Chapter - III

IDENTITY CRISIS

All I wanted was to be a man among other men.

I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build together

... I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man. (Fanon, Frantz, 85)

The American Literature, in its approach to racism, outwardly seems to be extrovert, acquisitive, and optimistic. But actually, it is thoughtful and the search for identity of black people began with the authors like Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller etc., William Faulkner’s works expose about the notion of tragedy and man’s failure to attain his identity. Washington Irving, behind the scenario of America’s struggle against the British culture and seeking self-identity, sketches ‘Rip Van Winkle’ to project the mindset of the American history and its people. In a similar fashion, Richard Wright too emulates the Bigger Thomas in Native Son, the Tyree Tucker in Long Dream and Richard himself in Black Boy, by projecting Blacks’ yearning for identity and recognition.

Whites with their economic privilege, while exploiting the misfortune, always misconceived that the blacks would pose a threat to the whites, if given an equal opportunity. This rather resulted in complete economic suppression and alienation over the blacks, perhaps as history portrays, when the blacks were shipped to this new continent, they were considered as just another “work-machine” or a machine which has life without feeling, rather than of any human consideration. Edmund S. Morgan said the condition of blacks as, “a machine to make tobacco for somebody else.’ (Morgan, Edmund. S, 129) Hence, a machine with life was attached to its place, expected to function and never considered to be given an opportunity, let
alone for equal status, even a better living condition. Thus, they were virtually identified and marked to serve the needs and interests of their Lords, the Whites.

Far from the above issues of ‘identity’ and ‘belief’, the factors disintegrating the global unity are parochialism and individualism. The perspective of Black American literature was a narrative to oppose racism and oppression in all measures, at the same time to gain a self-pride and identity. Many works have been undertaken in the Afro-American literatures, basically, to spear-head on self-identity and racism. James Baldwin’s “Go Tell it on the Mountain” (1954) focuses on the concept of racism. Similarly Richard Wright has expressively expressed his experience of oppression and cry for identity in his works more prominently in the Black Boy and Native Son. Blacks in America have long been longing for cultural self-identity. In his essay, James Baldwin, a renaissance literate mentions: “When I was growing up, Negroes in the country were, taught to be ashamed of Africa. They were taught to be bluntly, as I was for example, by being told that Africa never contributed anything to the civilization.” (Baldwin, James, 191)

Different notions have been expressed classifying ‘identity’ and the concept of its implication on human tendency. Individual betrayal and recognition of selfdom is pictured in the character of Moses Herzog, the protagonist of Saul Bellow’s novel. Herzog falls as a victim of betrayal and pitiable character who searches for his identity. He seeks to disintegrate himself from everything around, trying to forget his failures, as a writer, father and husband. The complicated mindset of his character goes too far of writing letters not only to the living, but also hypothetically even to the dead. Thus the frustration in him for recognition is not the reflection of the selfdom, but the longing dream of the blacks for an equal space in the common society.

The blacks started to realize their identity, and wanted to be identified as being a part of the society rather than away from the main stream society. The Africans depend on land for
their subsistence. They live more in constant harmony with nature. The rhythms of nature, seasons along with them a number of customs, beliefs, myths, legends, rites and religion which strongly shape the life and mind of consciousness of the people. They have their own social system, entertainment, dance, music, festival and rites. They have their own village council, judicial system that decide cases and settle disputes and quarrels. As R.K. Dhawan observes, “. . throughout most of the continent, African societies made their own laws according to customs and traditions” (Dhawan R.K, 45). The blacks in turn imagined their say in the American society rather than being marked as the outcast or the burden to the society to which they belong. However, the factors of burden, dependency, alienation were forced upon them ever since they were brought to this new land as slaves against their will. Unable to tolerate the unimaginable oppression, blacks started to rebel to see the golden rays happiness with a hope to be a part of the whole society added with a sense of belonging.

