a meager life.

There are various ways through which the characters in *Black Boy* react to racism and oppression. Some take violence others take to religion. Richard takes to violence then later alienation. In this connection, Rodwell Makombe's review on this book is appropriate to cite here:

Richard Wright's novel, *Black Boy*, is an autobiographical narrative which creatively traces Richard Wright's plight for freedom and self-realization against the white supremacist ideology of the South that intended to fix the African American to a position of docility and obsequious servitude. While Wright is skeptical about the possibility of escaping the hegemonic structures of white supremacy in *Native Son*;

in *Black Boy* he sees the appropriation of discourse as a possible leeway to self-liberation. (25-26)

In this way, *Black Boy*, is a counter discourse of resistance that interrogates established representations of the African American other.

Wright's radicalization is a reaction to the societal view of the condition of the blacks. As a child, he is curious about his society, the segregation which is exactly the opposite of what the blacks should experience. He states that at early age; "Every happening, no matter how trivial became my business. It was in this manner that I first stumbled upon the reactions between the blacks and the whites and what I learned frightened me" (36). Richard recounts the pain of growing in the south where survival is for the fittest. Like every other black child, this pushes him farther from home into the street; he develops the spirit of alienation. Wright tries to react to their poverty which is caused by oppression. When his mother was hit by a stroke of paralysis, shame and pride would however, not let Richard accept charity. Richard's understanding of the situation also adds to his resolution not to drink, or indulge in sex. He is resolute in his bid to improve the condition of the blacks:

I could fight the southern whites by organizing with other Negroes, as my grandfather had done. But I know that I could never win that way; there were many whites and there were but a few blacks ... outright black rebellion could never win. (138)

Richard is not only critical about the whites, but also the black men who have turned themselves into puppets in the hands of the whites. Grigg, Shorty, John all conform to the ways and rules of the whites. Richard portrays his radicalism as a reaction to the societal view on this individuality and the conditions of the blacks among whites.

It is Richard's experience that makes him a writer. Since he is alienated and isolated from both worlds, he takes to reading everything he could lay hands on, from magazine, newspapers, novels etc. Black Boy shows Richard's loneliness, he claims that "I learned to become invisible, to stop living; I felt lonely, cast forever out of life" (12). After Richard tries his hands on some few menial jobs, he came to realize the society is a plain one which holds no future for the uneducated blacks.

Richard's dream to become a writer is to be able to express the dominating spirit of the whites, the idea of white superiority and to tell of the various ways through which the blacks are exploited. To achieve this dream, Wright moves from the southern part of America to the northern part where he hopes things will get better. It was there he begins to write to antagonize slavery and the pervading racial discrimination. In this connection:

He further says that his alienation from the rest of the black community, which is evident in his failure 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. What is evident here is that blacks who acquire western education are usually torn between two worlds --- the world of the colonial master and that of their people. (26)

The above mentioned description shows that Blacks cannot fully identify with Western culture because they are born and bred in a different culture while at the same time they can longer identify with their own culture because western education has taught them to despise it. Richard is the enlightened one, entrusted with the responsibility of enlightening others among his own people, yet his attitude towards

the culture of his people tells us that the education he acquired has at once liberated and ensnared him.

As Franz Fanon believes, “Liberation means the right to self-determination... the freedom to this right is not part of some inevitable necessity built into history seen as a dialectical process, it is a goal to be achieved by focused revolutionary action” (166). If the blacks show violence in their behavior to have their right secured, then, it cannot be called an unjust and inborn one. It only results from the treatment the blacks receive from the whites and it is the behavior of the whites that need severe criticism. Put simply, the violence practiced by the whites breed violence in the blacks. Violence, necessary to create change, is a just one. Even though white violence against blacks may be unjust, and even though a corresponding black violence against whites may be unjust, yet certain violence is necessary to enact justice. This would be the violence that would enact a black world. Not a black world set up by force counter to the white world, but rather a black world, a black world that would simply be, in its blackness. That would be black without being non-white. Such a black world could not be spoken without a certain violence being enacted, in its very speaking destruction of that world which has enforced the denial and exclusion of blacks from its world and from its justice.

