

**T. C.**

**ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY**

**INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**THE PROJECTION OF RACISM IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *BLACK BOY***

**M.Sc. THESIS**

**Darbaz Azeez Sadeq**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**English Language and Literature Program**

**Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. FermaLekesizalin**

**February 2016**

T. C.

ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



**THE PROJECTION OF RACISM IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *BLACK BOY***

**M.Sc. THESIS**

**Darbaz Azeez Sadeq**

**(Y1412.020020)**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**English Language and Literature Program**

**Thesis Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr.FermaLekesizalin**

**February 2016**





T.C.  
İSTANBUL AYDIN ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜ

**Yüksek Lisans Tez Onay Belgesi**

Enstitümüz İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Ana Bilim Dalı İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Tezli Yüksek Lisans Programı Y1412.020020 numaralı öğrencisi Darbaz Azcez Sadeq SADEQ'in "THE PROJECTION OF RACISM IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S BLACKBOY" adlı tez çalışması Enstitümüz Yönetim Kurulunun 01.02.2016 tarihi ve 2016/03 sayılı kararıyla oluşturulan jüri tarafından çalışması ile Tezli Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

**Öğretim Üyesi Adı Soyadı**

**İmzası**

Tez Savunma Tarihi :03/03/2016

1)Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Ferma LEKESİZALIN

2) Jüri Üyesi : Yrd. Doç. Dr. Öz ÖKTEM

3) Jüri Üyesi : Yrd. Doç. Dr. Gillian Mary Elizabeth ALBAN

Not: Öğrencinin Tez savunmasında **Başarılı** olması halinde bu form **imzalanacaktır**. Aksi halde geçersizdir.

## **DEDICATION**

- *To my Mother, a caring, wonderful and loving person who taught me to depend on myself and be courageous during difficulties.*
- *To my dear Grandmother who taught me to concentrate on seeing light during the darkest moments of my life, may she be blessed.*
- *To my Father who did not inform me how to live happily, but he lived happily and taught me to live like himself through his actions.*
  - *To my entire brothers and sisters.*
- *To those who taught me to share knowledge, not to hoard it.*

## **FOREWORD**

I would like to convey my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of my thesis: -

First of all, it gives me great pleasure in acknowledging the support and help of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ferma Lekezizalin (my supervisor) who has worked tirelessly to supervise my work for the completion of this thesis.

Secondly, special thanks to my beloved brother, Dr. Sadiq Azeez who gave me a lot of encouragement, incessant care and unwavering support to me over the years. He strongly encourages me to succeed throughout my life.

I am indebted to my teacher, Assist. Prof. Dr. Gordon Marshall who provided me with technical assistance. His time and help is highly appreciated.

This thesis would have remained a dream had it not been for my classmate Qaidar Rahim who helped me from the beginning till the end. I express my profound thankfulness for him.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my friend Besar Fars who encouraged me to further my studies in Master Degree. He helps to boost my interest in my studies and that really helped me a lot.

I am ineffably indebted to my friend Dr. Mohammad Jameel for continuous guidance and ceaseless motivation to accomplish this study. I really appreciate it.

I cannot find words to express my gratitude to my close friends Darun Mamand, Rebwar Rashid, Hawal Sallh, Bazhdar Khidr, Zana Nawzad and Bzhar Bakir who encouraged to pursue my ambition and to further my studies. They are my real buddies and I love them all from earth to the moon.

My profound thanks and appreciation to Istanbul Aydin University/social science – English language and literature department for their steady support, opportunities and facilitation for carrying out this study.

I express my sincere gratitude to my teacher Dr. Sirwan Ali Michael for providing me with several valuable sources for the study. The support and help provided by him good self during this work is invaluable. I would also like to express my gratitude to my friend Diyar Esa Mohammed for his support and warm encouragements.

Last but not least, I love to thank my friend Bzhar Omer for being there all these years. He is a really great friend.

**February 2016**

**Darbaz Azeez Sadeq**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	<b>VI</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>ÖZET</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 General Introduction.....	1
1.2 Racism.....	2
1.3 Racism During the Jim Crow Era.....	4
1.4 The Early Black American Literature and Slave Narratives.....	12
1.5 The Harlem Renaissance.....	18
<b>2. RICHARD WRIGHT</b> .....	<b>23</b>
2.1 General Historical and Literary Context of Richard Wright.....	23
2.2 Richard Wright's Works.....	24
2.3 An Overview of <i>Black Boy</i> .....	28
<b>3. BLACK BOY</b> .....	<b>33</b>
3.1 Racism in <i>Black Boy</i> .....	33
3.2 <i>Black Boy</i> and Life Conditions.....	39
3.2.1 Hunger and Poverty.....	39
3.2.2 Violence.....	42
3.2.3 Alcohol.....	51
<b>4. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>RESUME</b> .....	<b>64</b>

## RICHARD WRIGHT 'IN *BLACK BOY* IRKÇILIĞIN PROJESİYON

### ÖZET

İrkçılık Siyah Amerikan Edebiyatı önemli bir temadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, JimCrow Yasaları uygulandığı zamanlarda sırasında siyah topluma karşı ırk ayrımcılığı yollarını inceleyerek yoluyla Richard Wright romanı Black Boy ırkçılığı göstermektir. Amerika Birleşik Devletleri Anayasası'na göre, herkes eşit haklara sahip doğar. Ancak, dönem 'eşitlik' Güney Amerika'nın eyaletlerinde olmayan veya alakasız oldu. Black Boy hayatı, mücadeleleri ve JimCrow Yasaları korkunç mevzuat uyarınca Mississippi asi devlet büyüyen bir genç, yoksul Black Boy nihai zaferini anlatıyor. Orada, JimCrow Yasaları oybirliğiyle değiştirilmiş ve bu devletlerin sakinleri zorla ediliyordu. Siyah toplum çok sert o zamanlarda tedavi edildi. Gözün beyaz kişiye bakarak gibi bile zararsız olaylar, yasa ile cezalandırılabilir idi. Siyahlar için ırk ayrımcılığı ve nefret 1900'lü yılların başında kendi zirvesinde idi. Cezalar çok acımasız ve güçlü tutuklama, şiddetli dayak ve mafya-linç dahil. Pek çok sorun Afrika-Amerikalıların yasadışı zulüm toplumda ortaya çıktı. Hayatı boyunca, genç Richard beyaz ustaların varsayımına herhangi kulak ödenen asla ve o oldukça huzurlu bir hayat sürdü nerede Fransa'ya taşındı yaptığı akıl, onları savdı. Romanda Black Boy hikâye ağırlıklı Wright hayatı ve JimCrow döneminde korkmuş ve çok dindar olan beyazlar, onun komşuları ve kendi ailesi ile daha da önemlisi onun etkileşimleri recollects. Richard Wright ve çağdaşları onların roman, deneme ve öykü bu konuda yazarak apaçık ayrımcılığı kınayan karar verdi. Onların amacı, siyah topluluğun günlük yaşamlarında bu önyargının zararlı etkileri konusunda halk arasında farkındalık yaratmak ve aynı zamanda bu basarak sorunları çözmek için birlikte çalışır. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda, bu tür bol romanı Black Boy ve yoksulluk oluşur şiddet, gıda ve eğitim eksikliği gibi konularda önem vermektedir. Richard Wright, onun çocukluk ve erken erişkinlik döneminde karşı karşıya hayat çok travmatik oldu. Ama nedeniyle onun sonsuz çabaları, istihbarat ve adaletsizliğe karşı mücadele etmek arzusu, o JimCrow Yasaları altında yaşayan rağmen siyah olarak önemli bir başarı elde etmeyi başardı.

**Anahtar kelimeler:***Richard Wright, Black Boy, İrkçılık, JimCrow Yasaları, Amerikan Black Edebiyatı, Şiddet, Açlık ve Alkol.*



## THE PROJECTION OF RACISM IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *BLACK BOY*

### ABSTRACT

Racism is a prominent theme in the Black American Literature. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate racism in the novel *Black Boy* by Richard Wright through examining ways of racial discrimination against black community during the times when *the Jim Crow Laws* were implemented. According to the Constitution of the United States of America, everyone is born with equal rights. However, the term 'equality' was non-existent or irrelevant in the states of Southern America. *Black Boy* narrates the life, struggles and eventual triumph of a young, destitute *Black Boy* growing up in the unruly state of Mississippi under the appalling legislations of *the Jim Crow Laws*. There, *the Jim Crow Laws* were unanimously being amended and forced upon the inhabitants of those states. The black community was very harshly treated during those times. Even innocuous incidents, like looking at a white person in the eye were punishable by law. Racial discrimination and hatred for the blacks were at their peak in the early 1900s. The punishments were very brutal and included forceful arrest, severe beating and mob-lynching. Many problems arose in the society from the unlawful persecution of the African-Americans. In his entire life, young Richard never paid any heed to the assumption of the white masters and he fought them with intellect, which he did when he moved to France where he led a rather peaceful life. The story in the novel *Black Boy* mainly recollects the life of Wright and more importantly his interactions with the whites, his neighbors and his own family who were scared and very pious during Jim Crow Era. Richard Wright and his contemporaries decided to denounce the flagrant discrimination by writing about it in their novels, essays and short stories. Their goal was to create awareness among the population about the harmful effects of this prejudice on the daily lives of the black community and also work together to solve those pressing issues. This study lays emphasis on issues such as violence which occurs abundantly in the novel *Black Boy* and on the poverty, lack of food and education, as well. The life that Richard Wright faced in his childhood and early adulthood was very traumatic. But due to his endless efforts, intelligence and desire to fight against injustice, he was able to achieve considerable success as a black despite living under *the Jim Crow Laws*.

**Keywords:** *Richard Wright, Black Boy, Racism, Jim Crow Laws, Black American Literature, Violence, Hunger and Alcohol.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General Introduction

Racism in America had a lot influence on the works of Black American writers. One particular example is found in Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy*. The essence of this study is to make it clear that racism affected individuals such as Richard Wright in *Black Boy* during Jim Crow Era in Mississippi, and Tennessee. Without doubt, this is revealed in the books of Negro writers like Wright who countered against racial discrimination as he faced it throughout his lifetime. Moreover, nobody could fully explain the influence of racism on black writer more than those who are either born into black community. This prompted Wright to use racism in his novel *Black Boy* and emphasized the issues affecting the lives of the African-Americans in America. The eventual goal of this thesis is to focus on racism in America and its effects on the black American literature, especially Wright's *Black Boy*. It is also meant to dissect a selected work of one of the black writers so as to valorize his works. Richard Wright represented different aspects of racial prejudice in his novel. Wright's *Black Boy* has a lively literary style and explores the circumstances of African-Americans in the 1900s. Racism affected mostly the different minorities in America. Richard Wright unlike the other writers of his generation helped in introducing the awareness of blacks and whites in his *Black Boy* novel.

The main idea behind this thesis is to fashion an understanding of racial discrimination and segregation by looking at the work of Richard Wright, *Black Boy* and the experience of Wright himself. This book was written at a time when segregation of the blacks from the whites in the American society was at its highest point as it was written during the implementation of *the Ethics of Living* by Jim Crow. It also takes into account the viewpoints of African-American individuals and their experiences. It helps to elaborate on the harmful and negative effects racial segregation on the psyche of the blacks as it labeled them downtrodden and degraded. Moreover, this study shows the effects of

racism on the Black American Literature and how Right as one of their most influential writers manages to portray and fight against racial prejudice through his masterpiece: *Black Boy*.

To begin with, a concise definition of the word racism will be provided in order to fully understand its meaning. Then, I will cover racism during Jim Crow Era. Additionally, I offer an overview of the Early Black American literature, Slave Narrative and the Harlem Renaissance in order to put Richard Wright's *Black Boy* into its literary and historical context.

## **1.2 Racism**

Before starting the explanation of racism in America, it is appropriate to identify the real meaning of the term "racism". Many disputes arose concerning the definition of racism due to the uncertainty surrounding it. Muir defined racism as a conviction that all individuals of a specific race share common features, capabilities that are different from the features of another race (Muir, 1993). In America racism is not a holy word and a debatable issue. However, those who use this dirty word certainly cannot define and explain it clearly. Also the word racism used in many variable ways that it is not easy to find out a common perfect meaning of this term except that nearly all people generally associate racism to evil and cursed word. In the history of America, surely racism is one of the most lucid issues. To put it differently, the hot issue of racism has always been present and dealt with by many scholars, and in the old and current studies on American Literature.

According to some scholars, racism can be described through two methods; first one is described as the belief that certain features present in the different races or ethnicities may be considered either as inferior or as superior to other groups of people (Asante, 2014, p. 1). Second one is described as the negative actions taken to promote such beliefs (Chrysochoos, 2009, p. 42). Generally, racism is to distinguish among groups by taking into account their respective features. The rank of these groups is divided into two parts, oppressors are upper class and the oppressed people are lower class.

Marger believes that the principles of racism are created so that an indefinite amount of benefits are offered to the said superior group and at the same time another group is

faced with blatant injustice and inequality (Marger, 2012, p. 19) and also considers discrimination in its crudest form as a behavior which deprives the members of particular ethnic group the right and freedom to live in a particular environment (Marger, 2012, p. 57). Initially providing the definition of these two conceptions is significant because they smooth the path of understanding the racism and discrimination. From the time of forcefully transforming the African people to America, they have been victimized by racial discrimination practices. The lawmaker and law enforcement agents were provoking those practices. For instance, The Watts Riots of 1965, during the 1920s and black people were under constant horrific attacks in Harlem (Pez, 2003).

In literary studies, racism described as the belief in the idea that race determines the main features and abilities of an individual; therefore, the differences of race create superiority or inferiority of the race. This racial discrimination leads to inevitable consequences such as injustice, hate, violence and cruelty. In addition, racism is the reflection of the financial system, political bias and ethnic. Derived from the word "race", racism involves the belief that due to ethnic differences, it is justifiable to consider a particular ethnic group as inferior and to treat them harshly and unfairly. Racism can be defined as issuing decisions, verdicts, laws and policies that serve the ideas or principles of one group at the expense of another group (Gibson, 2003, p. 2).

It is the experience of racism by the blacks that made Richard write about this widespread issue in *Black Boy*, which is an autobiographical novel about Richard Wright's childhood, and explores Wright's painful experiences during the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> in America (1945). Racism has its roots in the slave trading of the African people, they were living in slavery between the first half of 1700s and 1860s. They were transformed to America, the Caribbean Island, Canada and the other various places in the West. When they were forcibly transferred to America, they were named "Black Americans" and those who live on the Caribbean Islands were named "Afro Caribbean", although, all of them had the problem of racial inferiority. African people faced real tribulations while attempting to survive on their trip to America; they were forced to work for long hours in the plantation fields where they were often beaten or even whipped. The frequent abuse and harsh treatment at the hands of their masters led the

slaves to seek refuge in the Negro spirituals. This represented the rise of their artistic expressions (Johnson, 2002).

