

Cody Rawling

English II Honors

Mrs.Kay Period 7

23 April 2020

### *Native Son's* Blindness

Blindness is known as the lack of vision, that can't be normally corrected. People can be completely blind, or partially blind. *Native Son*, by Richard Wright, uses blindness as a trait of a character. In *Native Son*, you follow the life of Bigger Thomas, a young and poverty ridden black man living on the South Side of Chicago in the 1930s. Bigger's life gets turned upside down when he becomes a chauffeur for the rich white Mr. Dalton, and his wife Mrs. Dalton. Bigger accidentally suffocates Mary, their daughter, one night after she comes home drunk, leaving him a murderer. Bigger also rapes and kills his girlfriend, Bessie, after creating a scheme to get himself out of the murder picture. Bigger ends up going to court, and getting sentenced to death after Max, his lawyer, puts up a battle for his rights. In the end, however, Bigger accepts his fate, despite fighting beforehand to keep living. **Throughout *Native Son*, blindness is used as an attribute to someone's personality as a metaphor to racism, instead of a physical trait.**

**Wright uses blindness through characters such as the Daltons, Bessie, and Bigger.**

Within *Native Son*, Mrs. Dalton is known as Mr. Dalton's physically blind wife. She takes part in helping poor blacks, through the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and Mr. Dalton. In addition to being physically blind, she is also mentally blind. The two Daltons finally "see" for the first time, when Max, Bigger's lawyer, brings up a thought-provoking statement about the Daltons.

“I want you to know that my heart is not bitter,” Mr. Dalton said. “What this boy has done will not influence my relations with the Negro people. Why, only today I sent a dozen ping-pong tables to the South Side Boys’ Club....”

“Mr. Dalton!” Max exclaimed, coming forward suddenly. “My God, man! Will ping-pong keep men from murdering? Can’t you see? Even after losing your daughter, you’re going to keep going in the same direction? Don’t you grant as much life-feeling to other men as you have? Could ping-pong have kept you from making your millions? This boy and millions like him want a meaningful life, not ping-pong....”(Wright, 232)

Max says this to try to influence Dalton's ways of thinking. Max is using Bigger to show them that they are blind towards the black community as a whole. Mr. Dalton says that the killing of his daughter “will not influence my relations with the Negro people” but Max says that he has not helped them at all, and is just profiting off of the black community, thus trying to persuade the Daltons to change. Dalton's blindness represents the mentally blind rich white community, which tries to profit off of the poor black community, by giving them items that will not help the racial tension inside of the community towards the whites. They believe that they have helped the community by giving them items, such as ping pong tables, but in reality, all they are doing is flashing their wealth towards the black community, which increases racial tension.

Bessie throughout *Native Son* is shown as Bigger’s girlfriend. After Bigger kills Mary, he turns to her for a way to escape the crime. Bessie goes along with his plan since she is blind towards the real culprit, which is Bigger. Once Bessie finds out it was Bigger who killed her, Bessie saw Bigger’s true intent with her.

““Oh, Lord,” she moaned. “What’s the use of running? They’ll catch us anywhere. I should’ve known this would happen.” She clenched her hands in front of her and rocked to and fro with her eyes closed upon gushing tears. “All my life’s been full of hard trouble. If I wasn’t hungry, I was sick. And if I wasn’t sick, I was in trouble. I ain’t never bothered nobody. I just worked hard every day as long as I can remember, till I was tired enough to drop; then I had to get drunk to forget it. I had to get drunk to sleep. That’s all I ever did. And now I’m in this. They looking for me and when they catch me they’ll kill me.” She bent her head to the floor. “God only knows why I ever let you treat me this way. I wish to God I never seen you. I wish one of us had died before we was born. God knows I do! All you ever caused me was trouble, just plain black trouble. All you ever did since we been knowing each other was to get me drunk so’s you could have me. That was all! I see it now. I ain’t drunk now. I see everything you ever did to me. I didn’t want to see it before. I was too busy thinking about how good I felt when I was with you. I thought I was happy, but deep down in me I knew I wasn’t. But you got me into this murder and I see it all now. I been a fool, just a blind dumb black drunk fool. Now I got to run away and I know deep down in your heart you really don’t care.”” (Wright 191)

