

Bigger Thomas's Psychological fractures in
Richard Nathaniel Wright's *Native Son*

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Abstract

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

ملخص

من خلال 'الابن الأصلي'، ريتشارد رايت يوضح الطرق التي عملت بها العنصرية البيضاء على دفع السود الى حالة من الضغوط النفسية و العقلية الخطيرة الى أن حولتهم لأفراد متقادين دون وعي و بعيدين كل البعد عن التفكير في الاندماج في المجتمع الأبيض. بعبارة أخرى الخوف الناجم في انفس السود دفعهم للبقاء بعيدين عن تهديد المجتمع الأبيض من خلال محاولات الانتماء. يضطر السود تحت وطأة الفقر على العمل بخضوع لمضطهديم البيض، في حين يصور الصحفيون السود باستمرار كمتوحشين و معدومي الانسانية. وفي ظل هذه الظروف، فإن المنطق الثقافي للقوة العنصرية دفعت 'أكبر' لخلق شخصيتين مختلفتين لمساعدته في العيش في كلي المجتمعين، الأبيض والأسود. عمل 'أكبر' مع العصابات في مجتمع السود بشخصية قيادية لأنه قيل له أن البقاء للأقوى، ويعمل بشخصية مستسلمة أمام البيض، الشخصية المتوقعة منه تقديمها، لتكون مقبولة من البيض أي كما النمطية التي صممتها البيض لبني جنسه.

Key words: *Native Son*, black, white, persona, stereotype, Bigger Thomas, fear, hatred.

Introduction

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

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

Uncertainty and a Double Identity:

Bigger does not know what his identity is. He did not receive plenty of love and support as a child to give him the

essential confidence needed for him to fight for a position in life. Instead, he played the stereotyped role designed for a poor black man in the streets of Chicago. Bigger often was in trouble with the law. He stole from stores and carried weapons. He even fought with the guys he hung out with. He did not have a job even though his family had very little to survive economically. These are all traits of the 'bad Negro,' which is another reason for calling him 'Bigger.'

Because of the psychological delusion caused by the racial terror environment that he was forced to deal with; Bigger ended up having a completely unstable identity. He was forced to pretend to be strong because he lived in a tough neighborhood for the reason that in the ghettos the survival is for the fittest. There were also Negroes who became obedient with time to whites but they try to use an artificial language in front of whites.

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

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

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

'Please, Bigger, take 'im out,' Vera begged. 'Aw, don't be so scary,' Buddy said. The woman on the bed continued to sob. Bigger took a piece of newspaper and gingerly lifted the rat by its tail and held it out at arm's length.⁽¹⁾

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

Besides the perfect arrangement of events he gives a thematic example in order to read the images and events of

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

If we analyze Bigger's personality, we see that his exchanges with others are controlled by his efforts to be as anticipated by acting according to the expected type, and Bigger also has the problem of not being able to show his feelings to others. In addition to all these disturbances, Bigger's mixed duality has damaged him at the very center of his being. Few critics claim that Bigger's real problem is that his sense of self is based on artifice that with time he ends with no identity at all. The only emotion that defined Bigger's identity is extreme fear.⁽²⁾

Bigger's Self-denial and Fear:

1- Self-denial:

The hostilities lived by Bigger and the immovable social barriers that forced him to believe that he is nothing, neither a man nor something else. In one passage, Bigger declares that a black man living in white man's world is no man⁽³⁾. Such kind of statement shows that the white society was successful in erasing the black man's personality and identity that threw Bigger, and all those like him, into a long extended period of self-denial.

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

'That plane writing up there,' Bigger said,

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

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

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

'It better be funny,' Gus said.

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

'Cause if I took a plane up I'd take a couple of bombs along and drop'em as sure hell...'⁽⁴⁾

Besides being out of modernity and progression, there are other scenes that show how the white society uses delusion in order to banish the real self of the African American. As an example, Bigger is going to be accused of rape. The rape accusations against him are a way that aims to hide and shed light away from the real identity of the black, and hid him behind the black rapist myth. Imposing the black rapist myth upon blacks has kept them in the most terrifying and disgraceful image. In 'How Bigger Was Born' Wright says that the rapist myth became a symbol to refer to the Negro's uncertain position in America⁽⁵⁾. Therefore, the struggle for identity is a feature that gathers the whole black society. They can never reach the promised status which was reserved for whites.