### **1.3 Racism During the Jim Crow Era**

Racial discrimination and segregation were deeply rooted in American history. Although, Americans were excited about the establishing of the American Colonies, and then about the United States, since the country promoted the search for liberty including political and economic freedom, and freedom of religion. However, from the beginning, the American society was simultaneously founded on atrocious forms, of oppression and racial injustice that implied the complete rejection of freedom for slaves. And this consequence can be regarded as a fundamental paradox of American history. In order to be more specific concerning the issue of racism in America, it is necessary to explore the living conditions of the black community during the implementation and reinforcing of those laws in Southern America, more specifically in Mississippi where Richard Wright's *Black Boy* was set. The Constitution of America plainly states that "All men and women are created equal", however, black people were constantly oppressed during the beginning of twentieth century in the South according to *the Jim Crow Laws* (Zinn, 2009, p. 688). It was an environment of racial injustice, discriminatory practice and hatred. Penalizing black people was possible due to merely staring at a white person in just looking to whites in a strange way, in his *Racism: A Short History*. Fredrickson captures the exact conditions by stating that the black people had faced hanging or burning to death by the lynch mobs in order to provide examples to others especially the black community that transgression of the color barrier would not be tolerated (Fredrickson, 2015, p. 2). The white racialists had implemented plenty of strategies to restrain blacks from receiving citizenship in America. They practiced discrimination and racism, furthermore, they created murdering groups for eliminating the African-Americans. The blacks were considered as inferior and were dealt with in a degrading manner. Although, in 1865, the blacks were given some basic minimal rights by way of Emancipation Proclamation, the whites had not given upon executing racial practices against the blacks.

Racial discrimination imposed through "Jim Crow" laws by a majority of American states from the 1880s into the 1960s. Many states and cities from North to South and from West to East could enforce their terrible retributions on blacks for consorting with members of another race. Most of the laws prohibited marriage between blacks and whites and commanded employers and public organizations to treat the black and white people differently. Economically, the blacks provide were capable of earning their livelihood, despite that, the white people, that were not racist, were obliged to reject the black job-seekers and customers. The laws consequently promoted segregation and practices to the fullest extent possible, thus even following the laws by the non-racist whites ended up in racial inequality.

Historians believed that the expression Jim Crow had emerged in 1830 when a white, minstrelsy entertainer named Thomas Daddy Rice decorated his face with black and capered happily whilst singing a text entitled *Jump Jim Crow*. As he was journeying through the south of America, he bumped into an old black man or a teenager capering and singing cheerfully some words that ended with "I jump Jim Crow". Other Chroniclers argued that a young man known as Mr. Crow had a slave that motivated Thomas Rice to behave that way, therefore, the Jim Crow was mentioned throughout the text (Williams, 2009, p. 53).

The expression was originated during 1904 even though it is said that it has been used previously. Historically, The Jim Crow Period symbolizes the violation of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 issued by Abraham Lincoln, wherein he emancipated the southern slaves. However, following Reconstruction period and the approval of thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments, the racists of the south resorted to legislative body of their states to pass racially segregated laws which were called *Jim Crow laws* (Epps, 2012, p. 238). Throughout the southern states of America, discrimination began to be the basic rules and regulations of the state, a state of affairs which was allowed in 1896 once the Supreme Court of America declared that "separate but equal" opportunities for whites and blacks were legal. Therefore, the Jim Crow legislations secured its gravity due to that statement of the Supreme Court of America during 1880s and 1890s (Muldoon, 2015, p. 19).

By the end of the Civil War, many slaves were freed and they began to settle in America. However, they were not very familiar with the regime and the society still considered them differently. It was not easy for them to adapt to their new-found freedom. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Civil Right Movement surfaced and it was welcome by the black community as well as all the other minor communities residing in the United States at that time. But it should also be noted that while the minorities were flourishing, a dark organization was being put in place to counter the efforts of the minorities. That organization was called the Ku Klux Klan or simply the "KKK". The Ku Klux Klan is a right-wing extremist organization in the United States which aimed at the "purification" of the American society. They advocated extremist reactionary beliefs such as white supremacy, white nationalism, anti-immigration, anti-Catholicism, anticommunism, anti-Semitism and nativism. The first Klan was formed in 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee right after the end of the Civil War by six former Confederate army members. Its goal was to deny the freedmen and their allies the freedom to achieve social, economic and political rights (Lewis, 1999, p.142). The Klan had General Nathan Bedford Forrest as the leader and he was named the First Imperial Wizard. Due to the Enforcement Acts in 1870, the original Klan was disbanded.

In the 1920s, a second Klan was founded in Atlanta, Georgia and it had strong relations to religion especially Protestantism, businesses and political factions all over the United States. Its aim was clearly to restrict the arrivals of new immigrants more specifically the blacks, the Jews, the Catholics from Southern Europe like Italy and to protect the assets of the Americans. The operations of KKK had both political and brutal dimensions. That is to say, the organization had participated in political ground. Following the Reconstruction era, the republican party took control over the southern part of America, this dominance of the party entirely drove the whites into involving in the violent acts, changing political atmosphere "in the legislative and judicial branches" that resulted in the expulsion of blacks from the Democratic Party by 1890 and the entire political process by 1900 (Brown, 2014, p. xxii). The second Klan had the largest number of members but it too faded out in the 1940s due to internal conflicts.

The third Klan is still active nowadays and was formed in 1945 in Birmingham, Alabama. The members of the group mostly targeted civil rights activists in America, sometimes killing them or sabotaging their workplaces and homes. In the late 1990s it was officially regarded as a terrorist organization. The KKK was fighting for a conservative cause. The members of the organizations employed a number of means such as wearing masks and hanging by the neck in order to terrorize the blacks and the non-racist whites (Atkins, 2011, p. 3).

The goal was to estrange all blacks from the entire arenas of life not merely political arena. The racial acts of did not come to an end by excluding the blacks from political circle, but they similarly caused losing all close touches with the blacks. This situation can be perfectly exemplified by the nature of certain laws issued in Louisiana during 1890 because the laws obliged the blacks to get into different railcars. After six years, the blacks attempted to repeal the racial segregation law by possessing semi-white skins, Homere Plessey entered a railway train, therein he was apprehended immediately because of taking a seat dedicated white people. Plessey was taken to court and lost the case there, this incident recorded as a remarkable historical event of America known as Plessey v. Ferguson. Tribunal decided that equal rights had been granted to Plessey because different but equal places had been secured for both African-Americans and white individuals by the Civil Rights Act of 1875 that announced that all people must be given the right to enjoy equally and completely "the accommodations, advantages, facilities... and other places of public discrimination on a railroad and in public sites" (Wilson, 2013, p. 6).

The case of Plessey broke the ground for the destruction of black schools in areas endured economic difficulty. It is clear that the Supreme Court of the United States longed for backing and empowering separation rather than equality. Due to the affirmation of the Supreme Court, the states of south issued legislation for denying blacks entrance to public places. In other words, the court case built a formidable racial barrier to same rights for blacks. Furthermore, discrimination exceeded its maximum level because the Court passed overwhelmingly a wave of laws that restricted and curtailed legal rights for backs during the early of 1870s. The following racial and



discriminatory cases were the most popular ones, the Civil Rights Cases in 1883, *United States v. Reese*, the *Slaughterhouse Cases*, and *United States v. Cruikshank*. During 1899, the Supreme Court of the United States gave extra strong endorsement for racial separation in the case of *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education* (Brown, 2008, p. 202). During these cases, on the basis of the *Plessey* case, the Court declared that it is legal to isolate schools in Georgia whether or not the African-Americans having access to qualitatively similar schools, that was the first decree passed by the Court based on separate-but-equal principle in connection with educational opportunity.

In addition, the white segregationists promoted the White Supremacy, which is another form of racism. The formation of White Supremacy during 1865 to 1890 and the 1890 disenfranchisement Act by Mississippi State are regarded as the start of decriminalizing Jim Crow rules. However, blacks strived for exercising self-formed rights, and due to their efforts, they were subjected to violent attacks. In other words, in the southern part of America, the White Supremacy had been challenged, therefore the whites who still believed in the superiority of their own race decided to protect their principles by intimidating the newly freed black people who followed the rules of the Constitution of the United States of America (Epps, 2012, p. 246).

In the wake of the Civil War, most of the states issued some laws known as Black Codes in the South. The goal of the Black Codes was to restrict the bodily and financial freedom of the blacks that had recently gained their own freedom because of the Emancipation Proclamation. These efforts for decriminalizing the attachment of a degrading position to the blacks were momentary because of the existence of federal army in the one-time Confederacy throughout Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) and the approval of the 1866 and 1875 Civil Rights Acts, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, and the 1870 and 1871 three Enforcement Acts. It would be wrong, nevertheless, to consider that these federal attempts powerfully safeguarded the Blacks' civil rights. Flows of violent acts and terrorist atrocities overwhelmed the southern states during the 1860s and 1870s led by the KKK. Terrorist activities frequently had been conducted on the ground that were impossible to be legalized. However, the South decriminalized brutal acts, for instance, during 1866 and 1876 the one-time Confederate States passed legal codes that

constrained the free African-Americans in a way that was identical to slavery (Brown, 2014).

To impose the white supremacy, the whites prejudice were aided by an important fact that occurred at that time in that political inequality was still alive and hanging or brutal whippings were allowed: *the Nadir of the Negro*, a term coined by historian Rayford Logan was a time in history that ran for almost 20 years and it involved the killings, removal of civil rights and political inequality which helped to establish the superiority of the whites and the downgrading of the blacks (Brown, 2014).

In addition, the Brown v. Board of education is one of the prominent case in the history of the black American culture. During nearly 90 years prior to the Brown case, ethnic discrimination prevailed over racial interactions in America. The ruling of the Supreme Court over Brown case paved the way for social and educational reform of the blacks, it also opened the way for creating the Civil Rights Movement (Horton, 2005, p. 179).

The Topeka Board of Education under the 1879 Kansas law allowed the elementary schools to have different classes for the whites and blacks in the 12 regional areas with more than 15000 people. Topeka *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP) leaders were the ones who brought the families together to file the complaint against the board of education and among the leaders were the president McKinley Burnett himself and other legal counselors like Charles Scott and Lucinda Todd. Oliver L. Brown was working as a welder for the Santa Fe Railroad Company and was the assistant priest in the neighborhood church. He also happened to be black. Charles Scott, a long-time friend of Oliver Brown, persuaded the latter to join in with the court case. Brown's own daughter, Linda who was studying in the third grade at Monroe Elementary had a very long way to walk from the house to the bus stop and then travel nearly two kilometers to her school. At the same Sumner Elementary, a school reserved for the whites only was merely a few minutes' walk from her house (Wishart, 2004, p. 13).

The above paragraph characterizes the hardships related to education faced by the black Americans in those days. The parents of the school-going children were told by the NAACP to send them to the nearest schools in the locality to be enrolled but were

rebuffed and the administration told their parents to send their children to schools appropriate for them. In a PBS documentary in 2004, Linda Brown Thompson relived her episodes. She stated that the locality in which she lived was multicultural and that she had many friends of different races. She was really excited when she came to know that she could be able to attend the same school as her mates. However, when young Linda and her dad went to Sumner Elementary which seemed gigantic to her at that time, she was refused admission. She distinctly remembered her dad and the principal arguing in the office while she sat outside with the secretary. The arguments became fiery and her dada came out and took her back home. She was unable to fully grasp the gist of what was going on for she was pretty adamant she would have her little friends to study together. She said that she was unable to fully grasp the situation as she was adamant that she would be in the same school as all her friends like Mona, Guinevere and Wanda (Smarsh, 2010, p. 98).

The District Court favored the board of education as was ruled by the American Supreme Court in the case involving Plessey and Ferguson in 1896 163 U.S. 537. The rule was set to feature separate compartments on the public transport for both blacks and whites. While the judges felt that segregated education facilities were having a negative effect on the black children, they did not feel the same way when to come to accommodations, transport, syllabi and tertiary education levels of the teachers. They believed the alienation of the population would result in fairer judgments (Lomotey, 2010, p. 118). The Supreme Court discussed five more cases pertaining to the brown v. board of education case. They were Brown itself, Briggs v. Elliott (filed in South Carolina), Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, filed in Virginia, Gebhart v. Belton filed in Delaware, and Bolling v. Sharpe filed in Washington D.C. Almost all the black Americans were somehow affected by the case itself as they were backed by the NAACP. The Davis case was unique in the sense that it was led by 16 year-old Barbara Rose Johns who later instigated a 450-student walkout of Moton High school (Sargent, 2004, p. 14).

As a conclusion to this particular topic, one can say that under the Jim Crow Laws, the lives of the blacks in America were the most difficult in terms of survival. The then U.S

President Woodrow Wilson followed the Jim Crow Laws to the letter as he practiced the alienation of employees in his cabinet and office. He preferred to surround himself with politicians from the southern states as he was under the impression that this was the best option for the whole population. At Gettysburg on July 4 1913, fifty years after Abraham Lincoln's speech about all men being born equal, Wilson told the audience that he was very proud that the Union was growing bigger and bigger and also more powerful as more states decided to join without any doubts or questions. He likened the Union as a great family of freemen (Blight, 2001, p. 11).

Racial discriminations did not occur in America only but also happened in its colonies, for example the West Indies where many American settlers began their trades, more precisely in the different plantations. The West Indies which was colonized by the Americans was in need of people, especially cheap labor to work in the sugar cane plantations. For instance, in the year 1645, the number of white settlers was 40000 and the number of Negro slaves was 6000 in Barbados. But after some years in 1685, the numbers of the white settlers had changed to 20000 and the Negro slaves had changed to 46000 (McDowall, 1989). According to McDowall the number of Negro slaves started to increase during the seventeenth century. Likewise, in this period the term racism began having its real name. On the other hand, in 1619 for the first time they came from Jamestown by 20 African-American blacks (Kolchin, 1993). Masters treated with their slaves cruelly. Instead of reacting their masters they did nothing until the revolution which was the cause of killing nine Euro-American and burning some building by twenty blacks in 1712 (Morgan, 2007). This was the door of other rebellions which happened for the sake of ending slavery, and then it was the cause of ending slave trade in British officially until the year 1807. In the course of Civil War in the United States, Abraham Lincoln declared that the emancipation of slaves in America, however, any significant change did not occur with regard to their social status. Nevertheless, numerous institutions had been engaged in employing violence against black people such as The Ku Klux Klan (High, 1986). In the 1960s (High, 1986) the African-American Civil Rights Movement emerged afterwards in hope of altering the rules which hurt the blacks (High, 1986, p. 211).