Violence is used by all the characters in the black and white world as a means of either oppression or protection. The society is mainly of violence which is unconsciously engraved in the system of the blacks. In the opening chapter of *Black Boy*, Richard unconsciously sets the house on fire, “I had not really intended to set the house on fire, I just wanted to see how the curtains would look like when they burned” (2). Richard’s environment could be termed a violent one. As he states “our battles are real and bloody. We threw rocks, coal, sticks, iron and while we threw

them, we longed for deadlier weapons” (39). The black boys had to use violent methods to react to racism and oppression they faced. Richard’s mother equips him for survival by handling him a big stick and teaching him to defend himself by attacking the white boys. “In blind fear, I let the stick fly, feeling it crack against a boy’s skull. I swung again lamming another skull, then another...that night, I won the right to the streets on Memphis” (26). The black boy reacts to the racial segregation and oppression also by verbal means, they call the white men degrading names i.e. white bastard, son of a bitch etc.

Richard is fiercely individual and constantly expresses a desire to join society on his own terms rather than be forced into one of the categories that society wishes him to fill. In this regard, Richard struggles against a dominant white culture—both in the South and in the North—and even against his own black culture. Neither white nor black culture knows how to handle a brilliant, strong-willed, self-respecting black man. Richard perceives that his options are either to conform or to wilt. Needless to say, neither option satisfies him, so he forges his own middle path.

Richard defies these two unsatisfactory options in different ways throughout the novel. He defies them in Granny’s home, where he lives without embracing its barren, mandatory spirituality. He defies these options at school, where the principal asserts that Richard must read an official speech or not graduate. He defies them in Chicago, where the Communist Party asserts that he will either act as they tell him to act or be expelled. Richard negates this final choice by leaving the Party of his own accord. As we see, Richard always rejects the call to conform. This rejection creates strife and difficulty, however—not because Richard thinks cynically about people and refuses to have anything more to do with them, but precisely because he does not take this approach. Though Richard wishes to remain an individual, he feels connected to

the rest of humanity on a spiritual level. Therefore, as an artist, he must struggle to show compassion for communities that say they do not want him. It is a difficult task, but one that he learns to accept at the end of the novel.

A major concern in *Black Boy* is Richard's view of religion. Her mother's endless oppression about his lack of faith always becomes an obstacle in his turning into a true intellectual. He thought that there was one world, and we were in it, so any notion of some 'other' world was offensive to his intellectual sensibility. "In Renaissance and Gothic literature, a deformity or some other physical impairment often serves as an outward sign of an unhealthy or evil soul. This kind of symbolism implies that the universe is a sensible place, as an evil soul is rewarded with a mangled body" (Boynukara 117). In *Black Boy*, however, the opposite is true. Richard's mother, Ella, is one of the few people in the novel-and the only person in the entire family-who seems genuinely concerned for Richard's welfare. If anyone in the novel has a truly good, saint like soul, it is Ella. However, she is beset with incurable ailments and paralytic legs. Other family members, meanwhile, have abundant strength, which they frequently use to beat Richard for trivial offenses. In this context, Ella's infirmity symbolizes for Richard the unfair and random nature of the universe.

In his early childhood one day when a kitten meowed plaintively his father disturbed with meowing and wanted Richard to do anything probably not to kill but get it away from him. Richard knew that he had not really meant for him to kill the kitten, but his deep hate of his father urged him toward a literal acceptance of his father's word. After he killed the kitten his mother made him repeat after her a prayer in which Richard asks God to spare his life even though he did not spare the kittens:

‘Shut your eyes and repeat after me,’ she said.



I closed my eyes tightly, my hand clinging to hers.

‘Dear God, our father, forgive me, for I knew not what I was doing...’