Additionally, the white society found it necessary to prevent blacks from developing psychologically and holding them in the position of children. To note, the most unifying element in Wright's work is the struggle for self-possession, a struggle to be fully human and free. Through the whole novel Bigger searched for his manliness⁽⁶⁾. Since maleness is so central to Bigger's characterization, his quest for self-possession can be easily seen as a quest for manhood. Bigger is meant by Wright as a type that characterizes the whole black society in the Jim Crow Era, and this condition is much applied to the different black males that are just like Bigger.

Bigger knows that he is limited by society, but he does not possess the resources to combat the injustices he experiences. He has no father, which creates the burden of having to support the rest of his family. Bigger is under constant pressure from his mother, who nags and pleads with him to get a job and to become a real man. 'We would't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you,' she says.⁽⁷⁾ She has no goals for herself or for Bigger, other than moving out of their rat-infested apartment. Bigger has no significant education, skills, or talents. He also lacks confidence and determination.

Bigger really possesses only the understanding that he is worthless in the white man's world. This is a kind of self-realization, but he still has no ability to make connections with other people. Bigger does not feel morally attached to his girlfriend, Bessie, or his friends. His family and their poor condition angers him: 'He shut [his family's] voices out of his mind. He hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them'⁽⁸⁾. Bigger's life is full of hatred, coldness, and isolation. Moments after he accidentally kills Mary Dalton, 'Thought and feeling were balked in him; there was something he was trying to tell himself, desperately, but could not'⁽⁹⁾. Nothing and no one in Bigger's life can help him, so he is unable to mentally flourish and make sense of himself.

2- Bigger's Fear:

Richard Wright's great achievement, artistically speaking, in *Native Son* is in depicting and representing the psychological consequences of those deadly harming disturbances as being equal to the sociological and geographical fractures of the segregated and unstable society. Showing this cultural sickness in Bigger Thomas' self,

Wright powerfully and skillfully identifies the form of the psychological separatism and emptiness of identity among the African American population. The most important factor that composes Bigger's identity and was brilliantly captured in Wright's title for the novel's first book: fear.

There was a scene in which Bigger's shows that he can neither fits in the white society nor in the black which caused him a trouble of personality, a trouble that appears very clearly. It is when Bigger is continually seeking diversion and a way to avoid looking so solid and firm when it comes to racial injustice. He even trains Gus, his friend, to play with him the role a white man. The narrative voice informs us that this is a reference to [the game played by black in whom a black boy imitates the manners of white people].

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

'I don't feel like it,' Gus said.

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

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

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

'Nigger, you nuts!' Gus laughed.

'General!' Bigger tried again, determinedly.

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

'Yessuh.'

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

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

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

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

'Say, what's a 'left flank'?' Gus asked.

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

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

hand to his mouth, as though talking into a transmitter.

'Hello,' Gus said.

'Hello,' Bigger said. "Who's this?"

'This is Mr. J. P. Morgan speaking,' Gus said.

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

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

'Aw, just dump 'em at any price,' Gus said with casual irritation. 'We're holding too much.' 'Yessuh,' Bigger said.

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

'Yessuh, Mr. Morgan,' Bigger said.

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

'I bet that's just the way they talk,' Gus said. 'I wouldn't be surprised,' Bigger said.⁽¹⁰⁾

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

In the second scenario, Gus pretends to be an authority figure; by playing the role of J. P. Morgan⁽¹¹⁾. This latter order a subordinate to sell twenty thousand shares of United States steel in the market that morning. For Bigger and his friend Gus, these actions are of enormous and similar significance. The actions of Bigger and Gus show that economy and the military represent undeniable institutions of oppression.

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

To white society, African Americans having access to the white society was a fearsome idea. And what made it more terrifying especially to white women, is the black rapist myth. The second authority is also a slogan of the larger authority that keeps the oppression of blacks. For Bigger and Gus J. P. Morgan represent an economy system to prevent any social mobility in black society.