One cannot claim that the black trials and tribulations are definitely a thing of the past. There are many other types of discriminations such as social status which includes low and high or poor and rich or women and men..., etc. Which are still to this day affecting and destructing the nucleus of modern society. Thus, I concentrate my attention on the ongoing issue of racism in my thesis.

#### **1.4 The Early Black American Literature and Slave Narratives**

African-American Literature is the part of American literature that consists of works produced in America by writers of African lineage and directly related to the lives and perspectives of African-Americans. I will deal with the developments of African American literature. There is a misunderstanding about the concept of "African American". "Afro American" is defined through assessing the terms basic on their own context. The historical circumstance of slaves and the importation of African people as slaves to United States of America in connection with the situations that led to the rise of African-American authors will be covered. Afterwards, the artistic creativity of African American literature folklore in all its multidimensional features as a response to the American social sphere will be discussed.

As an initial step towards the outlining the origin and progression of the writing of the black people in American society, an explanation of the different terms determining the American successors of Africans is necessary. The term *Negro* is disparaging and derogatory expression. The *Negro* has been taught that he is no one and that blackness is an identity of biological degeneracy and symbol of uselessness. A deep admiration of their tradition and their historical determination to call themselves as Negroes began in the 1930s and the word Negro was widely used for almost a century (Coyle, 1990, p. 1137).

The outcome of racism against a certain group, the expression "Afro-American" is not much popular in some realms. "Black" as a color of complexion is incompatible with "Black", a name as a group because different color shades within the same group of people appears. The different shades raise some doubts concerning using the word "Black". These expressions "Afro-American" and "Black" are the most common modern

name used alternatively. The works of black American authors is called "Negro Literature" (Lash, 1947).

In the first half of the sixteenth century black people were brought from Africa to United States. Since their arrival, they remained as hired servants for numerous years, they "had bound themselves to work for masters for a specified length of time in return for paying the cost of their transportation across the Atlantic" (Quarles, 1969, p. 34). However, following the expiration of the contracts, slavery immediately became common practice. On the eve of 1640, a foothold was got by Negro slavery and the duration of service was expanded indeterminately, and a stamp had been put on slavery.

The black people were the first community to arrive in the United States on the eve of 1619. From the beginning, they entirely affected the American lifestyle. Farm owners methodically severed the ties of the new slaves with their families and tribes. They were sold and exchanged due to resistance to ties of blood, they were sexually abused and compelled to adopt the name of the white tyrants. However, certain white plantation owners wanted their workers to get married and start a family as it was believed that a man with familial responsibilities would rebel less than non-married men (Finkelman, 2006, p. 159).

Slavery adversely influenced their individuality. Destroying the black's sense of individuality led to the homelessness and namelessness. They were hardly able to survive. Certainly, the only American who had tamed to depend wholly on the American environment was the black American so as to rebuild his identity. In their writings, the American identity of the blacks was mirrored. As minimum white American individuals had their European normative traditions, customs, conventions, practices, and social values, to follow, or change, or to oppose them. In the environment of their white owners, the Negroes shaped their cultural values, that is to say, their cultural values were undoubtedly under the influence of the owners' culture. Therefore, the black individual was not able to get in touch with his historical heritage to find his real identity. The black community and its offspring faced years of abuse and dishonor and were deprived of their rights by tyranny (Barnes, 1986, p. 29).

The black writers have become competent in expressing the hardships of the blacks artistically. In other words, their ability to convey the difficult conditions of their lives without fury or wrath represents their strong self-confidence and their high self-esteem. Rather than constantly being disappointed due to their blackness, this black writers attempt to discuss their own destiny as a proposition to the terrible social conditions and to solve this race obsession of White individuals. With the responsibility of the black writer to cover the complex life of Negro, which put him in charge of helping both his own community and others to deeply understand the life of the black people. This remarkably discovery, makes him known as "an agent of self-discovery for the nation at large" (Hoffman, 1979, p. 340-341).

Literary tradition of black Americans is actually multifaceted. It is the literary works on the black community and the actual defense of the entire humanity. It is an inseparable ingredient of American literary works; however, it is additionally a fair and harsh criticism against the abusive and conflicting belief of the American people. Many authors have enriched and contributed to the American black literature. The writings of the black American author represented the reaction of their creative vision to a social life of America. The main features of the reaction are passionate devotion to literary technique and discipline, in combination with an unwavering social commitment. It is clear that the black authors wanted to change the society they lived in and at the same time change their own ideas and aspirations (Barnes, 1986, p. 30).

In their bondage, the black slaves were very busy with carrying out the commands of surviving in order to find and give a certain time to working on art. However, they created informal literary works from the beginning of their fight for reaching racial justice. Their literature was consisted of orally transmitting their values, customs and traditions to their offspring; they sang songs to their children and narrated various stories and tales from their past life to them. To put it differently, "The literature produced by them was oral" (Barnes, 1986, p. 32). In those painful times the way black Americans conveyed their messages should not be forgotten for they were denied basic education and material gains were very limited and not readily available. Still they found a way to

preserve their identities and passed on their lives' stories despite a lack of official records.

While living in a culture which was both foreign and hostile, the oral tradition of the black slaves paved the way for the written literature in the history of the slaves in America. The oral tradition refers to the somewhat farfetched stories to amuse others, the stories of past heroes and animals and the religious and work songs (Barnes, 1986, p. 32). In 1746, the first literary piece of writing entitled *Bars Fight* was composed by a sixteen-year-old servant-girl named Lucy Terry (1730-1821). Moreover, in 1760 a poem entitled *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries* was written by Jupiter Hammon (1718-1806). It was the first known piece of art to be published in the United States. However, those works were often perceived as somehow bias towards the White thinking (Whitlow, 1973, p. 15).

During 18<sup>th</sup> century, the black writers that had not experienced the tribulations of the field's workers in southern America, rarely wrote about conflicts arising from racial hatred. Similarly, the black writers of the nineteenth century mostly expressed their views on the religion that was forced upon the slaves by the masters. In other words, they devoted their works to religious issues and underestimated plain horrible aftermath of forcibly subjugating humans and considered the strange manner in the people from Africa were brought to their shores as an untarnished organization (Whitlow, 1973, p. 33).

Slave narratives are a major part of the Black American Literature. The stories of slavery and injustice were narrated through pamphlet and short stories by the blacks, which helped founding the groundwork for black texts and which were eventually called "Slave Narrative". These represented the various endeavors by the black slaves to communicate the stories of their origins from faraway places into more sustainable ways (Davis, 1991, p. xxiii). The continuity of this brutal trade caused the transportation of black people from Africa to America. Thus, they were working as a slave in the fields in America without having any right, that is to say, they suffered from complete lack of freedom and they were oppressed therein because their evil masters acted in a racial discriminated manner.



While some of the slaves preferred to delve into religious practices to escape the boredom of their lives, others turned to writing, the art of writing, however, proved to be a more pivotal means to express their plight, especially for the more educated ones among the slaves. They would use this art as a means to achieve what they craved for the most of their lives: Freedom. The slave narratives such as Briton Hammon's *A Narrative of the Uncommon sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton, A Negro Man (1760)*, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with J. Marrant, a Black (1785)* and others became very popular, best-selling books among both English and American followers of abolitionism since they were attacks on the practice of slavery and targeted troubled moral intuition of Americans. For instance, in his volume, *America and Other Poems (1853)*, James M. Whitefield (1823-1878) articulates his resentment: He describes America as a land of opportunity and freedom for all but it seemed to be filled with hideous and sinful designs (Robinson, 1969, p. 40). Here, Whitefield shows that hypocrisy of the whites in America.

The slave narratives were published in episodes, they were composed of detailed accounts of moral lessons, they often used the first person point of view, and they fulfilled a higher aim through correcting the widespread misconceptions about pro-slavery subject matters. The slave narratives encouraged the slaves to fight for their emancipation and launch a rebellion against racial oppression. Concurrently, they provoked the White reading public to do something against slavery in United States of America through narrating various harrowing experiences that "horrified or repelled the readers" (Barnes, 1986, p. 34).

On 16 March 1827, in New York City, the first African-American newspaper was started publishing entitled *Freedom's Journal*. Similarly, during 1831, in Boston, the most popular newspaper was launched by William Lloyd Garrison in the history of American abolitionism, and the newspaper was called *The Liberator*. Previously, in 1829, George Moses Horton released a collection of poetry entitled *Hope of Liberty*. It was regarded as one of the first collection of poetry dedicated mainly to topics of social unrest in a society which claimed to be democratic (Barnes, 1986, p. 35). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the eruption of the Civil War, the memoirs written by the African-

Americans were the most common literary style of works. They were the expansion of tales and traditions from their ancestors since they centered on the same social experiences, they narrate the same inhumane treatments of white masters with slaves. To put it differently, they were horrific stories regarding slavery and the alienation of the black families and the demonic white masters who mistreated the female slaves with sexual assaults (Barnes, 1986, p. 35).

The other African-American writers such as Frederick Douglass (1817-1895) and William Wells Brown (1810-1873), are considered as the voice against the oppression of the blacks. Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is an autobiography that was first published in 1845 and a decade later appeared in print again entitled *My Bondage and My Freedom*. It underwent another change of title in 1891 as *The Lives and Times of Frederick Douglass* and further revised a year later lastly with the exact title. In his books, Douglass firmly promoted linearization, fought against enslavement, worked tirelessly for racial justice in education and job opportunities and supported good treatment with the laboring class generally. In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Douglass says that he identified poverty, lack of knowledge and education and improper social habits as the reasons behind the downgrading of the black people in the free American society (Douglass, 2003, p. 204). The letter has its own historical importance since it shows the widespread social injustice during nineteenth century in America.

By the early 1860s, many black writers started to voice out their different opinions concerning racial issues, for instance, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) was of the opinion that black writers ought to deal with people's feelings in general rather than discussing problems faced almost merely by the black people in their writings. In her writings, Harper tried to explore "experiences transcending racial limitations" (Bigby, 1971, p. 46). In her poem entitled *A Double Standard*, Harper wrote about the problems faced by both races at that time and even pointed her finger at the double standards affecting both sexes. Martin Delaney (1812-1885) was another writer who had the same opinion and wrote that evil can be perpetrated by people regardless of their races. In 1852, a highly educated woman of Christian faith wrote against slavery, her name was Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe was a white American, she was an abolitionist. In her

novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe focused on the stories of the slaves and the difficulties faced by the slave families (Furnas, 1956, p. 8-10). Her writings were mainly a description of the catastrophic consequences of slavery. She wrote concerning the dangerous effects of slavery on both races. While the blacks were suffering mostly in a physical way, the whites were mainly morally affected because an absolute cruelty was being engraved in their subconscious. Because of her commitment to Christianity, Stowe successfully portrayed the character of Uncle Tom as a deeply religious, peaceful and admirable man who believed in self-sacrifice (Barnes, 1986, p. 38).

### **1.5 The Harlem Renaissance**

In the 1920s, a new movement was born: The Harlem Literary Renaissance. The movement was characterized by the attempts of numerous black authors to obtain approval and highlight their plight in their works and also to fashion a distinctiveness that can relate to the Euro-Americans. The motive behind this particular movement was to give the black community a platform to work on as it would provide the society with a prototype of the black person's characteristics in America (Keller, 1968, p. 29). The foundation left by their forefathers provides the basis on which people identify them. However, since their past was bondage and slavery, their quest in finding their own perceived identity was not easy for these African-Americans because they wanted to distance themselves from past slavery. To be accepted in society as free individuals and to climb up the social ladder, the black community faced many a hardship following the abolition of slavery and Declaration of Rights. In the past they were aware of the position they sat in and their white masters did too. Therefore, after their liberation, no one really had a clear notion of how to view the new situation and the question "How to fit the blacks in the society" arose (Keller, 1968, p. 29). That was the reason why the Harlem Renaissance was formed and sought to produce a prototype on which the African-Americans can follow. Along with some white writers who supported their mission, the black writers began to promote their ideas in their books and also enlighten the people of the need for equal rights among all the American citizens irrespective of their origins and colors. It was during that period that those authors became aware of themselves adhering to a group that would help them with their quest to solve the racial

problems plaguing the country. They really felt a bond was created among them as they sought their identity (Keller, 1968, p. 30).

It was said that the release of *The New Negro*, a collective work by Alan Locke in 1925 paved the way to the birth of the Harlem Literary Renaissance (Rampersad, 2003, p. 87). This was the first work that registered the ideas, opinions and endeavors of a colored person in the press and the public. The work of Alan Locke suggested that a major cultural upheaval was about to take place among the black community in different parts of America and indeed of the world. Rampersad believed that this book would provide an identity to that movement in a somewhat determined and vast way (Rampersad, 2003, p. 87). I believe that Alan Locke's works would give the black community much greater and easily accessible prospects in the American society. According to Alan Locke, he held the black authors in very high esteems and believed that the publication of his anthology would secure a world-wide consciousness about the search for an image for the black minority in the United States and also on the world stage. He did not forget any of his fellow writers and recognized them in his own manner by publishing their respective works in his anthology. Alan Locke discussed the black art and literature, their history and prospect that one day the black people will stand toe-to-toe with the whites (Rampersad, 2003, p. 88). Locke believed that the blacks could be as important a member of the society as a white man and that they could provide their assistance in building a decent and progressive society together, thus ditching the non-cultured or illiterate persona. The aims set by the Renaissance were to promote the ideas of the black authors and therefore creating a sense of solidarity among the different members of the society (Keller, 1968, p. 32).

The necessity to form the identity of the African-American person and to give it the desired features was essential for the Harlem Literary Renaissance and Alan Locke's works provided them with the necessary tools to work with. But they could not finalize a definite image of themselves because of the many arguments that arose. The authors were unable to settle for one and this caused the environment in the group to be less than friendly. Some of the authors decided to discuss about that portrayal in their books. The explanation by Keller proves that the black writers of the Harlem Renaissance could not

agree on the way to portray the black man as a member of the American society. Some of them wanted to depict the black man as someone with intelligence, dignity and honor and can be easily related to the whites while others wanted the black identity to be unique but also recognized favorably by the society at large especially the white people (Keller, 1968, p. 32-33).