(15)

Richard views the incident as an example of how religion uses terror to enforce norms that the community finds acceptable his mother’s view of religion translates as a form of violence and threat by other means so strongly does Richard feel about the unethicalness of his mother’s kind of religion that he devotes almost all of chapter 4 to this theme. Richard believed that there was very little that religious institutions would stop at in order to gain converts. Nevertheless, he also understood them function of religion – namely, to make up for what reality lacks- but he was implacably realistic: “My growing hate of the preacher finally became more important than God or religion and I could no longer contain myself” ( 27 ). He also understood religion to be another form of power: when his mother encouraged him to join a Methodist church, she put her request in a form that was hard to resist: She said that if he loved her, he would join church. And his mother’s long illness was sometimes blamed on his faithlessness.

It can be said that because of her illness, her mother, Ella, stands for the meaningless sufferings Richard experienced during his life. The meaning of Ella’s character lies in her illness, as symbolizes for Richard those elements of life that are at once unpredictable, over whelming and unfair. In chapter 3, Ella’s suffering effectively becomes a symbol of everything wrong with the world for Richard. In unjust universe, he concludes, the unfriendly and harmful people would be sick and Ella would enjoy vigorous health. However, the reality is, of course, that Ella is constantly sick and suffering. The injustice he sees afflicting his mother mirrors the injustices he himself faced: poverty, hunger, a severely abridged education, and the

fact of being black in the Jim Crow South. Taken together, these accidents of life constitute a major obstacle that Richard must overcome in order to live the life that he wants. His mother becomes a symbol of the suffering Richard has encountered and will encounter throughout the rest of his life. And this part of the book can show the obvious effect of his mother's illness:

My mother's suffering grew into a symbol in my mind, gathering to itself all the poverty, the ignorance, the helplessness; the painful, baffling, hunger-ridden days and hours; the restless moving, the futile seeking, the uncertainty, the fear, the dread; the meaningless pain and the endless suffering. Her life set the emotional tone of my life, colored the men and women I was to meet in the future, and conditioned my relation to events that had not yet happened, determined my attitude to situations and circumstances I had yet to face. (19)

In this way, the blacks turn to religion as a means of escaping from racism and oppression. As seen in the lives of Wright's grandmother, his aunt and his mother. Richard is compelled to make pretend of worshipping God. He is regarded in his family as the guilty one who has brought the wrath of God upon the whole house as a result of his racism. In their home, granny maintained hard religious routine, frequent prayers, reading of the Bible verse etc. but all her attempt at inculcating religion into Richard fails. To Richard, religion is the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of God and to worsen his stands; his family does not adhere to the tenets they teach; "...there were more violent quarrels in our deeply regions home than in the house of gangster, a burglar, or a prostitute. A fact which I used to hint gently to granny and which did my cause no good" (151). Richard's acceptance of God which he indicates by his acceptance of baptism broke the barriers that stand

between him and the society. He allows himself to be baptized not because he feels anything for God but he feels the need to observe protocol. The church is the only place where the blacks are able to find relief. The church is able to provide a kind of satisfaction for them; it serves as a place of escape from their hard experiences.

As Glenn C. Loury, in his article entitled “Racial Stigma and Its Consequences”, states:

An important consequence of racial stigma is “vicious circles” of cumulative causation: self-sustaining processes in which the failure of blacks to make progress justifies for whites the very prejudicial attitudes that, when reflected in social and political action, ensure that blacks will not advance. (2)

The effects of stigma are more subtle, and they are deeply embedded in the symbolic and expressive life of the nation and our narratives about its origins and destiny. America, for example, is often said to be a nation of immigrants and a land of opportunity. But one of the first things new immigrants to America discover about their adopted country is that African Americans are a stigmatized group.

Richard Wright explains how it is necessary for a people living in a society founded on free enterprise and individualism to have a background of education in one's own personal values and free access to the surrounding society. Without those qualities, and without a history of free choice, black Americans are forced to remain in close-knit, pre-individualistic groups; there, the possibility of survival is even greater than it would be if each person tried to make it on his own.