Identity can be analyzed in terms of individual and group dimensions according to the experience of black people. Bhugra notes that racial, cultural and ethnic identities form part of one’s identity. “Identity is the totality of one’s perception of self, or how we, as individuals view ourselves as unique from others.” (Bhugra .D. 6, 7) Black people were suppressed by the white society. Their talents, abilities, dreams and achievements were shadowed by the whites.

A similar notion could be attributed to racism. As dehumanizing act, it denied access to any identity factors for the Negroes (Blacks) in white society. Thus a discussion of identity would shed the light on the horrors of racism. According to the notion expressed in ‘phoenixnap’:

The importance of notion of identity in the United States is related to its use in ego psychology, which considers the ego as a relatively autonomous and potentially conflict like structure. Many theories of identity adapt a
portion of Freud’s view of the ego. Along side the Freudian Ego, which is a structure defined its function, another ego – or identity related to identification – is posited and conceived of as the outcome of a process of individuation.” (www.phoenixnap.com)

Woven with these webs of obstacle created by the whites, it was inevitable for the Blacks at every stage of life to struggle and search for equality and identity. For this they had to take several paths, the first was to try to achieve something in the society so that they could reach the white’s stance, the second path to hide behind the ‘mask of fear’ with a grinning face, but condemning them from behind. At the same time, hate the White’s dehumanizing act and pretend as if they accept every code which was laid by the whites whether they like it or not.

The third path was the inability to resist the burden of oppression, unable to tolerate the pain, and the fear, pushed upon the Blacks by the Whites; it was a life of living dead and a death of disrespect every day. The dependency of the Blacks crossed the limit of all extremes. At every stage of life they had to stretch their hands for help. In fact the deprival of the financial freedom made them extremely vulnerable to respond to the whims and fancies of the whites. The Senior Editor of Ebony Magazine Lerone Bennett.Jr, shares the views of the eminent playwright-actor Ossie Davis, when Bennett Jr. approached Davis to comment on his feeling of being a Negro, for which Davis searched his soul and came up with the following passionately eloquent statement;

I am a Negro. I am clean, black and I smile a lot. Whenever I want some thing – to get a job in motion pictures for instance or on television or to get a play produced on Broadway, whenever I need a political favor – I go to White folks. . . . White folks have money. I do not. White folks have power. I do not. All my needs – financial, artistic, social my need for
freedom – I must depend on white folks to supply. That is what is meant by being a Negro. (Bennett, Jr., Lerone, 54)

Decades earlier, in almost the same identical tone and voice Richard too echoed this view, as Bigger says to Max; “We ain’t got no money. We don’t own no mines, no railroads, nothing. They don’t want us to. They make us stay in one little spot …” (NS, 776)

Except few exemptions, most of the Blacks were submissive to the whites. The fear of survival made them handicap, hence could not rebel. But they tried hard to bring a change in the society. They were the mere spectators and silent suffers, like ‘mud’ they got dissolved in the water of white supremacy without any trace. Richard voiced for these people who could not speak and cry for their identity. The blacks, from the white’s pretext, were seen as a population incapable of sustaining or respecting family life, the desperate women and children were pushed to the corner and tend to be exploited. All the pessimistic thoughts, suppressed minds, exploited heart, signaled its prevalence through the rebellious ideas of Richard Wright in Black Boy, Silas from “Long Black Song” in Uncle Tom’s Children and Tyree Tucker from Long Dream.

In the racial hierarchy of American society, the Whites had dominated symbolically due to which the blacks had been sidelined, marginalized and devalued in all possible manner. Thus the dominant Whites made the Blacks to accept that they are inferior and their blackness symbolizes “bad”, “ugly” and “evil”. This phenomenon is further substantiated by Rajeshwar Mittapalli, who says,

... whether it is the effect of the political awareness born of the scientific as well as the technological advancements, or a sense of rejection in a compatible world of trade and marketing, the individual has always induced frustrations at all levels of the society. It is often said that the
racial atmosphere has produced the greatest rebels, particularly for not adjusting themselves to oppression and servitude. (Mittapalli, R. 98)