The fragile bonds among the authors of the Harlem Literary Renaissance were the stumbling blocks that caused the authors to disagree on a final depiction of the African-American. In the mind of others, however, doubts about the contribution of the writers surfaced and critics started to ask themselves whether the Harlem Renaissance was trying to copy the image of Euro-Americans or stick to their uniqueness as African-Americans. Keller said that the African-American man who now lives free has to produce its own identity and that he must do that from his own physical, mental and emotional characteristics. Keller believed that the work of the Renaissance was to help the black community and the general American society to see eye to eye and said that the black literature was to promote an idea of progress and not of revolution in America (Keller, 1968, p. 34). Here, in this situation, Keller wanted a harmony to arise among the citizens of the American society in order to move forward more smoothly. It was up to the members of the Harlem Renaissance to find the proper way to make their own image through their wonderful works in the hope that they will be welcome with open arms by the rest of the society.

The rapid development of literature revived an awakening spirit in the black people that resulted in a general upheaval against the traditional values of the industrial culture of America. This spirit lifted their plights in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They made new demands and by the time world war one was at its peak, a new hope arose with new expectations and determination to finally put an end to their problems. However, *the New Negro Movement* was merely apparently characterized by nonconformity. Throughout revolting against cultural and social confinements of their ancestors, the black Renaissance writers followed a different route that created deformity. They achieved aspiration from the obsession with the Jazz age, the focused on the African-American showmanship, his social entertaining activities, his dances and his songs. This

focus was the price of being indifferent to the other important aspects of his life. On the other hand, they were supporting each other and strengthening their individuality by figurative or realistic acts. "They tried to re-establish their past" (Barnes, 1986, p. 44).

In the first half of the twentieth century, African-American issues were written by some writers, the most familiar one were W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Although the tradition of Harlem Renaissance was carried on by Richard Wright from 1920 until 1940, Harlem Renaissance began in the New York City, the people of Harlem following the Great War. Producing literature was related to Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, Harlem Renaissance was famous for its many musicians and literary figures that produced their works in this period. The most important and major authors of that period were James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Jessie RedmonFauset, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston. The New Negro Movement was sometime their second name. Eventually, the period of Harlem Renaissance ended with the great melancholy (Graham, 2011, p. 146).



## 2. RICHARD WRIGHT

### 2.1 General Historical and Literary Context of Richard Wright

As it was shown previously, African-American literature and Black Renaissance literature are concerned mainly with the issue of racism and numerous leading literary figures contributed to the issue. It is clear that the second Black Renaissance literature actually originated from the literary writings of Richard Wright. Wright "defined the nature of the black American's debate with himself and with his culture" (Bigsby, 1980, p. 3). Therefore, in the current chapter, I will explore the influence of Richard Wright on Black American Literature; in addition, I will provide an overview of his well-known novel entitled *Black Boy*.

Wright tries to develop further the living conditions of the black people in America through his books and essays in which he endeavored to show black desolation, depression and also studied how the blacks can make alterations to their ways of life (Ward, 2008, p. 46). Wright was considered as one of the most outstanding black writers and his novel *Black Boy* is suitable for all readers. Certainly, the racial issue of African-Americans in *Black Boy* is first and foremost the clash between different races. His own life's events growing up included hostility, quarrels, ethnic prejudice and flee to the North. Nearly all the characters in the novel were present around him at a time when Wright was growing up and feeling oppressed and they could sympathize with him. He enjoyed writing about the lives and experiences of the blacks in America and linked them to his own experience as his novels such as *Black Boy* and *Native Son* prove that point.

Richard Nathaniel Wright (1908-1960), associated with *the Civil Rights Movement Era*, which was a black novelist of contentious novels, non-fictional essays, poems and short stories. A pivotal author in black literature, Richard Wright was considered among the leading writers of twentieth century America. He was a pioneering writer when he



depicted the inhumane treatments of the blacks in an explicit way. He spent his time writing mostly about the difficulties faced by the African-Americans from 1890s to 1950s in America. Richard Wright's books and views were well appreciated by the black community in the United States. Arnold Rampersad, a famous critic described Wright as a monument when he said that Richard Wright was up there among the leading writers in the long and old history of literature (Rampersad, 1995, p. 1-2).

## **2.2 Richard Wright's Works**

Richard Wright is considered to be a naturalist and one who focused on the real aspect of life and nature. In the history of American literature, Richard Wright through his successful novels created a platform on which the opinions of the black community could arise and were made to have an impact on those who lived in troubled times as depicted in *Black Boy* (1945), and his novels *Native Son* (1940) and *The Outsider* (1953) and his two short stories held titled *Eight Men*, *Uncle Tom's children* (1938) and *The Long Dream* (1958). Obviously, the works of Richard Wright mainly revolved around oppression and discrimination against the black people of Southern districts of America. His novels explained the withholding of the blacks in American society at different levels for instance, spiritual, individual, financial and political views. In his novels, Richard Wright used different literary devices for demonstrating the hardship, affliction and distress of the blacks.

Wright had also written a short story entitled *The Island of Illusion*, which is a portrayal of racial segregation in America. The portrayal was very precise and radically composed in such a way that publishing houses in America are reported to be reluctant regarding publishing the story, the literary journals was hesitant to approve it, and people generally did not like to think about the other America. One of Richard's most well-known quotes: "I am a very average Afro-American that is why I am not exceptional" was covered by the press and it has become the target of ridicule for the contemporary American reading public of Wright. On the other hand, even today the term Afro-American is considered as highly exceptional. The "Afro-American" as a term is regarded as exceptional on the grounds that it demonstrates an all-inclusive issue of culture and society in the West (Fabre, 1993, p. xxix).

In 1953, his existentialistic book, *The Outsider* appeared in print. In reality, Wright was under the impact of the proletarian writings when he went to Chicago. The majority of his works were based on Black people's life; furthermore, similarly he gladly connected their lives with the story of his life. Within the framework of African-American literature, Richard Wright may have been most in charge of molding modernist literature. Certainly, the convincing feature of his naturalism reared a large group of authors (Gates, 1993, p. xiii). Richard did not under any condition foresee that there ought to be a great deal of backing his Black Nationalism or a shielding against dehumanization at social level. In the next section, his *Native Son* will be discussed.

Richard Wright as an author did not develop a unique style. To clarify, he took his style from other authors such as T. S. Eliot, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Walt Whitman and James Joyce (Ward, 2008, p. 258, 72, 404). Richard's luck of unique novelistic strategies and his employment of melodrama in the self-depiction *Black Boy* made this a more traditional type of autobiography and a style that could not be found in contemporary biographical novels. The self-education of Wright made him to see his surroundings with novelty and freshness in a way that even extremely sophisticated authors were not capable of doing that (Ward, 2008, p. 210). Richard Wright is labeled as a first African-American author to earn affluence and fortune from his literary works. Another crucial point is that Wright ought to be known as an outstanding African-American writer that confronted the Euro-American with reality.

The date of publication of Richard Wright's *Native Son* is 1940. Throughout the novel, Wright's interest in modernism reappears (Kinnamon, 1990, p. 125). *Native Son* narrates the story of a young black man from the lower class who fought fire with fire i.e. he used the same methods to exact his revenge on those whose tyrannized him. In his novel *Native Son*, he predicted the uprising of the American inner-metropolises that broke out in every big city of America during 1960s. Wright attempted to be a radical author in a way that is easy to distinguish class and race, white and non-white, patriotism and prejudice and society and individual. His most favorite saying was "Not till the sun bars you, do I reject you" (Whitman, 1999, p. 254).

In his *Native Son*, Wright exhibits another way to deal with the treatment of blacks' lives in the city. *Native Son* is a poignant representation of the racism that prevailed in Chicago and engulfed the entire nation in the 1930s. The portrayal of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* is an important feature that augurs the advent of modern African-American Literature. As the main character in the novel, Bigger Thomas is depicted as a 20 year old, eldest son in his family, illiterate, impoverished black boy who lived in the ghetto of Chicago and had the lowest socio-economic status. Richard Wright demonstrated how the terrible situations destroyed the social and personal improvements of the black people. During those times, the judicial system clearly downgraded the blacks and it was seen when Bigger Thomas was captured by the security enforcers and held in jail where he was persecuted on a daily basis. He was told to confess to the crime or face the backlash from the vicious whites who would so willingly agree to kill him. When Bigger was tried in the court of Justice, it was done in an illegal manner. Mr. Buckley, the State Attorney, used devious means to get a confession out of Bigger and although the latter pleaded guilty to the murder of Mary Dalton, Mr. Buckley used his influence to appeal to the jury to award Bigger the death penalty. There were several instances of verbal abuse directed at Bigger and the black community at large in the written media (Wright, 1966, p. 472). In addition, he explains that individuals like Bigger Thomas lives by an odd and distorted moral values. Those individuals would not probably be successful by obeying conventional norms, thus, they look for emancipation from the disappointment and outrage caused by the committed frauds and crimes against them by the white Americans. That emancipation arises from the inclination to crush others and, finally themselves (Wright, 1966, p. 473).

Wright's novels including *Black Boy* show that in a more effective manner than any of his literary antecedents he perceived the wrath in the hearts of the black people that did not have anything to lose and anything left to fight for. The black individuals had been in need of coping with the vicious manners stemmed from racism in society. In his *Blueprint for Negro Writing*, Richard Wright hold the black author responsible for furnishing ethical disciplines for behavior, for considering misfortune lives as significant, and for pinpointing the reasons of in mass immigration of black people. In other words, he was asked to do exactly what he was supposed to do in order to live his

life without any trouble (Mitchell, 1994, p. 102). Richard Wright intensely took a stand against the authors that satisfied the white readers instead of concentrating their efforts on the needs of blacks. In this manner, Richard claimed that those authors disregarded the black people's culture and abandoned their duty for the sake of literary fame.

When Wright published *Black Boy*, he faced censure from those whom he criticized throughout the novel, however he kept going and he held himself responsible for being a voice of the young black men that had been with during childhood, thus his novel achieved success, due his perseverance. Though he managed to get through a society filled with social injustice and apartheid, he described his success as simply a lucky one (Andrews, 2003, p. 4). Wright strives to enhance living status of the black people in society of United States of America. Certainly, in his works, he endeavors to exhibit wretchedness and hard times of the blacks; moreover, he tries to show how the black people would be able to change the circumstances of their lives life. His main goal as an author was to present a new way of life by heightening the sensibilities and to cultivate a new worldview through enhancing circumstance of the black people (Smith, 2001, p. 125).

In addition, his fictions are exemplification of both Black and White people. The issue of Blacks in American society was a tension between diverse cultures and diverse generations. His wish was to portray Black individuals' lives to the white reading public in such a way that it shattered the White myth of the submissive patient funny Black man. He greatly had a hand in several social movements of his contemporary period. Although, his contemplations, thoughts and views of American life made his works, and style more concentrated and more lively. Wright personally was exposed to brutal hostilities, clashes, racial mistreatments in the society and he fled from the South the North. The aforementioned experiences of Wright are mirrored in the characters of his fictions, for instance, he expressed his concerns regarding racism in *Native Son* and *Black Boy*.

### 2.3 An Overview of *Black Boy*

As Wright matured and began to understand his circumstances as a black person in Mississippi in the early twentieth century, he became aware of the fear and dread associated with racism and its narrow limitation of black lives. He was frequently aware of the possibility of being killed or otherwise severely injured because of anything he might or might not say or do if that might inadvertently violate *the Ethics of Living of Jim Crow*. I will discuss the life conditions of blacks during *Jim Crow Era* in a dedicated section of the first chapter to the history of racism in America. The most frequent mood in the early life of Wright was tension, if not the tension arising from direct contact with whites, then tension resulting from the pressures brought on to African Americans curtailing from the Racial climate. Wright made it abundantly clear that the most intimate interactions among African Americans were largely influenced by the impact of Race. Wright keenly felt, as all his fictions reveal, that in interracial social relations, in both North and South ultimately, race was an ever-present factor. Even Wright's articulate Negroes appear illiterate, for if they possess the vocabulary, they have been trained to conceal their emotions from whites and from other blacks, through the indoctrination of *Ethics of Living* by Jim Crow among the blacks young and old. The absence of freedom provokes Wright's rebels to attack family and friends, sometimes in self-defense, sometimes in anger and hatred. *Black Boy* serves as a partial model for Wright's other works in which protagonists reflect their brutal environment. Fights in Negro schools and in black neighborhoods were more common than the interracial battle described in *Ethics of Living* by Jim Crow. Unlike his characters, Wright did not enjoy such encounters and only participated to protect his life and uphold his honor.

In his entire life, young Richard never paid any heed to the assumptions of the white masters and he fought them with intellect, which he did when he moved to France where he led a rather peaceful life. The story in the novel *Black Boy* mainly recollects the life of Wright and more importantly his interactions with the whites, his neighbors and his own family who were scared and very pious during Jim Crow Era. He was very wary of the whites as he did not enjoy their company very much. Personally, he was not directly involved in any confrontation with the whites but he was deeply hurt when his friend's brother was murdered. Although he blamed his own race for being traditionally

deficient, he sympathized with them on numerous accounts as he felt that it was the whites' fault that his people were denied liberties and rights in America. I believe that Richard Wright's novels proved to be a powerful tool for fighting against the whites and they filled the most sullied of the blacks with intense hatred for the whites.

When *Black Boy* was published, he had moved his focus in attaining internal emotional and spiritual autonomy, especially for the suppressed people. This type of struggle that most often occurred in Wright's work is a struggle to reach adulthood as all of Wright's heroes are males and they wanted to make a mark on history. Kenneth Kinnamon identified four essential aspects of the life of young Richard. These were his racial status, the poverty in which he lived, his dysfunctional family unit and his near illiteracy. Kinnamon believed that those aspects marked Richard permanently and created an essence which translated his thoughts into writings (Bloom, 2006, p. 118). According to Kenneth Kinnamon, those four aspects in the life of Wright helped him greatly in his search for education and also reinforced his already tough personality. The meetings with his parents and siblings in the novel were not pleasant as they tried to force him to obey the White rules.

*Black Boy* described fully the trials and tribulations of the black community to fit in the dictatorial system prevailing in the South. The novel does not concentrate on the physical aspect of young Richard but rather on his sentiments growing up until he reaches the mature age when manages to flee from the decrepit Southern America and its unruly laws to Chicago in the Illinois, also known as the Windy City. Growing up young Richard made the observation that racialism is taught to a person rather than the person being born with it. From this point of view he took racial prejudice to be a danger to his independence and started to fight against it. When he reaches nineteen, he fully understands that his life struggles enabled him to survive the world by adjusting his ideas and sentiments (Wright, 1998, p. 253).