The title of *Black Boy* sums up the whole pre-individualistic ethic or the ethics of living Jim Crow. Obviously, Wright did not think of himself as a black boy but as a human being, equals to the whites. The very term is a social judgment, not just used

by white society but inherited by the black folk in Richard's life. Richard's family saw him as bad ("black"), just as the whites did, because he expressed himself as an individual. At the same time, he was viewed as a boy, one who waited for and obeyed orders before he acted. The irony of this is that Richard quite clearly never did have a childhood, in the sense of a time free of responsibility or fears. His sensitivity to experience made him a man almost at birth. In the pre-individualistic, Jim Crow society he grew up in, Richard was considered evil and irrepressible.

In *Black Boy*, the whites who enter the story are invariably mouthpieces for southern racism. They are, in a sense, as much victimized by the institution of racism as are the blacks. They do not emerge as individuals, but as contemptible types, entirely ruled by prevalent attitudes. Public opinion rules them as much as it does blacks. Richard's difficulty in assuming the role of the passive victim makes him dangerous to both communities. To identify oneself with a particular race and thereby judge one's actions according to the history of that race was never an outstanding feature of Western individualism; yet it was a well-concealed fact that whites did think of themselves in racial terms, especially when threatened by foreigners.

Wright might be criticized for being simplistic in his judgments, but the reader must confront at all times the conditions that produced such a writer a writer so thoroughly American and in the light of those conditions accept and reckon with his presence. *Black Boy* explains what those conditions were and, in doing so, introduces Richard Wright to America as a human fact.

Wright's affiliation with the Communist party becomes a source of anxiety to him, particularly when his decision to resign from the local unit is met with serious resistance. He writes of his fellow party members: "[T]hey had never been able to

conquer their fear of the individual way in which I acted and lived, an individuality which life had seared into my blood and bones” (363).

Racial stigma is the extreme disapproval of (or discontent with) a person or group on socially characteristic grounds that are perceived, and serve to distinguish them, from other members of a society. Stigma may then be affixed to such a person, by the greater society, who differs from their cultural norms. In this connection, Erving Goffman writes: “Racial stigma can result from the perception of gender identity, skin tone, education, ethnicity, ideology and religion” (12). Attributes associated with racial stigma often vary depending on the geopolitical and corresponding sociopolitical contexts employed by society, in different parts of the world. He further adds:

Stigma is an illuminating excursion into the situation of persons who are unable to conform to standards that society calls normal.

Disqualified from full social acceptance, they are stigmatized individuals. . . . Their image of themselves must daily confront and be affronted by the image which others reflect back to them. (12)

The above paragraph shows that stigma can be the result from the social exclusion due to the race and color. In *Black Boy*, all the black characters along with the narrator are stigmatized due to the color of their skin, educational and economic background. In this way, racial stigma was thus the precipitating cause for racially differential treatment.

In *Black Boy*, Whites in the novel generally treat Richard poorly due to the color of his skin. Even more important, racism is so insidious that it prevents Richard from interacting normally even with the whites who do treat him with a semblance of respect such as the Hoffmans or Mr. Crane or with fellow blacks such as Harrison.

Perhaps the most important factor in Wright's specifically "black" upbringing, however, is the fact that he grows up among black people who are unable or unwilling to accept his individual personality and his gifts. Richard's Granny is a symbol representing qualities that little Richard dislikes or even hates. Granny is a very strong woman; she is always uncompromising, rigorous and rigid. She is always persuaded that it is her who is in charge of the family and she fully believes that she is really unerring. She takes in her daughter, little Richard and his younger brother under one very strict condition - in her house they must respect her rules and if they do not want to respect them and act in accordance with them, they will be banished. Granny is a very hot-tempered woman with white complexion and black hair. Granny and Richard fight throughout the novel. He is really scared of her. What Richard dislikes is that she is rigid, oppressive and puritanical. She is the person who does not want to let Richard read books and who stands against Richard's curiosity and talent. She is strongly religious and her faith in God stands above all. Everything that can give pleasures even food is sinful. She constantly tries to change Richard's character as though she wants to create a new person. The fact that she is not successful drives her insane. It seems that she believes that Richard is doomed and she must show him the right way. Her character prepares Richard for life in white America.