Whites imbibed with the belief that inequality serves as a positive function of society. And they believed that position of hierarchy demonstrates the superiority of the race. This further offended blacks being characterized as ignorant, grinning, happy-go-lucky and subservient, but actually, they wanted to be considered as real human beings. Negroes (Blacks) actually had their own legacy, culture and civilization and they had got their own life style. Unfortunately, when they came under the dreadful hands of the Whites, their real identity, all their arts, music, dance, literature, and their religion etc., faded away due to the Whites’ failure of recognizing the blacks and the society’s absence of identifying their intellectual abilities. But, they were merely identified as a living stock. Their ‘belongingness’ to the culture and its heritage is finely phrased in ‘Ralph Ellison’s Juneteenth & African American Identity’ as quoted by Christopher Z. Hobson:

This land is ours because we came out of it, we fertilize it with our dead … We know where we are by the way we walk. We know where we are by the way we talk. We know where we are by the way we sing. We know where we are by the way we praise the Lord on high. We know where we are because we hear a different tune in minds and in our hearts.

(Hobson, Christopher Z. 130)

The inevitable transplantation to the New World, and the forceful slavery snatched the reality in the lives of the blacks and their happiness seized forever. Eisenbruch has defined this as ‘cultural bereavement,’ who further quotes that,

The experience of the uprooted person – are groups – resulting from loss of social structures, cultural values and self identity. The person – or
group – continues to live in the past, is visited by super natural forces from the past, while asleep or awake, suffers feelings of guilt over abandoning culture and homeland, feels paid if memories of the past begin to fade but finds constant images of the past (including traumatic images) intruding into the daily life, yearns to complete obligations to the dead, and feels stricken by anxieties, morbid thoughts, and anger that mar the ability to get on with daily. (Eisenbruch.M, 673)

Identity is a delicate factor. Analyzing the human plight and attitude and taking effort to describe identity are elaborately discussed in American literature. Hostility towards fellow humans, non-acceptance of a living being and bringing-in misery to them by being antagonistic society are well pictured through the characters of Arthur Miller in search of identity. The simple fact of the identity of a human being is the recognition given to him with a name, a name that connotes the existence, a physical appearance. Unfortunately, even that benefit of having a name with a meaning was denied for the blacks, they were merely branded as a property, a commodity that possesses a ‘brand name’ of the manufacturer. Shakespeare once asked, “What is in a name?” with an intention that the essence of the thing won’t be changed by the change of name. But naming a black by his master’s name, it was the burial of the collective history, the culture, the reassertion of the family tree, and more specifically it influenced the white’s ownership on the blacks.

Thus, owned by the whites, the blacks had lost their self; ‘a self’ that projects everything. They derived their names from their owners, they became ‘his master’s voice’ as the language was passed on from their masters, and the culture of the Whites was donned on the Blacks. Thus Africa was not only distanced from them, but also it became an illusion. This symbolized nothing but a mask and their soul sadly followed the shadow of the owners. Forbidden to have a
name of their own, the name of the white was branded on the slaves. They were embarked with
the sign of ‘their owner’s family name’ as their second name. Thus Douglass’ and Nathaniel’s
became the common name for identification in the society.

The famous Seventeenth century Afro-American writer and a born-slave, Douglas, was
given the name of his owner, after he escaped to North. Most of the slaves, like him had their
last name only by the white owner of their father or grandfather. The name, though does not
suggest anything, the human value of the black is lost when given with a new name and identity,
to which he has no say. The case of Olaudah Equiano is more opt to mention here. Even the
names are not their own and the blacks do not own an identity. Olaudah Equiano was known by
several names, when he was bought by Michael Pascal, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, he
decided to rename him to a more understandable name, a Latinized form of the name Gustav
Vassa, as renaming slaves was a common practice among slave holders when they purchased
them. Although Equiano had been named Jacob Michael on the slave ship that brought him to
America, Equiano showed defiance and said to his new owners that he prefers to be named
Jacob. This is a classic example of how the white’s ownership was thrust upon the blacks.
Lupenga has traced this renaming custom of slaves as,