The novel can be described as being more of an archive than a fictional novel where both black and whites whether they are the tyrants or oppressed. Wright was interested in decrypting this pattern in the two novels he wrote. Despite being at liberty following the Civil War, the southern states still managed to develop a system which could

scrutinize and suppress the freedom of speech and movement of the black community. The fault lies with the society that did not discourage the human trafficking trade and subsequent advent of slavery. It was the same society controlled by the whites who felt they were superior to other races and therefore acted upon their idea of dominating the other races. This was happening in the Southern America in the early 1900s.

As narrated by Wright in the novel *Black Boy*, he made a point when he told the members of his community that they are no longer benefitting from the western culture and traditions. The reactions from the blacks were not amazing in any sense but rather it was a necessity in those difficult times. It was only a matter of survival. *Black Boy* can be described as an extraordinary denunciation of racism in America. Wright's exceptionality must be the major reflection of the readers. It was Wright's basic instinct of pride and self-esteem that had helped him run away from his ethnic and folk's background.

In *Black Boy*, Wright tried hard to create an improving impact on the society. Wright basically and emotively set up a sketch of African-American life in the years 1915 to 1925. In his book he wanted to enrich the reader to achieve a sense of identity which is unique to them only. He expressed this innovative custom of individuality and talked about his life in Jackson Mississippi, before his departure to Memphis at seventeen. *The Black Boy* records young Richard's early childhood which was packed with calamitous incidents. Before long his father left his mother, he knew extreme hunger; he became a drunkard begging for drinks from black stevedores in Memphis saloons. He had to flee Arkansas where an uncle was killed; he was forced to live with a zealously religious grandmother in an atmosphere of perpetual quarrelling; he took refuge in an orphan asylum; he observed the suffering of his mother who became an everlasting invalid, while fighting off the misfortunes of the poor relatives with whom he was forced to live. He was cheated, beaten, and kicked off jobs by white employees who hated his endeavor to acquire an expertise of the job; and to these circumstances must be added the personal fact that Wright, with his sensitivity, extreme shyness, and intelligence was a problem child who with his family mutually rejected each other.

A Record of Childhood and Youth is a highly acclaimed piece of non-fiction literature that supports both the American History and the African-American culture. The novel *Black Boy* is a dramatized account of the early life of its author: Richard Wright. It comprises of two distinct sections, the "Southern Night" which recounted his childhood in the town of Natchez in the state of Mississippi and the "The Horror and The Glory" which narrated his early adulthood in Chicago in the state of Illinois.

The first chapters recalled the childhood of Richard. When he was 4 years old and he set ablaze the curtains of his house while playing with matches. As an inquisitive and somewhat impish child, he wanted to see the results of fire on cloth. Young Richard lived in a house where the women were very stern and pious and the men aggressive and careless. He was not keen to join his mates in playing games outside but rather preferred reading stories at his leisure and he embraced an agnostic life early on. Growing up the south of America at that time was very painful and uncomfortable for Richard as he faced great discriminations because of his origins and skin color. He was under the impression that the society was unfair to him and he was appalled by the behavior of the whites and some blacks as they aimed at destroying his dreams. After his unfaithful father left the house, he lived sometimes with his mother who was ill and his zealously pious grandmother and other relatives. His endeavors to obtain a job in the society controlled by the whites were met with severe discrimination and sometimes vicious aggression which he bore for his entire life. His family was perpetually famished. Richard and his relatives considered the northern states as a land of opportunity and resolved to move there at the earliest possible. They managed to set aside some money and Richard and one of his aunts went to Chicago with the promise to bring both his mother and his brother there.

Once in Chicago, he quickly realized that the society there was not as discriminatory as that in the south and he started to have firm notions about the American society. He managed to find jobs albeit low-paying quite easily in Chicago. He cleaned the floors during daytime and at night he read Proust and some medical papers. There was no help from his family as they were poor; his mother suffered a focal neurological deficit and even his close relatives taunted him on his religious views and love for reading. They



never believed that a black man could be successful in the current society. However, Richard found employment at a post office and there he met with some white men and they discussed various topics namely world matters and religion. The white men noticed that they had common viewpoints and invited young Richard to the John Reed Club, an association that was deeply involved in the promotion of arts and social revolution. Richard began to write for a magazine Left Front and joined the Communist Party as a coordinator for the writers and artists.

In the beginning, Richard believed that he would meet his pals especially among those of his community when he joined the party. But he soon realized that there was no difference between them and the racist white masters he fled from. They were both scared to embrace changes in the society. Those who differed from the policies of the Communist Party were called "counter-revolutionary" and Richard Wright was one of them as he never backed down from his thoughts, ideas and principles. He was also called a traitor when he attempted to desert the party after finding out that the other members did not have anything in common with him. He left the group shortly after one of his peers sided with him and Richard faced a lot of trouble as he was banned from their meetings and could not find jobs. The other members were in fact intimidating him. However, he decided not to fight back as he believed that they had the same goals though they did not know how to achieve them. Those goals were unity, tolerance and equality. The final chapter of his book indicated that he intended to act on his thoughts and dreams in a different way to cause uproar in the society. He firmly believed that each and every one has a meaning to life and according to Richard Wright; his method was to join the political system.

This thesis is planned to outline the origin of racism in America and try to bring out the horrible hardships experienced by the African-Americans. Their lives given an account by Richard Wright in *Black Boy* will thus be scrutinized to bring to light the elements of racism and subjugation as a part of the American society history in the context of Wright's *Black Boy*.

### **3. *BLACK BOY***

Being a black writer and novelist, Richard Wright could gather many white readers around his great works. Richard achieved popularity by just publishing his successful novel *Black Boy*. One more thing is that Richard was considered as the most significant Negro novelist before Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. In 1945, *Black Boy* was published and it was widely regarded as a masterpiece in the Black Literature point of view. The manner in which Richard Wright depicted the racism that was rampant at the time he was growing up was commendable. He was among the first writers who plainly described the atrocities associated with racism in Southern America and even forced inadvertently the outbreak of the Civil War. He made a name for himself and was a pioneer in fighting for eliminating racism and segregation committed against the black community in America.

#### **3.1 Racism in *Black Boy***

The foci of this chapter will be on racism and violence which are both depicted in the book *Black Boy*. In other words, the depiction of the suppression and the different shapes of racism will serve as a means to understand how Richard Wright copes with them. One of the reasons which affected Richard to start writing this novel was that he thought he was an ordinary Afro-American and his racial identity makes this autobiography to be an astonishing masterpiece (Wright, 1998).

An explanation of the term "racism" is primordial to understand this chapter. The novel is heavily involved with Racism. Concerning this issue, an author Fredrickson in his book entitled *Racism: A Short History* deals with the dilemma of racism and reveals a new suggestions and views on this subject. He produced his own definition of the term racism as a general and often careless manner in which belligerent sentiments and sometimes actions are thrown at people belonging to another racial group. However, he also believed that the aversion to another group transcends the barrier of mere feelings

and the violence that may occur was at times so brutal that words cannot give justice to them. The atrocity that followed such actions went way farther than just human feelings (Fredrickson, 2002, p. 1). It is safe to say that actions speak louder than words and the circumstances in which violent acts of racism shown in the novel were more than what can be described.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Wright in his novel *Black Boy* depicts the uneasiness between the Euro-Americans and African-Americans. The importance of this study is to clarify the fact that racism hurt many people in the ancient periods, especially during the twentieth century. In the book this is what makes a consequence from this attitude develop. It appears completely believable that Richard had troubles with whites, at the same time, the awkward moments were the main reasons that even the relationships were not good among African-American people. By the way, in this study the circumstances in Richard's family were truly great that I would like to explain that situation further.

Furthermore, the main reason that Richard Wright considered as a powerful novelist and writer not simply just as a prominent knowledgeable thinker that was the prominent power of his successful novel *Black Boy* and his other great works. One more thing, in the unfriendly Jim Crow South, his novel *Black Boy* depicts Richard Wright's growing up. For those who want to read this autobiography with understand the concept of the book depends on an apprehending of its social and cultural background and on an apprehending of historical contexts. At the beginning which I mentioned one of the contexts above are rules which are called *the Jim Crow laws*. The outrageous laws "separate but equal" were continued following the ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson. Separation of African-American people from Euro-American people became inevitable under this law *the Jim Crow laws*. Additionally, the segregation was related with too many places which is related with real life for instance public cafes, public means of transport, swimming pools, theaters, hospitals, public houses, public schools, at the same time they were also linked with the court of law or marriage where any African-American people could not give evidence against any Euro-American. *The Jim Crow Laws* were so successful, that they created two separate worlds for the blacks and the

whites. It is not needed to discuss that between these two worlds there was no justice in the handing out of the wealth. In earlier times, agricultural inhabitants, the African-American people were put into poverty. In fact, those who controlled African-American people's land and abused African-American people were Euro-American people. Besides, the farms which African-American people worked on were owned by Euro-Americans (Wormser, 2003, p. 201).

Subsequently, Richard Wright found out that these laws were not specific to the South, though; they were considered the absolute laws and were strictly implemented. Knowing some fundamental facts about Communism in the US in the 1930s and 1940s it makes easier to understand the novel *Black Boy* but without any background it is hard to understand. In addition, in these years the disintegration of the stock market, decline in industry production, other depressing matter and rising unemployment took place. The Communist Party indicated that political ideas and thinking were built on a scientific representation and the party focuses on fairness, equality and solidarity. According to intellectuals and many American politicians believed that the Communist Party brought about the capitalist production which brought big issues mentioned above. As we know Richard Wright is an African-American writer, he considered Communism as an ideology that could in the end defeat racism. However, several years as a Communist Party member, Richard Wright thought that he was indeed wrong about ending racism through the Communist Party (Foner, 1987, p. 125-126).

Richard Wright also found out a suitable way by laying emphasis on the first person while writing the story of his early years, it also relates to the youth of many African-American children who were brought up for the duration of the height of the American isolation era. Richard Wright wrote his novel in a normal and natural way making it easy for those who will read his book. In spite of, he implied the circumstances in his naturalistic way which is the consequence of the "separate but equal" laws. Additionally, the American Supreme court interested from these laws which his situations are the result of these laws and would not be abolished until 1952. The autobiography *Black Boy* portrayed institutionalizing apartheid laws in America. Racism attained its highest points in the period 1920-1960. Besides, the main issue which was symbolized by

different working conditions and rights for African-American people unlike other people especially the Euro-American and the education system was at its worst. One more thing, Euro-American "white people" were allowed to do as they wanted and visited places they wanted to go but African-American people were not allowed to even go to public places such as restaurants, swimming pools and they did not have the right to work in public sector. Such forms of alienation were nowhere to be seen in the Old World until in the 1930s when Nazism controlled Germany (Ezekiel, 1995, p. iv).

At the beginning of his childhood was so hard for Richard Wright to understand racial issue that is why at that moment he could not understand what was occurring and he also was not able to feel that there were any differences between African-American people and Euro-American people. Afterwards, his mind started to open and he began to see practically first differences which were happening around in his daily life that at the first time he could not understand what was happening and see the differences between African-American and Euro-American. Consequently, the time when he started to understand what occurring was the time in which racism were institutionalized in America. Soon after, when he was mature enough to comprehend for seeing the monster called "segregation" wandering the United States. Racism showed its darker side one more.

In his novel *Black Boy*, Richard Wright pointed out that handshakes or any other formal greetings were not permissible between whites and blacks. Furthermore, black teenagers were not allowed to make eye contact with any woman of European descent. Another rule that African-American people had to comply with was that they could not walk on the same pavement as a white lady was approaching in the opposite direction. They had to lower their gaze and move away from that pavement until the lady was gone. Also, when buying clothes, African-American people had to pay for the clothes they wished to try on. In a court of law against a white person a testimony could not be presented by a black person even if it involved a homicide case.

A secret organization which was established in the southern United States was the Ku Klux Klan, a despotic and racist group that upheld the values of white supremacy and oppressed those of different races. Young Richard fascinatingly explained in the novel

*Black Boy* his misunderstanding of those Ku Klux Klan members when he saw them in their white hooded attire for the first time.

Obviously racism is portrayed as a main issue in the novel *Black Boy*. In addition, Richard Wright describes this dilemma with some strange opinions held by some people. In his novel, he pictured racism as a demonic problem that was slowly ruining the foundations of the society that was being built. Some characters in the book are represented as horrible and cruel but also played an important role in the novel as they are cast as main protagonists especially in chapters involving oppression and massacre. Readers of this book will rightfully question on the methods to eradicate racism from the society as they believed it had such a deep impact. In this novel, the people of European descent did not show mercy to Wright and their mercilessness was due to the fact that he is not the same as them; that is he was of African descent. Because of that, Richard Wright had trouble to relate to the whites, even to those who were compassionate with him (Feagin, 2014, p. 116).

Another point, Richard Wright was not very well understood by the members of his own community as he had a different mindset. Growing up among them was painful for Richard as his character, personality and talents often clashed with other black people who were uninterested in believing in him. It is clear that Richard Wright hated white people as proven by his novel *Black Boy* when he criticized their judgments and conceited remarks against black people in America. However, he also he had some kind of hatred against some members of his own community who were forbidding him from acquiring education through books he loved to read. The writer reveals that he is not a well-learned man when he started reading books and he falls in love with writing books with his own stories. Moreover, this novel *Black Boy* is not only an autobiographical novel, those who read the book noticed that he observed and liked to highlight the character of racist people that were around him in his daily life. The main theme of this novel being racism is a vital piece of work for Wright as he described racism to be a nasty thing as it was destroying the society he lived in and also the relationships between the whites and the blacks and also the relationships among the blacks as well.

In this novel *Black Boy* there are many terms used but the major term is "Black". Obviously, as it mentioned before that this novel is an autobiography but the reader noticed that the author is black. But the difference is that he was not only being brought up in America but also he was growing up as someone of African origins. It could be argued that young Richard had no other option but to grow up even if he is labeled as "Black". It is shown in the novel that Richard Wright is an individualistic person and wants to be an important member of the society but on his own terms. He is not comfortable with society putting him down to a certain group and this prompted him to react fiercely against both the whites and the blacks. Richard reveals that none of these two cultures know that how to accept and encourage someone who is unique, extraordinary and amazing. Nevertheless, Richard Wright mentions that he dislikes his only options he has as he considers them to be useless. Richard is looking for another chance. The reader can find out the instances of Wright's reactions in the whole book. Richard reacts to his headmaster at school when he refuses to read a particular essay in his final examination. He starts to stand against these options in his grandmother's house, and against them in many other significant circumstances. It is obvious that Richard enjoys being rebellious. Throughout the novel, his opinions and outlooks cause difficulties for himself and others, but it was not because he was reckless about life but more of the fact is that he hates this outlook. At the beginning, Wright wishes to be as an individual with opinions and feelings so eventually he achieved that.