Bessie says this towards Bigger to try to persuade him into changing himself, and wishing that she never met him. Bigger refers to Bessie as “a dangerous burden” in his head beforehand, which further implies how Bigger was using Bessie. Bessie was blind before she saw Bigger’s true intentions, which unfortunately led to her death, as Bigger acted as if nothing was wrong and raped her. Bessie also mentions that the trouble he caused was just “plain black trouble” which leads the reader to believe she is blaming all of the trouble she has had from him on his race, and

how his killing of Mary was race-related. Bessie represents the also mentally blind black community at this time, how they were letting whites get away with exploiting them, and the rising crime rate due to it. Bessie saw this before her death, which was caused by her previous blindness.

Bigger, who aspires to be an airplane pilot, lives in South Side Chicago, also known as the black belt. Bigger is blind towards himself, thinking there is nothing to do but submit to crime. Bigger “sees” for the first time when he and his gang are about to rob Blum, a white man who owns a store nearby.

“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.” (Wright 33)

Bigger in his head saw what they were doing; diving into a life of crime. Robbing a white man at this time would be guaranteed jail time, and maybe worse. Bigger saw for the first time since he “felt a curious sensation.” He thought about his actions at this time. They called off the robbery, and Bigger got the job at the Dalton’s. Bigger’s blindness in this scenario was race-related, as he realized that this robbery would put him in a life of crime. After Bigger gets the death penalty for killing Mary, he sees one final time.

““Mr. Max, you go home. I’m all right.... Sounds funny, Mr. Max, but when I think about what you say I kind of feel what I wanted. It makes me feel I was kind of right....”

Max opened his mouth to say something and Bigger drowned out his voice. “I ain’t trying

to forgive nobody and I ain't asking for nobody to forgive me. I ain't going to cry. They wouldn't let me live and I killed. Maybe it ain't fair to kill, and I reckon I really didn't want to kill. But when I think of why all the killing was, I begin to feel what I wanted, what I am...." (Wright 326)

Bigger says that he began to feel what he wanted; justice. He wanted to feel justice for his race after he was blinded by the others in his community. Bigger now sees that he killed to serve justice. He doesn't want forgiveness since he now sees that he did it for a reason. He also sees who he believes he is now; not a murderer, someone who needed justice.

Blindness is the physical trait of having little to no vision. But in *Native Son's* case, Richard Wright uses blindness as a mental trait to portray racism. Throughout *Native Son*, characters are portrayed as "blind" if they don't know what the social climate around them is like. This is seen through both races. The whites are oblivious to how the black community is, and the black community is oblivious to how the white community exploits them and uses them. This metaphor to the physical trait of blindness can also be seen today, as some people are oblivious to what happens around them. *Native Son* shows that if you don't know what is going on around you, it will be worse than knowing. Wright shows that blindness isn't just a physical trait that you can get; it's something everyone can have.

Sources :

Wright, Richard, 1908-1960. *Native Son*. New York :Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

Rianne Delos Reyes

English

April 19th, 2019

Mr. Langford

### **Their Eyes Were Watching God**

Zora Neale Hurston's language reveals that Janie carried more responsibilities and felt pressured of being the Mayor's wife after Joe Starks attempts to limit her decisions and control her actions. When Janie met Joe Starks, he left an intriguing impression on Janie. Janie was determined to be with Joe when he shared his values and goals in life, however, that impression shifted when he began excluding her and limiting her life decisions. Hurston quoted Janie's position; "The wife of the mayor was not just another woman ass he had supposed. She slept with "authority" and so she was part of it in the "town mind"." - (Hurston, 47). Through this metaphor, the author unveils that Janie had to remain intact with Joe's role as a Mayor, and she was pressured to meet the standards of being his wife for the town. As stated, "authority" and "town mind" indicate that Janie is married to someone with great power and she must present a proper reputation for the townspeople to see, even if it comes to changing herself and disabling herself to act like any normal female. Similarly, Janie was given the responsibility to run the store for her husband, however, Janie felt confined as he continuously forces her to do things in his ways. As stated; "Joe put up the mail himself, but sometimes when he was off she has to do it herself and it always ended up in a "fuss"... The store kept her with a "sick headache"." (Hurston, 54). This personification signified that Jody remained controlling and pressed works to Janie without understanding her insights. Hurston's personification about Janie's works and the