African Americans have no access to the stock market which is impossible to reach and almost mythic as the

airplane because the military will never let Bigger fly. Interestingly, the subordinate in both scenarios integrates the dialect of Negro submissiveness, responding 'yessuh' to the authority's directives, making of these scenarios, which are peopled only with imagined whites, imitations of white and black conflict in which the white is always the authority. The scene follows about a page after Gus makes fun Bigger's claims that he could fly a plane given the chance. [In the response Gus pulled down the corners of his lips, stepped out from the wall, squared his shoulders, removed his cap, bowed low and spoke with an ironic voice 'yessuh'].⁽¹²⁾

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

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

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

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

The scene ends with an appearance of the frustration about racial injustices that are continually bearing on them economically and psychologically. After the final improvised scenario, the exchange between Bigger and Gus indicates there is no diversion from the constant pressure of racial inequity. In this scenario we read that Bigger took a deep breath and said 'God dammit!' questioning what the matter was, speaking about the white people who let them do nothing⁽¹³⁾. This scene, of a joking tone for the most part until the concluding expression of frustration, represents the emotion to which Bigger and those like him are driven by their socio-economic circumstances.

Some critics claim that scenes like those that happened between Bigger and Gus when they pretended to be men of authority are seen as typically black males' actions. Those who are struggling to manage with a society of racial oppression. The function of black male community in *Native Son* is claimed to be as the social grouping among poor urban black males. Such grouping helped to keep Bigger struggling for universal and his humanity as well. The grouping of African Americans in Ghettos provided them with a feeling of security in their hostile Society.⁽¹⁴⁾

Although this sense of community was supposed to be a stabilizing force for Bigger, but Bigger's relationship with his community is in reality not good, on the contrary it complicates his efforts to keep his inner and outer selves in harmony. Though all African Americans in Chicago's Black Belt would have been forced to modify their discourse in the presence of whites, Bigger, and his friends to a lesser degree, have the added pressure of maintaining a reputation that facilitates their survival in the Black Belt. For Bigger, the exaggerated masculinity he shows as part of his established reputation conflicts severely with what is, in reality, his fearful and anxious state of mind.

It becomes clear that Bigger is not as tough as he represents himself to his neighborhood. Indeed, he even seems confused by the disconnection between his external aggression and his inner fear and anxiety. For the most part, Bigger appears to be a friendly and sociable person until some psychological tension motivates him to show a more aggressive identity. We learn that the group of friends has engaged in small attempts of robbery before, but now Bigger wants something more significant. He wants, this time, to use a gun to rob 'Old Blum's.' This in itself is an indication of his growing aggression and his desire to replace his inner fear and his obedient behavior around whites by his wishes and quest for humanization.⁽¹⁵⁾

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

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

'Save for the sound of Doc's whistling up front, there was silence. Bigger watched Jack closely; he knew that the situation was one in which Jack's word would be decisive. Bigger was afraid of Gus, because he knew that Gus would not hold out if Jack said yes. Gus stood at the table, toying with a cue stick, his eyes straying

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

'Goddammit! Say something, somebody!'

'I'm in,' Jack said again. 'I'll go if the rest goes,' G.H. said. Gus stood without speaking and Bigger felt a curious sensation—half-sensual, half-thoughtful. He was divided and pulled against himself. He had handled things just right so far; all but Gus had consented. The way things stood now there were three against Gus, and that was just as he had wanted it to be. Bigger was afraid of robbing a white man and he knew that Gus was afraid, too. Blum's store was small and Blum was alone, but Bigger could not think of robbing him without being flanked by his three pals. But even with his pals he was afraid. He had argued all of his pals but one into consenting to the robbery, and toward the lone man who held out he felt a hot hate and fear; he had transferred his fear of the whites to Gus. He hated Gus because he knew that Gus was afraid, as even he was; and he feared Gus because he felt that Gus would consent and then he would be compelled to go through with the robbery. Like a man about to shoot himself and dreading to shoot and yet knowing that he has to shoot and feeling it all at once and powerfully, he watched Gus and waited for him to say yes. But Gus did not speak. Bigger's teeth clamped so tight that his jaws ached. He edged toward Gus, not looking at Gus, but feeling the

presence of Gus over all his body, through him, in and out of him, and hating himself and Gus because he felt it. Then he could not stand it any longer. The hysterical tensivity of his nerves urged him to speak, to free himself. He faced Gus, his eyes red with anger and fear, his fists clenched and held stiffly to his sides.

'You black sonofabitch,' he said in a voice that did not vary in tone. 'You scared 'cause he's a white man.'⁽¹⁶⁾

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

'You black sonofabitch,' [Bigger] said in a voice that did not vary in tone.

'You scared 'cause he's a white man.'