When the teacher Ella tells Richard about the story of *Bluebeard and His Seven Wives* while he was still child, immediately a very significant moment appears for him. Richard Wright was astounded as he realized that it was the first time in his young life that he had strong feelings. This is not the only circumstance in which Richard is filled with emotions. On the other hand, the reader while reading the novel perceives that this is a most spiritually powerful moment that Richard goes through while he was previously numb and felt nothing. When Richard Wright started to read such horror stories and science-fiction he went through some more exciting moments and he also exposed that in these stories there is a myriad of power in words which is likely have an effect on people around. It is clear that this is portrayed when he utilizes his writing just for the sake of proceeding forward with the Community Party. While he was busy with reading

and writing his own stories he realizes the thought that this is a main factor to make life full of meanings by being creative and innovative. From Richard Wright's writings, many people including some critics perceived him as an existentialist. It was just a great helper to his life experience while Richard focused on writing this novel, which definitely includes numerous imaginative powers (Gayle, 1983, p. 15).

### **3.2 *Black Boy* and Life Conditions**

#### **3.2.1 Hunger and Poverty**

Hunger and poverty occupied a major part in the author's view of the protagonist of the novel due to the prevailing racism that denied him a sound financial status. Being on the wrong end of the existing laws at that time, the black community suffered enormously to provide decent lifestyles and basic amenities to their families.

While reading Richard Wright's novel *Black Boy*, the reader understands that the behavior of the Richard's family is complicated. The constant feeling of hunger was a major issue in the life of young Richard. Being young and naive, Richard did not see racism as evil, but sometimes later, he realized that when his family had to forage for food after the whites have finished eating. The fact that he was poor and destitute provided the key to unlock his destiny. His family moved to Arkansas to live with his Uncle Hoskins and Aunt Maggie. He was able to eat to his heart's content there as his uncle was the owner of a saloon where many people from the black community used to come. Young Richard was so happy to see a large variety of food on the dinner table that he asked his uncle if he could eat as much as he could, to which his uncle replied positively. Later, after he had eaten, Richard confessed that he did not think his uncle was serious when he told him to eat but Richard ate until he felt pain in his stomach. But still he did not want to leave the table as well (Wright, 1998, p.51).

Young Richard could not believe his eyes when he saw the amount of food available at his relatives' house and when he made the comparison between that and his previous experiences. He felt that he was in a dream. As a precaution he would slip a few snacks in his pocket so that when it was time to wake up in the morning, he would have something to eat instead of nothing. He has been so used to constantly feeling hungry



that he once said "when I am with my mother, I wake up to hunger standing beside me" (Wright, 1998, p.15).

It is obvious on page twenty of the novel when Richard Wright was six years his father deserted his family to live with a new-found woman. Then his mother tried to work in a restaurant as a cook in order to feed her two children. After some time his mother took both her kids to the restaurant because she could not leave them both alone at home. Occasionally, while she was busy with cooking, Richard and his little brother would feel the smell of the freshly-cooked meals and would later manage to get hold of some scraps to eat. Richard and his younger brother would sit in a corner and watch their mother doing her chores in the kitchen, moving about one place to another carrying pots and plates and cutlery to do the cooking. He liked being there as sometimes he and his brother were given some food like a piece of loaf or meat. But at other times, he disliked the place as he could smell the delicious foods that his mother was preparing for her white masters and Richard was not allowed to have the same food. While his presence in the house was not disturbing for the owners, Richard himself felt embarrassed as the rampant racism in the society followed him (Wright, 1998, p. 20). Here as he watched his mother cooking, the tasty smells emanating from the kitchen would test Richard's hunger.

Nowadays, very few people know the real meaning of hunger. Nevertheless, in the novel one can read several situations when Richard dismissed physical hunger as non-significant as he believed that there were more pressing matters to attend to. In the novel, Richard Wright described other forms of hunger other than the physical one. Being intelligent, young Richard was more interested in dealing with the other types of hunger that tormented him. For example the hunger to acquire a decent education, the hunger to strive for a better life, the hunger to read, write and express himself in an artistic fashion and the hunger to sort out various problems affecting the community at large. His ideas of love, tolerance and unity were believed to be more important than hunger itself and he even suggested that people around the world should communicate with one another instead of fighting and killing one another that would result in a more

suitable and friendly environment. Richard accessed the society and with the help of his friends and his works he climbed up the social hierarchy.

In his autobiographical novel another main part is his love for reading. Moreover, at the beginning of the novel until the end Richard Wright is hungrier for reading than for food which makes his love for reading same as physical hunger. Richard's desire for food and his desire for reading are somehow interrelated in some parts of the text.

An extremely remarkable incident is narrated in a chapter of his novel on page 29. As mentioned above, his mother was very poor and abandoned by her husband; she was unable to manage the house bills. Poverty is the main factor which forced his family to move to Memphis while Richard was about six years old. She inherited some money from her mother but it did not last long enough to help her look after her two children. After much thinking, she found a job in a restaurant as a dishwasher for white people. But still the money earned from this job was not sufficient to take care of her family. Anyhow, his mother try to focus on her job to feed her two little kids but actually it is so hard for a woman to run her life with two kids at the same time without her husband. She made a painful decision to send her kids to an orphanage. Richard momentarily stayed at the orphanage but after a period of time his mother became sick that is why they had to move to Jackson, Mississippi, and stay at grandfather's house. The orphanage in Richards view was a two-storied building overlooking a vast field. His mother took him and his brother inside the hall and was presented to a tall, elegant woman of mixed race by the name of Ms. Simon who at once liked Richard. But he was intimidated by the woman so much he could not speak during the time he stayed there. Since there was plenty of small children in the orphanage, it was very noisy. Richard was so scared that he did not remember all the details about his time there. He did however remember the feelings he had which were hunger and fear. He was constantly hungry as the meals provided were insufficient and tasteless too. The children were given a piece of loaf with molasses before they went to sleep. All of them complained a lot about the food and sometimes they even threw it away:

The orphan home was a two-story frame building set amid trees in a wide, green field. My mother ushered me and my one morning into the building and into the presence of a tall, gaunt, mulatto woman who

called herself Miss Simon. At once she took a fancy to me and I was frightened speechless; I was afraid of her the moment I saw her and my fear lasted during my entire stay in the home.

The house was crowded with children and there was always a storm of noise. The daily routine was blurred to me and I never quite grasped it. The most abiding feeling I had each day was hunger and fear. The meals were skimpy and there were only two of them. Just before we went to bed each night we were given a slice of bread smeared with molasses. The children were silent, hostile, vindictive, continuously complaining of hunger (Wright, 1998, p. 29).

In the above passage of the novel, Richard Wright explains the horrors he faced in the orphanage. Richard was scared of Ms. Miss Simon who was a very strict director. He could not ask her for more food thereby staying always famished and he could not really understand the rules he was presumed to obey. He found it hard to get accustomed to the environment of the orphanage. Ella, his mother was then forbidden to see him in the orphanage because her visits were deemed as unsuitable by Ms. Simon. As a result, young Richard felt very homesick and became sullen and depressed when his mother was not allowed to see him.

### **3.2.2 Violence**

Another theme of the novel *Black Boy* is violence. It so occurred that when Richard Wright was scolded he was beaten and he was even slapped at his cheek, that is to say other people used violence against him. He had numerous bad encounters with his pious grandmother. He was scolded by the "whites" only when they found his attitude to be intolerable and they would either scold him with words or pour down a glass of whiskey or any alcoholic drinks they were having at the time on his head and face. Both physical and mental violence as shown in every corner his autobiography was essential to its success. At times young Richard was very curious about his surroundings and he would experiment with things around him. For instance he set the curtains of his house ablaze only to see for himself how they looked (Wright, 1998, p. 6). Richard's environment could be termed a violent one. When Richard himself was not being scolded for his misbehavior, he would be the one who would use actual violence. He even narrated that when and his fellows would throw rocks and other small objects they would imagine that they were using more lethal and sophisticated means as weapon for they believed that their actions were justified as they being persecuted (Wright, 1998, p. 84).

Furthermore, his own mother would be the one who instill a sense of self-defense in the child by giving him a thick stick to be used as powerful weapon against the neighboring white kids. In another situation, while going on errands with his mother, he again used his reliable stick to beat some older boys who wanted to beat him and his mother. However, young Richard was also known to be quite cruel when he had a cat hanged only to gain the approval of his father having taken his words as literally as possible and he knew that his father would never punish if ever he did so. In the environment he lived, Richard was compelled to use violence to either make him more heard or he acted out of revenge as in the case of Addie where he threatened her with a knife and set his dwelling on fire.

Richard Wright started his novel by narrating an episode which happened in his young life. He had burnt the curtains and was scared of the repercussions of his acts, he ran away to a hidden place. But he was found by his mother hours later and was severely beaten:

I was lashed so hard and long that I lost consciousness. I was beaten out of my senses and later I found myself in bed, screaming, determined to run away, tussling with my mother and father who were trying to keep me still. I was lost in a fog of fear. A doctor was called - I was afterwards told - and he ordered that I be kept abed, that I be kept quiet, that my very life depended upon it. My body seemed on fire and I could not sleep. Packs of ice were put on my forehead to keep 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. Later, when I grew worse, I could see the bags in the daytime with my eyes open and I was gripped by the fear that they were going to fall and drench me with some horrible liquid. Day and night I begged my mother and father to take the bags away, pointing to them, shaking with terror because no one saw them but me. Exhaustion would make me drift toward sleep and then I would scream until I was awake again; I was afraid to sleep. Time finally bore me away from the dangerous bags and I got well. But for a long time I was chastened whenever I remembered that my mother had come close to killing me (Wright, 1998, p. 8).

Following this situation, Richard got ill and fainted. His parents tried to hold him but he was shouting too much in pain. The doctor came and examined him. He ordered Richard to lie on the bed and not move as if he would die should he get off the bed. To keep the fever down, ice packs were placed on his forehead. But the pain and his body

temperature were so intense that he started to hallucinate. He kept seeing strange things like the full udders of cows hanging from the ceiling. He was very much afraid that the contents of those bags would fall upon him and harm him. He supplicated with his parents to remove the bags that only he could see. He had those nightmares for a few days where he would wake up screaming his heads off every now and then. Finally with time he got better, but he still remembered the time when his mother almost killed him and he felt ashamed of that incident. The preceding quotation shows that young Richard was afraid of his mother and her punishments. He even felt shame when recalling that incident.

There is no law or any rule as to how to begin a chapter or a novel. Richard Wright started the chapter in a violent and brutal fashion and by choosing to do so, he made his introduction more dramatizing and therefore the readers were thrilled. The above-mentioned passage indicated that life itself was ever changing. His mother proved that by being kind and supportive at times and admonishing at others. He feared her very much for she could easily chastise him as well as be compassionate to him "huge, wobbly white bags, like the full udders of cows" (Wright, 1998, p. 8).

But this assumption is not fully depicted in a mortal way as racism was still prevailing in the society. As always, it was the abominable settings from the whites degrading the blacks. However, Wright reconstructed his narrative using metaphors like the "huge wobbly bags" as his mother's breasts which oozed the life-giving white liquid that was milk and the "full udders of cows" as a deadly weapon. He especially feared that the white liquid would asphyxiate him and also helped on his way to establish himself as a dignified person. The novel *Black Boy*, which narrated the life and the perils of Richard Wright began with the time he was born, with the time he took his first breath, with the time he came into being. Moreover, the child Richard only believed his own mother was actually punishing him was when he felt very near to losing his life, the very life given to him by his mother. As a young boy, he said "I was chastened whenever I remembered that my mother had come close to killing me" (Wright, 1998, p. 8). He would later compile those excruciating experiences into his book.

Those compiled verses of the various experiences of Wright could easily be interpreted in many ways. The way he described the waters of the river Mississippi can be attributed to the fact that young Richard was imagining those different sources. It put his tremendous amount of imagination to the test as it showed his embodiment of the senses of real living and surfing on the bed of dreams and fantasy and journey and of different schemes of possibility. The power of his imaginative mind was so strong that the feelings he had were almost impossible to set in words. Here he described the scenery he saw and the feelings that washed over him. For instance, when he first saw horses galloping on the slopes of a mountain, the colorful vegetables on the sides of the road, the elation he felt when he ran in the green meadows and feeling the dew on his skin, the amazement when he watched a tiny ant carrying something much bigger than its size and moving on its own path or the feeling of derision when he tortured a crawfish which found its way in a tin can. He also recalled the colors emanating from the clouds from an unseen sun (Wright, 1998, p. 8-9).

Richard Wright was of the belief that a concrete balance between the moments of uncertainty when he was under the impression that he was about to lose his life and the great senses of travelling through a range of dreams and imagination.

It is fascinating to note that most scenes described in the novel are interconnected with one another. Another scene which is deemed worthy of interest involves Richard's mother telling him that they are leaving for Memphis on the boat named *Kate Adams*.

One day my mother told me that we were going to Memphis on a boat, the Kate Adams, and my eagerness thereafter made the days seem endless. Each night I went to bed hoping that the next morning would be the day of departure.

'How big is the boat?' I asked my mother.

As big as a mountain, she said.

Has it got a whistle?

Yes.

Does the whistle blow?

Yes.

When?

When the captain wants it to blow.

Why do they call it the Kate Adams?

Because that's the boat's name.

What color is the boat?

White.

How long will we be on the boat?

All day and all night.  
Will we sleep on the boat?  
Yes, when we get sleepy, we'll sleep. Now, hush (Wright, 1998, p. 10).

The unlimited amount of imagination that young Richard possessed would serve as a means to enlighten his day to day activities which were by no means entertaining and full of grandeur. It served the purpose of adding a bit of saga in his life, one which each and everybody needs. However, this was all pure fantasy for he was unable to distract himself from the realities of the world in which he and his family lived. He was a pauper and on top of that, black, which meant that he was very much unwelcome and was deprived of certain joys. The avid readers at once noticed that this poor fellow was doomed from the start and that he would be incapable of fulfilling his various dreams and ambitions.