store reveals that Joe's possessiveness resulted in an argument and made Janie feel bad. The use of the words "fuss" and "sick headache" connotes that Jody and Janie's relationship is ailing and is mentally abusive. Due to Jody being controlling and ignorant for his social image, it shifted Janie's impression towards Joe and built her a mindset that in order to please his reputation, she must obey his orders despite how damaging they could be. Unlike their first meeting, Hurston's language revealed that Janie's perception viewed Jody as a terrible husband, which later on commences Janie to express her true emotions.

Hurston's language reveals that when Janie is with Tea Cake she experienced optimism and freedom from Stark's possessiveness. In other words, Tea Cake makes Janie lively, unlike her marriage with Starks. After Joe Starks's death, Janie mourned and grieved for him. Nevertheless, Tea Cake began visiting Janie and they both instantly connected. Janie laughed like she never did before and explored places where she has never been before. Hurston used a simile to signify that Janie doesn't feel confined as she used to; "It was so crazy digging worms by lamplight and setting out for Lake Sabelia after midnight that she felt like a child "breaking rules" (Hurston, 102). Through this simile, it indicates that Janie and Tea Cake both are having fun and feeling stress-free like they were kids with no responsibilities. The quotation "breaking rules" connotes how Janie and Tea Cake are breaking the social expectation of their classes. It indicates that Janie is damaging her social reputation for being with someone that's not only younger than her but also below her social class. Despite the consequences, Janie remained with Tea Cake because he gave her the freedom she had never experienced. Janie's feelings and actions alternated as she expresses her childlike version of herself to Tea Cake while she only showed her maturity to Starks. In like matter, When Tea Cake took Janie out on dates, not only



she saw beautiful views but she also felt beautiful emotions as well. Hurston used imagery to indicate Janie's perception; "So she sat on the porch and watched the moon rise. Soon it's amber fluid was drenching the earth, and "quenching the thirst of the day""- (Hurston, 99). In this imagery, Hurston describes Janie's surroundings and her interpretation after a day with Tea Cake. This reveals that when Janie was watching the moonrise, she felt a new beginning in her life. The statement "quenching the thirst of the day" connotes how empty she was and now with Tea Cake, she felt like he watered her lifeless life. Janie became hopeful with her and Tea Cake's relationship as she realized how much he meant to her. Unlike Tea Cake, Joe was absurd. He absorbed Janie's freedom and liveliness for his wealth and power, leaving Janie empty. Now that Tea Cake entered her life, she felt optimistic about her decisions, that later on followed a new marriage and home with Tea Cake.

Ceora Ford

English II

Ms. Miner

April 15, 2020

### **Richard Wright's "Protest"**

"All literature is protest." These words spoken by Richard Wright himself can be clearly seen throughout the pages of his widely acclaimed novel, *Native Son*. Taking place in the South side of Chicago during the 1930's, *Native Son* follows a young and poor black man named Bigger Thomas. Readers experience events through Bigger's eyes and it does not take long to see that this main character is quite troubled. The book begins by showing Bigger's shaky relationship with his family and mischievous friends, allowing readers to see the alienation Bigger feels from those who are supposed to be close to him. Steeped in fear of white society and discontent with his lack of opportunity, Bigger eventually gets a job as the driver for the rich, white Dalton family. After a series of events that highlight the vast distance between the white and black world, Bigger accidentally kills the daughter of the Dalton couple, Mary, and his run from the law insinuates. While evading capture, Bigger murders his significant other and accomplice, Bessie Mears. Eventually, he is caught by the police and tried in court. The last book in *Native Son* describes Bigger's trial and the clear bias and hatred that is tied to him because of his black skin. Despite the extensive efforts of Bigger's lawyer, Max, Bigger is still sentenced to death. The novel ends with an intimate conversation between Bigger and Max. Within the pages of *Native Son*, Wright gives readers an inside look on the racism that truly filled the notoriously