'Don't cuss me, Bigger,' Gus said quietly.

'I am cussing you!'

'You don't have to cuss me,' Gus said.

'Then why don't you use that black tongue of yours?' Bigger asked. 'Why don't you say what you going to do?'

'I don't have to use my tongue unless I want to!'

'You bastard! You scared bastard!'

'You ain't my boss, Gus said.

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

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

'He's yellow,' Bigger said. 'He won't go with us. ... Gus leaned on his cue and gazed at Bigger and Bigger's stomach tightened as though he were expecting a blow and were getting ready for it. His fists clenched harder. In a split of a second he felt how his fist and arm and body would feel if he hit Gus squarely in the mouth, drawing blood; Gus would fall and he would walk out and the whole thing would be over and the robbery would not take place.'⁽¹⁷⁾

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

submissiveness to whites, raises the tension to an unbearable level.

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

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

'Goddammit!'

'What's the matter?'

'They don't let us do *nothing*.'

'Who?'

'The *white* folks.'

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

'Naw. But I just can't get used to it,' Bigger said. 'I swear to God I can't. I know I oughtn't think about it, but I can't help it. Every time I think about it I feel like somebody's poking a red-hot iron down my throat. Goddammit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence....'

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

'You know one thing?' Bigger said.

'What?'

'Sometimes I feel like something awful's going to happen to me,' Bigger spoke with a tinge of bitter pride in his voice.

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

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

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

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

Gus hunched Bigger with his elbow and mumbled good-naturedly, 'Aw, nigger, quit thinking about it. You'll go nuts.'...

'Nothing ever happens,' he complained.⁽¹⁸⁾

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

'Gus?'

'Hunh?'

'You know where the white folks live?'

'Yeah,' Gus said, pointing eastward.

'Over across the 'line'; over there on Cottage Grove Avenue.'

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

'What you mean?' Gus asked, puzzled.

'Then, where do they live?'

Bigger doubled his fist and struck his solar plexus.

'Right down here in my stomach,' he said.

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

'Yeah; I know what you mean,' he whispered.

'Every time I think of 'em, I feel 'em,' Bigger said.

'Yeah; and in your chest and throat, too,' Gus said.

'It's like fire.'

'And sometimes you can't hardly breathe....'

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

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

Bigger paused, narrowed his eyes.

'Naw; it ain't like something going to happen to me. It's ...It's like I was going to do something I can't help....'

'Yeah!' Gus said with uneasy eagerness. His eyes were full of a look compounded of fear and admiration for Bigger. 'Yeah; I know what you mean. It's like you going to fall and don't know where you going to land....'⁽¹⁹⁾

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

through with the robbery. Bigger, clearly, is unable to fully mask his inner fear.

Gus finally softened and agreed to participate in the robbery. He said that he will help just like he always helps. But he will never accept orders from Bigger because 'he is just a scared coward, Gus shouted'⁽²⁰⁾. This truth shocks Bigger and the psychological tension that had been growing nearly explodes in violence as Bigger rushes at Gus. Jack and G. H. intervene to prevent further violence, but the scene, as each scene of Wright's well-planned does, anticipates more unpredictable shattering actions that are to come.

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

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

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

Gus lay still.

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

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

'Naw,' Gus said, his lips scarcely moving.

'You goddamn right you ain't.' Bigger said.

His face softened a bit and the hard glint in his bloodshot eyes died. But he still knelt with the open knife. Then he stood.

'Get up!' he said.

'Please, Bigger!'

'You want me to slice you?'

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

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

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

'Lick it,' Bigger said, his body tingling with elation.

Gus's eyes filled with tears.
 'Lick it, I said. You think I'm playing?'....
 'Put your hand up, way up' he said.
 Gus swallowed and stretched his hands high along the wall.
 'Leave 'im alone, Bigger,' G.H. called weakly.
 'I'm doing this,' Bigger said.
 He put the tip of the blade into Gus's shirt and then made an arc with his arm, as though cutting a circle.
 'How would you like me to cut your belly button out?'
 Gus did not answer. Sweat trickled down his temples. His lips hung wide, loose.
 'Shut them liver lips of yours!'
 Gus did not move a muscle. Bigger pushed the knife harder into Gus's stomach.
 'Bigger!' Gus said in a tense whisper.
 'Shut your mouth!'⁽²¹⁾

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

The symbolic rape of Gus matches the expected rape of Mary Dalton and the later rape and savage murder of Bessie Mears after the pressures have finally overcome Bigger and he is no longer able to manage the situation. The term 'rape' will take numerous meanings as the novel develops, and the understanding of its thematic introduction may in fact be central to our understanding of the novel's message. It also allows a unique relation to each of the roles Bigger finds himself forced to negotiate.