There is a thing connected to powerlessness that arises from the repeated variation which one starts to see even plotted in the initial three chapters, and the trouble with powerlessness is first located not centrally in that social world. The reader is not meant to understand that the young Richard Wright when he discovers that the *Kate Adams* is a dirty, little boat and that it is not the romantic vision of a ship he had dreamt of, thoughts became to form in Richard's mind. It is simply an experience of disappointment. It was a moment felt by someone being let down. The most intense feeling of inability seen in the first chapter in a scene involving his mother almost beating the life out of him is embedded in the family. And the reader gets such a dramatic vision of that in another scene which follows, the scene talking about the kitten.

The job of Richard's father takes place at night and during the day he rest. So the children had to remain quiet at all times and not disturb him during his naps. The meowing of a neighboring cat deeply affected the peace that his father enjoyed during the day and he became very irascible by the sounds of the cat. He even told the boys to silence the cat for good if need be "Make that cat shut up" he would tell them but they cannot, Richard already despised his father for many reasons "Make it shut up. I don't care. Kill it if you have to. Kill that cat" (Wright, 1998, p. 12). He was aware that his father would soon leave the family to fend for themselves as he was enchanted by another dazzling beauty. For Richard, it is most that particular kind of person: a rude,

upset, abusive person that he loathed above all. His resentment over his powerlessness within the family bursts out during this moment and Richard thinks of a way to play a revenge on his father. He immediately acted upon the direct orders of his father and killed the animal by hanging it, "I will take his words literally; I will kill the cat," (Wright, 1998, p. 13). Richard's mother finds out when his brother prodded it out of him, and the father cannot punish Richard. Richard has taken the father's words literally even though they were not meant that way, however, in doing so, in relying on his father's words in a sense, to protect him, even as he subverts them, he escapes the punishment that would surely follow. Richard Wright's own vocabulary came into existence when he started using the very same words uttered by his much despised father and also certain words which he either invented himself or distorted other words to create new ones. He would then later use those same words in his essays to cause a vilifying effect. Thus, words became Wright's preferred weapons. To enhance his own intellectual power and development, he copied Mencken's idea of words as weapons in the view to achieve a political meaning. For Wright thought that he was now able to assert his own independence and have his dreams and ideas come to fruition. He was no longer under the dominance of his own father. But his mother was not to be fooled or even scared by this new found development. Richard's mother was more resourceful than his father and attacked her son in such a way that he it made him ashamed of what he had done earlier, that is the killing of an innocent kitten. Throughout the afternoon she kept on admonishing him with carefully chosen words that according to Richard started to create fears that the kitten would want revenge on him. He became so worried that he was afraid to go into an empty room alone. Even apologizing to his mother was not enough to assuage her stance. Here, we can see that by taking his father's words literally, young Richard was able to demonstrate that he was not to be intimidated by his father. He stood up to him and knew he had the upper hand. His father could not beat him up for killing the kitten because he knew Richard would never listen to him again. However, his mother knew how to punish him and make him feel guilty without violence (Wright, 1998, p. 13).

His mother had her personal manner in which she could employ the words properly to achieve the desired effects on her son. She would use words in a much more powerful



way, but with a different intent so as to make that kitten killed by Richard be reborn in his mind. In that episode, Richard Wright's mother became the main character where she absorbed the soul of the dead kitten in order to make his life like hell. In Richard's mind there was now a conflict he could not fully understand. While he had power over his father by using words, those same words would then be used against Richard by his nonsense mother.

Suspense upon suspense kept on piling up as the plot thickened. The highlight is the language used in the book. While that novel *Black Boy* was about the life, trials, problems, tribulations, oppressions suffered by the author when being brought up in Southern America and at same time being black and poor, it also narrated the way in the author managed to educate himself enough to enable himself to use different wordings to convey his messages. Acquiring of power was the focus of the initial scenes and language later became the focal point. However, the power exerted by words in any given language is such that it cannot be fashioned to any specific meaning or significance. Words can be interpreted by anyone wishing them to have an alternate meaning. Richard learned that particular lesson when realized that his words did not have the similar effects on his mother as they did on his father.

In a completely different setting where violence would again occur in the life of young Richard was he went on errands for his mother. It was a very ordinary scene. Richard recalled in the beginning of his book of an incident that occurred when he was six:

Go on and don't pay any attention to them, she said.  
I went out of the door and walked briskly down the sidewalk,  
praying that the gang would not molest me. But when I came abreast  
of them someone shouted.  
There he is!  
They came toward me and I broke into a wild run toward home.  
They overtook me and flung me to the pavement. I yelled,  
pleaded, kicked, but they wrenched the money out of my hand.  
They yanked me to my feet, gave me a few slaps, and sent me  
home sobbing. My mother met me at the door.  
They b-beat m-me, I gasped. They t-t-took the m-money.  
I started up the steps, seeking the shelter of the house.  
Don't you come in here, 'my mother warned me.  
I froze in my tracks and stared at her.  
But they're coming after me, I said.

You just stay right where you are, she said in a deadly tone. I'm going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself (Wright, 1998, p. 18).

In the above quote, Richard was told to go to the market and get a few things. His mother gave him the money and told him not to pay any attention to the gang of older boys on the streets. However, he ran into the gang of older boys who dashed towards him, hit him, took off with his money despite his many pleas and sent him to his home. Young Richard was very shaken and started weeping. He came back to his home to stay away from the streets, but his strict mother refused to allow him inside unless he brought home the groceries. He pleaded with his mother with no success. The mother then gave him some money again and told him that she was going to teach him how to stand up to others. This scene shows that Richard is armed with a stick and advice from his mother in order to teach him how to protect himself through his difficult times.

His mother handed him some money again, but this time she also gave him a pole to be used in case he was mugged for second time. Richard was scared. He did not want to face those goons again. But his mother was adamant. Richard reluctantly pocketed the money and ran to the market. With tears flowing freely from his eyes Richard left. Upon finding that little Richard was back again, the older lads went straight for him with intent to thrash the living out of him. Richard had two choices. Either stand up against those boys or return home where he would face the music from his mother. He made a decision to stand his grounds and confronts the guys. Sometimes black people reacted violently to the racism and oppression they faced on a regular basis. The stick given to him by his mother was the right tool to be used when encountering such dangers and young Richard did just that. He beat up those same guys who took his money earlier with the stick. He used the stick expertly on the older boys. He felt the weapon crack the skull of one of them and continued to strike hitting another on the face breaking his nose. He squared up to them even taunting them to come near him and beat him. He wanted to hurt them so much as to kill them so that they did not hurt him again. The gang ran away injured. When their parents came out to threaten him, he hurled abuse at them too which was the first time in his young life that he did so. He felt he could beat up and hurt the elders as well if they upset him. He collected the money and grocery list

he dropped and made his way to the market once more. He did not throw the stick away for it was a useful weapon in case he was attacked again. That day he felt brave enough to walk on the streets on Memphis all alone (Wright, 1998, p. 19). In this scene, Richard used the stick and the advice given to him by his formidable mother to gain the independence he wanted and also to stand up to abuses from others.

Moreover, there had also been several incidents where the black boy reacted to the racial discrimination and abuse by similarly calling their abusers names not fit for a civilized society. Such names were very hurtful and included the likes of "white bastard", "sons of bitches", and so on. This means that, when one reads this part of the book for the first time, one must ponder how Wright's mother could be so strict, inflexible and uncaring. It seemed that she was not troubled for her son. Many readers were asking the same question. They were asking whether or not she would have been upset that her son came back home injured (Wright, 1998, p. 81). His mother sends him to buy groceries outside home but the money that she has given him is taken by some teenagers on the street. Then, he is given more money again and a big stick by his mother for defending himself against the teenagers on the street. In addition, his mother says to him that "I'm going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself". At that time, he is about six years. He goes out arrogantly and returned to the home with the groceries (Wright, 1998, p. 18). Suppose the same incidents happen nowadays, most people will barely comprehend that such woman being on top of that a mother to a growing child would actually react in that kind of way. It is important to point out that the story was set in the 1920s when racial discrimination and alienation of the different races were at its peak. The aim of his mother's actions was to instruct Richard on the manner to protect himself and to live in those difficult periods. She was absolutely right to help her child and her fight did not go to waste that evening. Richard Wright was able to walk on the roads of Memphis by standing up to the gang. He became more daring and the mother ascertains herself that her son was able to look after himself. Needless to say that many of the inhabitants were taking necessary measures during those precarious times in the same way Richard Wright's mother who was trying to teach her son that it was crucial to struggle for life.

### **3.2.3 Alcohol**

The reader could consider the scene where little Richard got drinks in a bar. People would give him money and drinks to convey messages to other drinkers in the bar, mostly to women and men would want to chat up. After getting the money and the drinks, Richard would simply go up a woman and tell her exactly what the men said to him. Thus eliciting a raucous laughter from the men who had the most fun by seeing how little Richard would act and do what he was told. Richard had no idea what he was actually saying and simply repeated the things to say to another fellow in the bar.

At a young age and with the time he spent in the saloons, Richard became a drunkard and also discovered that he could learn about the language by doing those odd jobs. Language has unexplained influence. It has the gift to influence the proceedings of world matters which Richard had no bearing on its awesome power. When he overcame his alcohol addiction - his mother kept him safe in the house to be certain he could not go to the saloons and then she brought him to her workplace, so that he got rid of that drinking habit in the bar with strange people. In the text following the start of the novel, little Richard started to ask several questions, some of which pertained to the natural structure of the world. Growing up young Richard was very inquisitive. One day he asked his mother about the origins of his grandmother. He noticed that she did not have the same skin color as his or his mother's; she looked different, paler. He did tell his mother that granny looked white and ask why she was living with them in the same house. His mother asked him back whether he did not want granny to live with them to which he replied positively. They continued to argue for a while until his mother told him to ask his grandmother those questions directly. He asked if granny became colored when she got married to his grandfather. His mother replied with anger that granny was never colored and that she was born in the color she was and she told Richard to quit asking stupid queries. However, Richard was not yet convinced and believed that the truth was still there lying hidden under the sheer reality of the situations. He kept asking the questions until finally his mother got fed up and slapped hard across his face. Afterwards, rather reluctantly she told him that granny had Irish, Scottish and French bloods to which African blood was mixed in a way. She said all that without showing any emotions (Wright, 1998, p. 48-49). Here, it can be noticed that Richard's mind was

sharp and he was aware of his surroundings. He could detect anomalies easily and was curious enough to ask questions.

However, young Richard overcame his addiction to alcohol by indulging in his new-found interest which was to acquire as much knowledge and literacy as possible. The experience he gained of having words spoken to him and what he had to do with them, even though he had no clue as to the meanings of those words, made young Richard even more interested in learning as the time he used to take everything especially the words of his father thrown at him. A famous scene in the novel he narrated was when his grandmother was bathing Richard and his brother in the tub, and young Richard told his grandmother after she washed his backside "When you're finished, kiss back there" (Wright, 1998, p. 42). And she got really mad and she was seen chasing him around the house with a wet towel with the intention to whip him and give him a lesson. Upon hearing the commotion, Richard's mother got off her bed to see what the matter was. She asked her mother but she was too shocked and appalled by the impertinence of Richard to give an answer. Richard also could not speak as he knew he said something really awful and he stood in the hallway naked ready to run away if need be. His mother continued trying to get an answer from everybody present in the house including her younger son until granny started crying with rage and told her what Richard said earlier. In fact she repeated the exact words Richard used. By then, Richard's mother was shocked and she could not believe her ears. She even tried to take Richard's side but her mother insisted on what he told her (Wright, 1998, p. 43). In this case, we can see that Richard was still naive and did not know what he was saying. He could have learned those words from an irresponsible person in the vicinity and tried them on his grandmother.

This is a very fascinating but sad scene of powerlessness in his family, where he was the victim of violence. However, in this particular case it is a reaction produced in the negative manner not unlike the reactions that occurred in the bar. He said something which he did not really understand the origin of it. He could not understand why his grandmother was furious with as he was unable to fully explain his words.

So there it was the sense of the story of a novice writer who was still in the learning process. He had no mastery over the language yet and did not know that language had those attributes. However, there is another feature to the kind of language that Wright was illustrating and that was the racial issue. He was learning a language filled with racial connotations. Any discussion among Richard and his friends may be tricky to understand by an outsider because the wordings were usually in the form of racial slurs:

Hey. Timidly.  
You eat yet? Uneasily trying to make conversation.  
Yeah, man. I done really fed my face. Casually.  
I had cabbage and potatoes. Confidently.  
I had buttermilk and black-eyed peas. Meekly informational.  
Hell, I ain't gonna stand near you, nigger! Pronouncement.  
How come? Feigned innocence.  
Cause you gonna smell up this air in a minute! A shouted accusation.  
Laughter runs trough the crowd.  
Nigger, your mind's in a ditch. Amusingly moralistic.  
Ditch, nothing! Nigger, you going to greak wind any minute now!  
Triumphant pronouncement creating suspense.  
Yeah, when them black-eyed peas tell that buttermilk to move over,  
that butter milk ain'tgonnawanna move and there's gonna be war in  
your guts and your stomach's gonna swell up and burst! Climax.  
The crowd laughs loud and long.  
Man, them white folks oughta catch you and send you to the zoo and  
keep you for the next war! Throwing the subject into a wider field.  
Then when that fighting starts, they oughta feed you on buttermilk and  
black-eyed peas and let you break wind! The subject is accepted and  
extended (Wright, 1998, p. 80).

The previous excerpt from the novel demonstrates that the used language is filled with jargons and slangs. Sometimes racist remarks are employed to create an agreed atmosphere. This type of language may seem inappropriate but to the black youth, it was a way to show their manhood. One can note the dual meaning in the above quote where the narration began to break in a deliberate way. The conversation among his friends occurred in the past while the reader reads in current times and notices the language used to attach the events that happened especially in the south of America. Richard Wright used the classic ideas of story-telling to help the readers understand his life experience in a better light. Sometimes he used a comic or witty sense to raise topics of discussion which may turn out to be embarrassing or risky if approached directly. The type of language used by Richard Wright in his books is that of a writer who is still in the learning curve that is that the writer is learning the language both at home with his

family and in the hostile environment of the society he lives in with all the social and racial aspects it contains. It is noteworthy to remember the time when young Richard asked his mother about the origins of his grandmother. The latter looked pale-skinned but was labeled as black in the community she lived. Richard's mother was quite angry and embarrassed by his questions and refused to answer them. In a way, Richard was learning a language which would help him write his books and also bring enlighten his family. The dual meaning of the language as talked about by W.E.B DuBois is seen in this story.