more liberal northern United States. **Through symbolism, Wright gives readers a clear view of the racism and injustice that filled the whole United States, north and south. He uses symbolism in characters to show readers the negative effects the pervasive racism and injustice in America had on people. Through symbolic characters, he relays his “protest” of the racist America he lived in and wanted to change.** His character, Max, was his avenue for directly expressing his viewpoint on the race relations between blacks and whites in the 1930’s. Close examination of the symbolism in Bigger, his family, and the media shows readers what Richard Wright's *Native Son* “protest” is.

Despite only appearing in the last book of *Native Son*, Max was an extremely important character in the novel. A member of the Communist party, Max took on the daunting task of defending Bigger in court. Charged with the murder and rape of Mary Dalton, a white woman, and Bessie Mears, Bigger was no easy person to defend. His black skin made him even more guilty. Even though the odds were not in Bigger’s favor, Max still felt the need to defend him. During Bigger’s court trial, it was evident that many were in strong opposition to Bigger mainly because of his African American race. Max overlooked these things and his reason for doing so is evident in his closing oration. The context of this speech shows readers that Wright designed Max’s character to address a problem much larger than Bigger. “I know that what I have to say here today touches the destiny of an entire nation. My plea is for more than one man and one people” (382, Wright). Spoken at the beginning of his speech, it is clear that Max’s closing rhetoric would encompass principles and ideas that would touch on the lives of more than just one person. His following words would do more than solely address the problems and unfortunate circumstances of Bigger. Through Max’s speech, Wright was laying the groundwork for his own testimonial against the world he knew so well.

The mere act of understanding Bigger Thomas will be a thawing out of icebound impulses, a dragging out of the sprawling forms of dread out of the night of fear into the light of reason, an unveiling of the unconscious ritual of death in which we, like sleep-walkers, have participated so dreamlike and thoughtlessly. (Wright, 383).

Within this text from Max's speech is the theme of *Native Son*. Wright makes the claim that understanding Bigger was the key to unearthing deeply entrenched presumptions. Referring to these presumptions as ice bounded, he highlights the need to thaw out these things. He acknowledges that these presumptions and stereotypes are deeply rooted in "the night of fear", denoting an almost blind fear. This fear induced by a lack of knowledge can be eliminated by the light of reason. This light of reason therefore can end the sleep-walking routine that ends in death. Death may not be literal. In this context, death can be synonymous with ruin or self destruction. When someone is sleep-walking, they have no control over their body and mental faculties and therefore they are able to unknowingly harm themselves. Wright is claiming that fear has the same effect; fear takes away one's control of their mental faculties and thinking ability and ultimately leads to someone harming them self and/or others, indirectly or directly. Only knowledge, only understanding can unearth this fear. Once fear is disabled, the ice-like presumptions and stereotypes can be eliminated. Once the Daltons, once Jan, once Vera, once Buddy, once Ms. Thomas, and once Bigger himself eliminate their own presumptions, stereotypes, or predeterminations about Bigger, they will be able to gain that essential understanding. Once they see Bigger for who is and where he comes from and not who they think he should be, they will be able to understand Bigger and how much he represents. Likewise, once readers truly gain an understanding of the symbolism in the characters within

*Native Son*, they will truly be able to understand the true nature of the America Richard Wright lived in. They will be able to clearly see the corrupt foundation on which it was based.