With her white face and black hair, her religiosity and hot temper, Granny came to represent everything that Richard had to struggle to escape from. He and his Granny were locked in warfare. It seemed to be an irrational conflict at first, but soon it could be seen that a clash of temperaments was not the only problem between them. Granny's face was the first white face he knew but it was the face he hated most. She was absorbed those qualities of white society that are intolerant, puritanical, oppressive and fanatical:

My first indications that something was wrong were that Granny became terribly still, then she pushed me violently from her. I turned around and saw that her white face was frozen, that her black, deep-set eyes were blazing at me unblinkingly. Taking my cue from her queer expression, I knew that I had said something awful, but I had no notion at that moment just how awful it was. (41)

She used her religiosity as the weapon for all her venom, just as the white Protestants done. She made church into the center of respectability. She stood in the way of Richard's natural curiosity and impulses. Her white skin effectively prepared Richard for the culturally white society around him. It was ironic that what he received from her religion -the beautiful language and the mystery of sound and meaning- was the opposite of what Granny wanted him to receive.

The truth is that Nathaniel Wright, Richard's father, does not belong to the leading characters in the novel. However, the smaller the character is, the bigger impression it leaves on the reader's mind. It is sad that the impression is strongly negative. The relationship between Richard and his father is not close at all. Richard's father is a hardliner man and Richard is afraid of him. This is shown in the scene where Nathaniel sleeps in his flat in Memphis and his frame of mind is rather insensate when he is awoken by his sons who play games in the room. This is followed by the scene with hanged kitten where little Richards kills the kitten only for one reason - he wants to win over his father. Father leaves the family because he loves another woman and he seems to be very reckless when he his reminded by Ella that he has some responsibilities. He has no intention of taking care of his children and he does not support the family any more. Many years later, Richard meets his father in Mississippi. His father is an old man who works as a sharecropper. At this moment,

Nathaniel symbolizes a whole generation of African-American people who changed the land for the life in cities where they were not able to take care of themselves, to find a good job and to live a vital life. More or less, Richard believes that his father is an unfree man. He associates him with slaves. Richard sees his father's manhood only in terms of visceral features, otherwise he perceives him as a product of the then society.

Another character used as a symbol is Olin who works in the optical shop in Memphis. He is a typical Southern racist who is fond of harming African-American people. It is surprising when the reader finds out that Olin does not have any reason to terrorize African-American people. What is worse, he terrorizes them because he simply finds it amusing and entertaining. Another character in this novel is Falk and he is the opposite of Olin. He is a Southerner who likes African-American people and he tries to support them and help them. A few Ku Klux Klan members and also people of Jewish origin work in the shop too. It is possible to say that the shop is a symbol of racial stratification in Memphis.

The final sentence of Wright's novel *Black Boy* reveals a man dismayed with what he has found throughout his life:

I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo . . . and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human. (385)

Wright saw little hope around him, and yet he chose not to give up. He also reveals a sense of hope that there are ideas worth believing in. His life has been filled with horror and terror, but he will continue his search for decent human values. With the



original ending of Wright's novel in place, the readers begin to understand the full scope of his search.

White and Blacks do not really get along with each other especially Richard with other whites. Richard has been laid off a job by a white person and tends to find a new job running his errands by washing eyeglasses. Richard had finally felt his relationship with the white people and how there were tensions going on. He felt that he could either take it or discover ways of handling it. By doing this he might cause more tensions to occur and he might have to live another fear in his life. There are many consequences that Richard already faces in his life and he just deals with it, no matter what the problem is.

This relates to the two scenes because it can show the relationship that he has with his mom and the white people. The relationships are different of course since Richard is being punished by his mother, but it also somehow relates to each other in a way that the whites are punishing the blacks by laying Richard off of his job. Knowing that tensions are going on, Richard is thinking about if he should discover a way to solve this problem, but he is also considering about what is going happening. He is learning from the fact in his passion of life, the consequences he is going through and the words of fear that his mother put upon him. Richard first understands the tensions between the whites and the blacks.