At first Richard Wright was very familiar with the acts of terror and abuse suffered by the black community at the hands of the white community. For instance, there were many such incidents like a white American lady slapping a black one across the face or that of a white American man shooting to death a black man. Later he met with his own experience when his uncle was fired at, or when his black mother not securing work. He was deeply saddened by those events. He began to really hate the white people when he noticed that his community was being persecuted in all aspects of life. Wright's grandmother was a woman whose faith never faltered and she kept saying that books and manuscripts are designs of the Satan. Her religious beliefs influenced Richard's life as well. His life was comparable to the jail life as narrated in the novel *Black Boy*. Being short on funds, he kept on searching for work. He was forced to work for people he loathed especially the whites.

Richard Wright felt abandoned by his own people and family and that left him very distraught. He was an ardent opponent of racism for most of his life and he particularly despised the principles in place in Southern America for they allowed the segregation and subjugation of people of different races. His life experiences played an important role in molding his personality and by extension his works.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The novel *Black Boy* centers on racism. Richard Wright was born in an African-American family in the state of Tennessee in 1908. During his lifetime, racial discrimination was prevalent in the American society due to the implementation of the *Jim Crow Laws* under which the black community suffered a lot. By his experiences and understandings, Richard Wright pinpointed racism as a malevolent issue that plagued the entire society. As narrated by Richard in his book, he was the target for various types of racism. He noticed a white man hitting a black boy when he was a child but did not pay any heed to it as he was under the impression that the man was the boy's parent. At home the subject of racism was never discussed and his mother would either refuse to answer his questions or simply change the subject of conversation. While working at a clothing outlet, Richard saw his superiors abusing the non-white clients, often kicking them out of the store. Richard himself was exposed to racial bigotry from his white colleagues when he was fired from his job at an eyewear store.

Fighting and violence are other major themes in the novel *Black Boy*. They were ever-present in the early life of Richard, be it at home or at outside home. He thought that using violence was the right way to grow in the society but later he realized that was never good or appropriate for progress. A society that characterized itself on the basis of racial profiling was always going to implode according to Richard and he did not want any part of it even when his friends told him to fight. Violence is also widely depicted in the novel. He was subjected to what he called violence when he was punished or smacked. But there was no indication that he was beaten by a white person. In fact, the only times when he was humiliated by the whites were when they could not tolerate his attitude or behavior. But then again, he was not physically beaten. Instead beer or whiskey or brandy was thrown to his face. The success of his book owed a great deal to those types of violence. Richard was curious by nature. One day he set fire to the curtains of his house in order to observe the effects. Violence also occurred in his



neighborhood. When he was not being punished or humiliated, Richard and his gang would employ violence as a means to avenge the attacks on his community. They would retaliate by throwing rocks and small objects at people or buildings envisioning that they were deadly weapons to cause as much damage as possible.

Richard Wright's autobiography, *Black Boy*, recounts his life and his numerous struggles against the prevalent racism that consumed the American society in the early 1900s. He also gave detailed explanations on the hardships he faced as moved from one city to another, from south to north. In fact, he described the lives and difficulties of many African-Americans living in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.

A very personal story of the life of Richard Wright is told in his autobiography. It narrates his early childhood and adult life as well. To grow up in a bigoted part of the United States proved to be difficult for Richard as he could not understand the rampant incidents of racism and also the elders in his community declined to tell more about it. He decided to move to another city in the northern parts of the country. The novel depicts the hardships faced by all colored people especially the African-Americans in a society filled with blatant accounts of racism and subjugation.

Richard Wright's upbringing was tough. He was poor. He felt hunger on a daily basis both on the physical and mental level. He was constantly belittled at home as well. When he lived with his grandmother, he had to deal with her overzealous reactions with respect to religious values. When he lived with Aunt Addie, he had to deal with her lack of confidence at school and when his mother suffered a stroke, he felt trapped in his quest to acquire more knowledge. In the outside world, Richard faced many hardships related to racism including the incident at the jewelry store when he was fired because of his skin color. He felt very distraught when he got the news that his uncle was killed by a mob of white people for no apparent reason except that he was black. However, Richard was a talented young boy and he used his talents of writing and his determination to escape the injustice in the South to create awareness about the social injustice that was taking place in the society. He wrote a short story at the age of six and he later became one of the most respected writers in the history of Black American Literature. That occurred at a time when the members of his community were deprived

of civil rights. While the Constitution of the United States of America openly states that everybody is born with equal rights, the Southern states did not pay any attention to that clause. The blacks there were severely punished for trivial reasons like looking at a white person in the eyes. Arrests, beatings and lynching were among the most common forms of punishments.

Despite his miserable life on the plantation fields in Mississippi, Richard was bright enough to manage to escape that life and be successful. He attributed his intelligence, perseverance and desire to fight back as his most important inspirations. Independence was essential to Richard's aspirations. He showed his total detachment to everyone in his book. He never accepted any help from others even in dire circumstances. From a young age, he learned to shoulder responsibilities. He took over the role of the man of the house when his mother was sick. He narrated that he did not feel like a child and was ashamed to beg for help from his neighbors. While staying with his grandmother, he dreamt of moving to Chicago to become a full-fledge writer especially after his story *The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre* was mocked and he did not receive any support. He was very happy when he felt the weight of the burden of responsibilities was lifted off his young shoulders and he did not have to put up with the annoying opinions of others which would otherwise keep him downtrodden.

Additionally, his desire not to be bullied by other people was another point that led to Richard's eventual success as an influential writer. It first happened at the age of four when his irritable father gave him a direct order to kill a small cat that was meowing constantly and disturbing his sleep. At that time Richard and his brother were playing outside the house and Richard took his words literally to shut down the cat once and for all. He knew his father did not mean him to actually kill the animal but he did so to put an end to his father's authority. Furthermore he knew his father could never punish him for doing such a thing. This would have indeed undermined his authority. Another incident that pointed to his rebellious nature happened when he was asked by the principal of his school to give a speech at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade graduation ceremony as Richard was selected as the class valedictorian. Both Richard and the principal had written a speech. The principal told him that he would not graduate if he did not read the

principal's speech. Richard answered that the 9<sup>th</sup> grade diploma would be of no use to him in life. But he did not lay the blame at the principal's feet and preferred to stand his grounds. This showed that even at a young age Richard was resolute and did not accept to be forced to follow rules even from a respected adult.

The intelligence shown by Richard was both innate and acquired. Despite not having a formal education, Richard was striving for knowledge which he craved for. At the age of four, Richard showed his propensity as a quick learner for the first time. An incident happened when his mother gave him the responsibility to pay for the coal she ordered earlier. The delivery arrived and Richard paid the man with the money his mother had given to him in the morning. The delivery man asked him about the change he owed to Richard and he replied that he did not know how to count. Then the delivery man taught him about numbers which his young mind absorbed. Within an hour, young Richard succeeded in learning to count up to a hundred and also some simple additions. When his mother returned home that night, she was shocked to find his young child being able to count up to a hundred when Richard told her to stand still and listen to him. Afterwards, Richard's mother helped him acquire more knowledge by teaching him read short stories and Sunday newspapers. She guided him by spelling some of the words.

Richard's perseverance also led him to success. He never allowed himself to move away from any challenge. While some of those challenges would probably deter most people, Richard persevered to attain his goal. It was again at the age of four that he faced his first problem. He was assigned by his mother to be one to go to the grocery store and buy the food. He went to the market alone that day but was mugged by a group of older boys. He went back home to tell his mother what happened and was again ordered to buy the food at the market. This time again, he was beaten by the gang. His mother was not pleased to see him come without the groceries and taught him to stand up to those delinquents by giving a stick to use as a weapon. He again went to the market and when the gang saw him again they made a beeline for him to again steal his money. But Richard hit them as hard as he could with the stick and the older boys ran away. That quality remained an integral part of his personality.

To conclude, it is noted that the rebellious, independent and perseverant natures and intelligence of Richard Wright helped him on his way to greatness as he shed his past life experiences to be considered as one of the most prominent writers of the African-American Literature. The novel *Black Boy* provides an obvious outline on the manner to treat and respect other people despite the differences in the color of their skins. Richard Wright showed in his book that racism should not be tolerated in modern societies and also pointed to the fact that people have the same feelings although they are distinct in their physical features.



## REFERENCES

- Andrews, W. and Taylor, D.** (2003). *Richard Wright's Black boy (American hunger)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Asante Philip G, P.** (2014). *The Truth about Racism: It's Origins, Legacy, and How God Wants Us to Deal with It*. Nashville, Tennessee, United States: WestBowPres.
- Atkins, S.** (2011). *Encyclopedia of right-wing extremism in modern American history*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO.
- Barnes, A.S.,** (1986). *Black women: interpersonal relationships in profile: a sociological study of work, home, and the community*, Bristol, Ind., U.S.A.: Wyndham Hall Press.
- Bigsby, C.** (1971). *The Black American writer*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Bigsby, C.** (1980). *The second Black renaissance*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Blight, D.** (2001). *Race and reunion*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Bloom, H.,** (2006). *Richard Wright's Black boy*, New York: Chelsea House.
- Brown, N. and Stentiford, B.** (2008). *The Jim Crow encyclopedia*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Brown, N.L.M.,** (2014). *Jim Crow: a historical encyclopedia of the American mosaic*, Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.
- Chrysochoos, J.** (2009). *In reason we trust*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: RoseDog Books.
- Coyle, M.** (1990). *Encyclopedia of Literature and criticism*. London: Routledge.
- Davis, C.T. & Gates, H.L.,** (1991). *The Slave's Narrative*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Douglass, F.** (2003). *The life and times of Frederick Douglass*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications.
- Epps, H.,** (2012). *A Concise Chronicle History of the African-American People Experience in America*, North Charleston SC: Create space.

- Ezekiel, R.S.**, (1996). *The racist mind: portraits of American Neo-Nazis and Klansmen*, New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books.
- Fabre, M.**, (1993). *The unfinished quest of Richard Wright* 2nd ed., Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Feagin, J.R.**, (2014). *Racist America: roots, current realities, and future reparations* Third., New York: Routledge.
- Finkelman, P.** (2006). *Encyclopedia of African American history, 1619-1895*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Foner, P.S.**, (1987). *American communism and black Americans: a documentary history.*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Fredrickson, G.M.**, (2015). *Racism: A Short History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Furnas, J.** (1956). *Goodbye to Uncle Tom*. New York: W. Sloane Associates.
- Gates, H.L.**, (1993). *Richard Wright: critical perspectives past and present*, New York: Amistad:
- Gayle, A.**, (1983). *Richard Wright: ordeal of a native son*, Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith.
- Gibson, K.**, (2003). *The cycle of racial oppression in Guyana*, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.
- Graham, M.**, (2011). *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- High, P.B.**, (1986). *An outline of American literature*, London: Longman.
- Hoffman, D.**, (1979). *Harvard guide to contemporary American writing*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Horton, J.O.**, (2005). *Landmarks of African American history*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Johnson, J.W. & Johnson, J.R.**, (2002). *The books of American Negro spirituals* Da Capo Press pbk., Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press.
- Keller, F.R.**, (1968). The Harlem Literary Renaissance. *The North American Review*, 253(3), 29–34.
- Kinnamon, K.**, (1990). *New essays on Native son*, Cambridge [England: Cambridge University Press.

- Kolchin, P.**, (1993). *American Slavery, 1619-1877*, London [etc.: Penguin Books.
- Lash, J.S.**, (1947). What Is "Negro Literature"? *College English*, 9(1), 37–42
- Lewis, M. & Serbu, J.**, (1999). Kōmmemorating the Ku Klux Klan. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 40(1), 139–158.
- Lomotey, K.**, (2010). *Encyclopedia of African American education*, Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Marger, M.**, (2014). *Race and ethnic relations: American and global perspectives* Tenth., Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co.
- McDowall, D.**, (1989). *An illustrated history of Britain*, Harlow: Longman.
- Mitchell, A.**, (1994). *Within the circle: an anthology of African American literary criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the present*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Morgan, K.**, (2007). *Slavery and the British empire from Africa to America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Muir, D.E.**, (1993). Race: The Mythic Root of Racism. *Sociological Inquiry*, 63, 339–350.
- Muldoon, K.M.**, (2015). *The Jim Crow Era*, North Mankato, Minneseta: ABDO.
- pez, I.**, (2003). *Racism on trial the Chicano fight for justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Quarles, B.**, (1969). *The Negro in the making of America Rev.*, New York: Collier Books.
- Rampersad, A.**, (1995). *Richard Wright: a collection of critical essays*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Rampersad, A.**, (2003). The Book That Launched the Harlem Renaissance. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 38, 87–91.
- Robinson, W.H.**, (1969). *Early black American poets; selections with biographical and critical introductions*, Dubuque, Iowa: W.C. Brown Co.
- Sargent, F.O.**, (2004). *The civil rights revolution: events and leaders, 1955-1968*, Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.

- Smarsh, S.,** (2010). *It happened in Kansas remarkable events that shaped history*, Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot.
- Smith, V.W.,** (2001). *Richard Wright's travel writings new reflections*, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press.
- Ward, J.W.,** (2008). *The Richard Wright encyclopedia*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Whitlow, R.,** (1973). *Black American literature; a critical history*, Chicago: Nelson Hall.
- Whitman, W. & Schmidgall, G.,** (1999). *Selected poems: 1855 - 1892 A new.*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Williams, R. & Beard, B.,** (2009). *This day in civil rights history*, Montgomery, AL: New South Books.
- Wilson, J.J.,** (2013). *Civil rights movement*, Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood.
- Wishart, D.J.,** (2004). *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press.
- Wormser, R.,** (2003). *The rise and fall of Jim Crow*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Wright, R.,** (1966). *Native Son*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Wright, R.,** (1998). *Black boy: (American hunger): a record of childhood and youth*, New York: Perennial Classics.
- Zinn, H.,** (2009). *The Zinn reader: writings on disobedience and democracy* 2nd ed., New York: Seven Stories Press.



## RESUME



**Name Surname:** Darbaz Azeez Sadeq

**Place and Date of Birth:** 29/July/1989

**E-Mail:** Darbaz\_eng@yahoo.com

### EDUCATION:

- **Bachelor:** 2012, Salahaddin University, College of Languages, English Department
- **Master:** 2016, Istanbul Aydin University, English language, English language and literature program

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND REWARDS

#### PUBLICATIONS/PRESENTATIONS ON THE THESIS:

- **Sadeq, Darbaz Azeez.** (2016). The Projection of Racism in Richard Wright's Black Boy. *The International Journal Of Media, Culture and Literature.*