Bigger Thomas is undeniably a vastly complex character. All of his actions and thoughts were carefully planned out to portray a side of oppression that many shy away from. Bigger did not have the revered and widely enjoyed struggle-to-success story that made oppression appear as an easily surmountable entity. He did not have the optimism and outlook that fit that character. This was something Bigger himself realized from the very beginning of the book. Acutely aware of his lack of opportunity and lack of assets that would allow him to be a struggle-to-success story, Bigger lives his life in search of anything that can give him a sense of dominance. In an attempt to capture this feeling of dominance that he knew he did not have, Bigger and his friend Gus play “white” at the beginning of the novel. Although the game is meant to be fun, it only highlights the stark difference in opportunity of blacks and whites at the time. Playing “white” actually emphasized the lack of dominance Bigger had in life because of his race and financial status. This over-consciousness of his deficit in dominance did not insight feelings within Bigger that set the stage for a struggle-to-success story. Instead, this realization overwhelms Bigger, filling him with fear and panic. When faced with the task of robbing a white owned business, this fear and panic is again awakened in him. His reaction to this feeling is captured later on in the text.

Bigger felt an urgent need to hide his growing and deepening feeling of hysteria; he had to get rid of it or else he would succumb to it. He longed for the stimulus powerful enough to focus his attention and drain off his energies... All that morning he had lurked behind a curtain of indifference and looked at things, snapping and glaring at whatever had tried to make him come out into the open...

These were the rhythms of his life: indifference and violence; periods of abstract brooding and periods of intense desire; moments of silence and moments of anger. (Wright, 28-29).

The quote embodies Bigger's reaction to the reality of robbing a white store. Because it forced him to come out of his curtain of indifference, because it caused him to so strongly feel his inferiority, Bigger resorts to his alternative rhythm of life: violence. To regain a sense of control and rid himself of his deepening hysteria, Bigger violently lashes out on Gus. Choosing to humiliate Gus instead of face his fear, Bigger excessively beats him to "focus his attention and drain off his energies." This is exactly what leads to his murder of Mary. Bigger no doubt felt completely powerless in the close presence of two white people, Mary and Jan. Because of his personality makeup, Bigger reacts in the way outlined in the quote. He did not use the negative feelings as a stimulus to become a prosperous African American. When face to face with his stark reality, when face to face with the fact that he was black in a world meant for white people, Bigger turned to violence to rid himself of this awareness. By designing Bigger with this personality make up, Wright was trying to make readers aware of the negative effects oppression had on some members of the black community.

Overshadowed by more significant characters and events, someone may skim over Bigger's family at first glance. But Wright did not fail to weave symbolism into these characters as well. Readers are first introduced to Bigger's family within the first scene of *Native Son*. The book opens with the family struggling to rid their one-roomed apartment of a rat. During their frantic attempt to exterminate the rodent, it is easy to see their unbalanced family dynamic. Conversation between Bigger and his family thereafter gives readers a glimpse of the personality makeup of Bigger's sister Vera, brother Buddy, and his mother, Ms. Thomas. Although they,

particularly Ms. Thomas and Vera, display an obvious contempt for Bigger because of his attraction to trouble and pleasure, they fail to realize that they themselves are quite similar to Bigger. In response to oppression and white supremacy, Bigger turns to pleasure and violence, lashing out at anything that forces him to confront his lack of agency. It is noteworthy, though, that Wright designed Bigger's family to harness similar behavioral tendencies. Vera, when confronted with her lack of agency and dominance in a white world, shies away in fear. This reaction is captured in the scene where Bigger and Buddy struggle to kill the rat that has intruded their apartment. Crippled by fear, Vera finds refuge on her bed in an attempt to avoid being bitten by the rodent. When Bigger playfully waves the dead rat in her face, she faints. It is clear that Vera's strongest reactionary emotion is fear. This is further emphasized in the last book of *Native Son*. When she and the rest of her family go to visit Bigger while he is in police custody, her mother informs Bigger of her decision to stop attending school because the girls "look at and make her 'shamed'" (Wright, 298). Once again, we see Vera's reactionary tendency: when confronted with a force that causes her to recognize her lack of dominance, she shies away in fear. Realizing that she could not dominate Bigger's reputation and the girls who shame her, she retreats, refusing to attend school. Buddy is slightly different however. It is clear that Buddy highly esteems Bigger. Like Vera, readers can determine Buddy's reactionary tendencies within the first scene of the book. While Bigger hunts down the rat, Buddy follows his orders without question. This dynamic is consistent throughout the scene. Buddy does whatever Bigger tells him too. When Bigger receives the job as a chauffeur, Buddy is the only who is not overly critical of him. While Bigger still struggles to accept his lack of opportunity, Buddy admires Bigger, envying his job. In short, Buddy either did not realize that he and his family were oppressed or he chose to accept it. Buddy makes no argument with his status. He just accepts it and follows