In a nutshell, Racism as a problem among individuals is a familiar topic in literature. *Black Boy*, however, explores racism not only as an odious belief held by odious people but also as an insidious problem knit into the very fabric of society as a whole. Wright portrays characters such as Olin and Pease as evil people, but also—and more chillingly—as bit players in a vast drama of hatred, fear, and oppression. For Richard, the true problem of racism is not simply that it exists, but that its roots in

American culture are so deep it is doubtful whether these roots can be destroyed without destroying the culture itself.

In summary, *Black Boy* is about the frustration and humiliation experienced by a sensitive Negro boy; it deals with the depression of the blacks. Although, at the end of the novel, there is a glimpse of hope. Wright uses himself as the protagonist to portray a society where inequality and man's inhumanity to man is the order of the day. With the insight we have about the blacks, we are made to see that the life of Richard Wright symbolizes the emergence from slavery and struggle towards freedom and equality through self-appraisal and self-identity.

### III. The Menacing Effects of Racism in *Black Boy*

Racism has been a big issue throughout world history. This can relate to many people's lives. Many people's families and friends might have been a big issue of racism and the issue of slavery as well. There are many people who have died as slaves, as well as there are many people who have survived. Slaves who have survived this big issue of racism have live feelings and emotions about what they have been through. Throughout *Black Boy*, Richard is going through many racial issues and his behavior seems to change. Not only the narrator perceives himself as a stigmatized person by the whites, but all the blacks in the novel felt that they are stigmatized.

*Black Boy* is a memoir of racism, racial identity, and the difficulty of surviving as a young African-American man in the South. As a boy, Richard sees that some people have lighter skin, and other people darker skin. But he only understands what these distinctions mean, culturally and politically, after observing the bigotry of whites and the fear with which many black families live. Thus, *Black Boy* shows in brutal detail, the consequences of Southern racism, and demonstrates that racial distinctions are not inherent or biological, but are products of a society that is economically and politically unequal.

*Black Boy* is a story about a boy named Richard who grows up in not so perfect society where he is always being punished by his mom. Everything that he does, even though if he doesn't, his mom would always yell at him for his violent behavior. Richard goes through many obstacles in his life, dealing with his own consequences which he faces. Richard is socially inactive with other people and tends to do things his own way. Throughout the book, Richard also faces racial issues and behavior that whites and blacks hate among each other.

Wright paints himself in several different shades throughout the course of *Black Boy*. As a young boy, Richard is simply unable to believe the publicly accepted notions that his blackness, lack of religion, and intellectual curiosity make him inherently flawed. Rather, the readers find in Richard a character determined to live according to his own principles and willing to live with the consequences. This strong-willed nature, however, contrasts with Richard's powerless position in society the low social status that comes with being black and poor. Starting off removed from society and his family, Richard must learn to educate himself. Much of this education stems from his experiences in the homes of sharecroppers, as a black in the Jim Crow South, as a resident of the cramped apartments of Depression-era Chicago. There are clearly negative aspects to the character Richard develops, as the readers see him lie, steal, and turn violent numerous times in the book. In a sense, he is stigmatized of his poor upbringing in both the black and white communities in the South; as a stigmatized person, he becomes contaminated by the oppressive forces working against him.

Despite his flaws, Richard remains intensely concerned with humanity, both in a universal sense and in the context of his concern for the individual people he meets on his journey. In this way, Richard overcomes the negative, debilitating, isolating aspects of his environment and channels them into a love for other people. He is an outsider who feels little connection to other people, yet who cares for these people nonetheless. Richard's traits do not exist in perfect harmony: at certain points, one trait will seem to dominate, only to give way to other traits at other times. However, because the character of Richard Wright so convincingly contains all these traits, albeit in imbalance, he has a self-contradictory appeal that transcends the simple biographical facts of his life.

Richard's contentious relationship with his mother may be traced back to his early childhood, when Ella administers a beating that nearly kills him. Ella shows a special tolerance and affection for Richard that we do not see in any of the other major characters. When Richard publishes "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre," for example, the rest of the family attacks him, but Ella shows compassion through her concern that Richard's writing might make it hard for him to get a job. Similarly, Ella walks on her weak legs to give Richard a hug when she learns that he will get a job in defiance of Granny's and Addie's wishes, suggesting that she takes genuine delight in her son's success.