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

Although Bigger's tightness appears in the violence against and metaphorical rape of Gus, more disastrous effects are, for the time being, avoided because of the violent sexual release he finds in the abuse of Gus. The descriptions of the scene employ some key verbal indications that permit us to

attach the thematic meaning of this scene to other events in the book. Bigger's tightening muscles are a symptom of the tension resulting from the conflict of his different selves he was showing. We saw the same tightening a few pages earlier when Bigger threatened Gus in order to intimidate him to force him to participate in the robbery. Bigger's muscles remain tense until he is satisfied.

Obviously the satisfaction he needs is not too different from that he seeks from Bessie after his communications with the Daltons. The signals help us to locate the source of Bigger's psychological disorder and to connect the serious effects of that turmoil directly to it. The lines that conclude these opening scenes indicate to us that the scenes can be used to help for a better understanding of the significance of all that follows. He said that this was the way Bigger lived his life trying to defeat the world he feared. Book One works out as a manuscript that defines Bigger's tensions and provides a reference source for the causes of his later actions.

Conclusion:

Bigger Thomas does not know who he is, what he is, and how he is supposed to act. Bigger does not know what his real identity is. Lack of love and support as a child prevented him from gaining the essential confidence needed to fight for a position in life. Instead, he was trapped in the stereotyped role designed for all poor black men in the streets of Chicago. Bigger often was in trouble either with the law or even the guys he hung out with. He was jobless though his family's major need for financial support. These are all traits of the 'bad Negro,' which is another reason for calling him 'Bigger.'

Adopting many identities was forced upon Bigger, one for his neighbor and another in front of whites. He was forced to adopt an identity that he did not favor to please a white society that does not trust him. Bigger feared to show his real identity to both societies, his own people and the white society, he was obliged to go back and forth between the obedient character and the aggressive one. Due to all these causes, Bigger could not establish a stable identity.

Bigger is not as tough as he represents himself to his neighborhood. Indeed, he even seems confused by the disconnection between his external aggression and his inner fear and anxiety. For the most part, Bigger appears to be a friendly and sociable person until some psychological tension motivates him to show a more aggressive identity. Bigger's lack of a psychological center is understood as a consequence of the strategies of denial employed by a racist white society, preventing them from assimilating. In other words, forcing the repression of identity in blacks was a means of excluding them from the American narrative.

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2-3)- Sengova, Joko. 'Native Identity and Alienation in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*.' *Mississippi Quarterly* 50.2 (1997): 327

- 4)- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. Harper and Row, Publishers incorporated. 1966. P. 20- 21
- 5)- Guttman, Sondora. What Bigger Killed for: Rereading Violence Against Women in *Native Son*. Texas Studies in Literature and Language 43.2. 2001. P. 170
- 6)- Ciner, Elizabeth J. 'Richard Wright's Struggles with Fathers.' *Richard Wright: Myths and Realities*. Ed. C. James Trotman. New York: Garland Publishing, 1988. P. 127- 125
- 7- 8- 9)- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. P. 7- 9- 100
- 10)- Wright, Richard. '*Native Son*'. New York: Harper Collins , 1993. P. 21-22
- 11)- J.P. Morgan was an American financier, banker, philanthropist and art collector who dominated corporate finance and industrial consolidation during his time.
- 12- 13)- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York: Perennial Classics, 1993 P. 18- 21
- 14)- Ellis, Aime J. 'Where is Bigger's Humanity? : Black Male Community in Richard Wright's *Native Son*.' ANQ 15.3.2002: 23-30
- 15)- Fishburn, Katherine. 'The Delinquent's Sabbath; Or, The Return of the Repressed: The Matter of Bodies in *Native Son*.' *Studies in the Novel* 31.2. 1999. P202- 21.
- 16)- Wright, Richard. '*Native Son*'. New York: Perennial Classics. 1993 P. 28

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- 19- 20- 21)- Wright, Richard. '*Native Son*'. New York: Perennial Classics. 1993. P. 24- 40- 41

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