orders. In one instance, Bigger described Buddy as “aimless, lost, with no sharp or hard edges, like a chubby puppy” (Wright, 108). Dogs are known for their unwavering obedience. It is noteworthy how Buddy is likened to a creature that follows orders without question. It is significant that Buddy was the chosen name for this character since Buddy is a popular pet name for dogs. Wright was trying to convey a personality type to readers through Buddy. He wanted readers to clearly see that Buddy represented those who blindly comply with the order of things.

Bigger’s mother is also of great importance. Like Vera, she often scolded Bigger. At one time, she even said she wished she had not ever birthed him. Pained and angered by Bigger’s lack of responsibility, her relationship with is obviously strained. But, like Vera and Buddy, Ms. Thomas displayed many Bigger-like tendencies. To shield herself from the realities of being black in the 1930’s, instead of turning to violence or fear or compliance, Ms. Thomas turned to religion. When faced with the reality of her son's actions and the unavoidable destiny he was headed for, Ms. Thomas’ first reaction was to send her pastor to visit Bigger. Hoping to instill a fear of God in him before his death, Reverend Hammond admonished Bigger to put his life in the hands of God. But it was not Reverend Hammond’s voice that Bigger heard. “It was the old voice of his mother telling of suffering, of hope, of love beyond this world. And he loathed it because it made him feel as condemned and guilty as the voice of those who hated him” (Wright, 283). Bigger’s sought relief from the oppressive world she lived in in religion. Thoughts of the after life gave her hope and prompted her to accept the corrupt social order of the American society in the 1930’s. By creating Ms. Thomas in this way, Wright brings to light the thought process of many African Americans of his time. It is common knowledge that many African Americans rallies around the church in search of an escape from the harsh discrimination they faced on a daily bases. Blinded by religious hopes, like Ms. Thomas, many African Americans



put their faith in God and hoped for change through Him. Those who relied on God, however, failed to that he would not come to their rescue. Ms. Thomas failed to realize that even God could not save her son from the negative effects of the oppressive world he lived in.

The media may seem like a strange entity to examine in *Native Son*. However, Wright's depiction of the media is a candid reflection of popular opinion in the 1930's. Readers confront the media many times in the novel. One instance of media exposure in *Native Son* is very early in the book. Although it may be easily overlooked, it gives insight to the thought process of African Americans in relation to the media during the 1930's. Early on in the novel, Bigger sees how the media depicts the white world. When in the movie theaters with his friend Jack, a commercial comes on. Depicting smiling, white girls on the beach of white sand and sparkling water, Bigger's was intrigued. As the scene continued, it focused in on one white girl and white man frolicking in romantic pursuit on a serene Florida beach. That white girl happened to be Mary Dalton. Seeing her in the commercial impressed upon his mind the great difference between the lifestyle of the rich, white community and that of the poor, black community.

He looked at *Trader Horn* unfold and saw pictures of naked black men and women whirling in wild dances and heard drums beating and then gradually the African scene changed and was replaced by images in his own mind of white men and women dressed in black and white clothes, laughing, talking, drinking, and dancing. Those were smart people; they knew how to get a hold of money (Wright, 33).