With respect to Richard, though, all characters are part of the same group: they all ascribe to inflexible attitudes and beliefs that do not accommodate differing opinions from independently minded people like Richard. In the cases of Granny and Addie, strict religious faith drives them to attack Richard at every turn because he fails to act like a good Adventist. Tom's belief that young people should unthinkingly obey their elders rouses him to fury whenever Richard takes a justified stand against him. Pease, Reynolds, and Olin believe that black people exist merely for the service and sport of white people, leading them to treat Richard with shocking inhumanity. Finally, Ed Green and Buddy Neelson, who maintain that Communists should quietly march in step with the Party, vilify Richard as soon as he seems to be marching to a different drummer.

In short, these characters all deny Richard's worth as an individual. Taken together, these characters represent the multitude of ways in which society is in conspiracy against Richard.

From the above description, *Black Boy* attacks the racism of the South during the period Wright was growing up there (1908-1927). Many of the hardships of

Wright's family life are direct or indirect results of racial discrimination. Once Wright enters the world of work, he finds racism pervasive and intolerable. The book concludes with Wright's fleeing the South and the racist conditions he has been forced to endure there.

In this way, the autobiography, *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright is written to not only tell of his personal experiences, but to teach a very important lesson as well. Wright uses the novel to explain his views on racism and how it tears apart family and friends through violence. This motif of violence enhances Richard Wright's view on racism and how it not only affects interracial relations by causing fear and hate, but also affects the friendship of blacks toward one another since they feel they cannot trust or rely on one another for support, and therefore, decide to take out their frustration on one another instead of on their white oppressors.

### Works Cited

- Boynukara, Hasan. "Self-Discovery Journey of Women: Richard Wright's *Black Boy*." *The Journal of International Social Research* 3.10 (Winter 2010): 115- 117.
- Christle, Patricia Paul. *Reflection on Self*. New York: Canon Gate, 2003.
- Dijk, Teun A. van. *Elite Discourse and Racism*. New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1993.
- Fanon, F. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1952.
- Gerzina, Gretchen Holbrook. "Black Victorians, Black Victoriana." *Victorian Studies* 46. 4 (Summer, 2004): 696-98.
- Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. London: Prentice-Hall, 1963.
- Gibson, Donald. "Richard Wright's Black Boy and the Trauma of Autobiographical Rebirth." *Callaloo* 28 (Summer, 1986): 492-98.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Literary Vision of Integration*. New York: Norton, 2001.
- - -. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Hatcher, Donald R. "Appealing to the Middlebrow Reader: Changes Made to Richard Wright's Black Boy." An Unpublished Master's Degree Dissertation. B.F.A., University of Georgia, 2011.
- Howarth, Caroline. "Race as stigma: positioning the stigmatized as agents, not objects." *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 16. 6. (2006): 442-51.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain*. *The Nation*. June 23, 1926.

- Jeffries, Shavar. "Black Men: Stigma, Status and Expectations." *New York Times*.  
9<sup>th</sup> May, 2015: 6.
- Kaiser, Cheryl R. *Representation of Racial Stigma*. London: Harper Collins, 2002.
- Loury, Glenn. *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard  
University Press, 2002.
- - -. "Racial Stigma and Its Consequence." *Focus* 24. 1 (Fall 2005): 1-6.
- Makombe, Rodwell. "Apartheid, Crime, and Interracial Violence in *Black Boy*." *Journal of Black Studies* (April 2013): 290-313.
- Miller, Carol T. & Cheryl R. Keisar. "A Theoretical perspective on coping with  
Stigma." *Journal of Social Issues*. 57.1. (2001): 73-92.
- Sears, David O. and P. J. Henry. "The Origins of Symbolic Racism." *Journal of  
Personality and Social Psychology* 85. 2 (2003): 259-75.
- Wright, Richard. *A Black Boy*. New York: Penguin, 1999.