. . . African slave personal names have disappeared, replaced largely by
the Anglo-American names of their owners. But the African definition of
“name” is different from the European one, and Gutman says that in 1783
some slaves’ surname differed from their owners’, displaying a social
identity independent of slave ownership. (Mphande, Lupenga, 104)

It was the search for soul and the inner-self that Richard articulated through his stories for
seeking identity. The unwillingness of the dominant society to recognize the humanity of blacks
was evidenced through *Black Boy*. The whites deny the connection of black American with the
land, history and culture. There is always a vigorous assertion as there is something in a ‘name’, it is a possession for one to be proud of, because names are more than a mere word or words by which a person, animal or a thing is recognized with. Name is an embodiment of an individual, social norms and values as well as a personality and individual attribute. In *Black Boy* through his protagonist Richard brings up the issue that his grand mother too had her name derived from her plantation owner. Wright’s granny was named by her slave master:

“What was Granny’s name before she married Grandpa?”

“Bolden”

“Who gave her that name?”

“The White man who owned her.” (BB, 44)

Similarly, the name ‘Nathanial’ was nailed on the family tree of Richard. The Christian identity was placed upon his family. The white owners branded the blacks owned by them, such as the hoard of cattle belongs to the owners. “Richard Wright has got his name “Nathanial” from his grand father’s owner. ‘Nathanial’ was of Indian and white and African ancestry. His father Nathanial had been a slave, and received the ‘Wright’ from his owner.” (Webb, Constance, 17).

The essence of the African name is lost and name carries no meaning for the blacks. This amounts to no more than the identification of their owner’s right. The purity of the name is thus corrupted and looses the glory of a proper name.

Richard in his world fancied the evaluation in the black race and claimed the achievements of his civilization, they lived their own life, they conceived their own ideas and implemented it, they decided their own destiny, and their civilization was rich with resources and blessings. He further explains,
We had our own civilization in Africa before we were captured off to this land . . . in numerous respects the culture of many of our tribes was equal to that of the lands from which the slave captors came. We smelted iron, dance, made music, and recited folk poems; we sculptured, worked in glass, spun cotton and wood, weave baskets and cloth; we invented a medium of exchange; mined silver and gold, made pottery and cutlery; we fashioned tools and utensils of brass, bronze, ivory, quartz and granite; we had our own literature, our own systems of law, religion, medicine, science, and education; we painted in color upon rocks; we raised cattle, sheep and goats; we planted and harvested grain – in short, centuries before the Roman rules, we lived as men. (Wright, Richard, P 141)

Social or cultural identity or even the self-identity has never been accomplished by an average black American in any comparison, because of the socially dominant white majority valued blacks differently. Black as a color, from days unknown conceived as inferior. Therefore, it was quite common that this color isolation became more evident in the American white society. The blacks were given an image of down-grade, therefore not quite human. The physical appearance prompted them and differentiates them as negative. But this negativity, due to the physical appearance was forced upon them by projecting ‘white as good.’ It is ultimately the white society that determines the status. This color concept inevitably puts to disadvantage and prevails upon the prominence of negativity and cultural isolation.

Richard chose to express the condemnation on the negative identity of blacks. To save himself from the humiliation, he started writing fictions. The urge and flame of desire was in him to write the plights of the blacks. Many of Richard Wright’s characters, either they suffer or rebel against the hostile forces. To bring it to the light, Bigger Thomas from Native Son is an
eminence. This character brought the dark agonies of the blacks to the larger view of the world. However, his protagonist took the extreme steps of violence to fulfill his thirst for identity. By the turn of the century the attitude has changed as the whites have realized the want of the blacks. Alex-Assen Soh expresses,

As the twentieth century moves into its final decade, man, who is too much conditioned by time and machine, finds that his life has lost all purpose. He finds himself a drift in a world where values keep shifting like sands on the beach. In such a maze of changing values and conflicting ideals, he has to seek his identity. While black writers in the Diaspora have succeeded in creating and sustaining their identities, even if ambiguously the African writer; who continues to operate from the continent, is still struggling for both identity and survival. (Soh, Alex-Assen, 6)