This commercial evidently made Bigger feel that his culture was inferior to the white way of life. This commercial made him subliminally esteem the rich lifestyle of white people above his own. In a sense, it was preparing him to go into his job feeling profoundly inferior. Bigger no doubt

spent his life surrounded by media that depicted the rich, white world in this way: extremely sophisticated and far more advanced than what he could ever be. Being constantly bombarded with images such as these, Bigger likely felt that this was the way most white people lived, furthering the already severe inferiority he felt in comparison to white people. This no doubt had an effect on his reactionary tendencies as previously discussed. While the media of the 1930's glorified the white world, it was not so kind to the black identity. This is seen clearly in the last book of *Native Son*. After he is caught for his murder of Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears, Bigger gets a newspaper while in police custody. Immediately, the negative persona they allot to Bigger is evident. Titled "NEGRO RAPIST FAINTS AT INQUEST" (Wright, 279), the article opens by describing him as a "Negro sex-slayer." It continues describing him as being abnormally strong, likening his physique to that of a jungle beast. Another newspaper that Bigger briefly read was armed with the title, "NEGRO KILLER SIGNS CONFESSION FOR TWO MURDERS" (Wright, 341). Failing to address Bigger by his full name in the titles, it is as if these newspapers attribute his crimes to the whole black race. Referring to Bigger as a "Negro Killer" or "Negro Rapist" not only made him guilty but anyone considered "Negro" guilty as well. All "Negroes" would now have to carry Bigger's actions with them as if they were their own. This point is further emphasized by another newspaper article. The article explained that, while policemen still searched for Bigger, many "Negro" men were beaten. Several hundred "Negroes" that looked like Bigger were taken into police custody for questioning. Many blacks were losing their jobs as domestic workers as a result "for fear that [they] might poison the children." This clearly points out how the media's representation of Bigger was perceived as a representation of the African American community as a whole. This exemplifies the clear difference in the media's

portrayal of the white world and the black world in the 1930's. It was something Wright wanted readers to see.

It is clear that Richard Wright used symbolism all throughout his novel *Native Son*. Utilizing it as an avenue for his testimony against American society, Wright embodied many personality types and social structures in his characters. Most noteworthy is his development of his main character Bigger Thomas. As the focal point of much opposition, Wright uses Bigger to portray what American discrimination and racial oppression can do to a person. The symbolism within Bigger's family also portray the negative effects of oppression. Vera, when faced with the reality of her lack of dominance in a white world, shrinks back in fear. Buddy, often oblivious and unaware, follows along with the order of things, raising no questions. His mother's reliance on religion and her unfounded hope in it reflected attitudes of many African Americans in the 1930's. Through these characters, Richard Wright is showing how destructive oppression can be. While many spend their time exalting those who overcome it, they forget the vast majority of those who are like Bigger, Vera, Buddy and Ms. Thomas. They forget those that are too occupied by fear and anger and those that do not have the will to rebel. They forget those who are too disillusioned by religious hope to overcome oppression. Richard Wright wanted to make sure that those who fit these characters, the Biggers, the Veras, the Buddies, and the Ms. Thomases, of the world don't go unseen and forgotten. His depiction of the media also emphasized the correlation between the media and oppression. The racism and prejudice, from which oppression often stems, is perpetuated by the media. In *Native Son*, the media's portrayal of Bigger as a savage beast who unnaturally hungered for white women not only reflected badly on him but on the black community in Chicago's Black Belt. Seeing Bigger as the African American race as a whole instead of an individual only furthered the oppressive racism that

already filled the 1930's. This was often the case in the media of the 1930's. African American people were pictured as the small minority of black people who exhibited bad behavior. This is often the case with racial and ethnic minorities even today. But, as Max's speech pointed out, gaining understanding of Bigger, gaining understanding of all misrepresented people will eliminate any negative stereotypes tied to them. Through *Native Son*, Richard Wright was able to protest the long lasting oppression of African Americans in the United States. He was able to highlight the need for understanding. True and candid understanding is the only force able to combat the fear that oppressive traditions and social systems are based in.