Most of the characters pictured by Richard were trying to find their identity in the society. Richard implores to prove that his protagonists indulge in crime and violence that goes to the extent of murdering the whites because of their inability to tolerate the resistance from the whites to progress and oppression to ascend, murder becomes the ultimate solace for the blacks. Their oppositions make an impact and make their presence felt in the society. For example, Bigger Thomas killed Mary Dalton the white girl in *Native Son*, in “Down by the River Side” (*Uncle Tom’s Children*), Mann kills Mr. Heart Field, and in “Long Black Song”, Silas kills the white man who seduced his wife in his absence and Saul Sanders from “The Man Who Killed the Shadow” eliminates the lady librarian who harassed him and abused him with the word ‘Nigger’.
Every individual in black society tries to attain identity; these identity seekers expect recognition for their contribution to the society. When they were deceived by the whites, the dejection to swallow the disappointment prized by the whites, they try to find out alternative channels to prove their identity. An example can be given from the novel Lawd Today, which was written in the beginning by Richard Wright, but published posthumously. Wright reveals contradictions in Jack and his friend’s attitude in a scene. To gain acceptance and perhaps to enter the society dominated by the whites, the Blacks tend to straighten their hair. It becomes an attitude for the blacks to show a change in them thereby to earn the consideration of the society, particularly from the whites. Richard depicts this mind set and scenario,

Leaving the drug store just before the parade scene, Jake suddenly smells the scent of burning hair coming from a beauty parlor. The burnt hair belongs to a black woman whose bleached appearance and straightened hair did not match the color of her skin stressing the futility of self-denial, Jack mocks at her inability to par as white. Her hair was shining, and it was straight back, plastered to her head. The contrast between the overdose of white powder and the natural color of her skin was so sharp that she looked like two people instead of one; it was as if her great ghost walking in front of her. (LT, 86)

In this passage, Wright implies that “it is pointless to employ the best brand of hair straightening… and the most effective bleachers; the person’s racial identity remains intact.” (LT, 86)

In order to gain the societal acceptance, straightening the hair became social mask to adhere white’s way of life, and Mehravand termed this attitude as ‘a miserable failure’. The significance of the hair straightening incident actually emphasizes the hollowness of the attempts
made by the blacks to convince themselves. They try to fulfill the belief of color conscious whites and to meet white standards of beauty and to pass as a white. At the same time, Wright exposes the fact that those blacks who chose to emulate as whites, fall in the trap of isolation from the black community, either way their identity falls into the pit.

This changing of physical appearance was not only discussed in *Lawd Today*, but also in *Long Dream*; the argument between Fish’s friends tends to prove their identity. They had a heated argument about their race, whether they belong to Africa or America, the root cause of the very word which gives intolerable pains to the whole black race, and also questioned about Zeke’s straightening of the hair, which Zeke considers as beautifying his appearance. They conversed about coloring the skin to look like whites, only to get access into the society. This is one of the ways to adhere themselves with the stance of superiority of the whites.

“Sam says we want to be white.” Zeke bared the bone of contention.

“Sam, why you say that?” Fishbelly asked.

“We all black . . .”

“You straighten your hair, don’t you?” asked Sam bitterly.

“Aw, that ain’t trying to be white.” Zeke contended

“Why you put lye and mashed potatoes on your hair?”--- “you kill your hair to mash it straight like white folk’s hair!” “You all just ‘shamed of being black.’ Sam charged directly.”

(LD, 30)

The simple thought of being black, naturally, and the thought that they too were from a great civilization has completely been eroded out of the mind of Blacks. James A Banks, thought provokingly applied,
The average black American has never been able to establish social or self-identity that is comparable in terms of social valuation to that of the white majority . . . In his quest for identity, the black man has begun to ask, “Who am I?” in relation to other races and ethnic groups? This heightened awareness has caused many black Americans to reject their old identity, which was shaped largely by the white community, including the term “Negro.” (Banks James A, 7).

It is pertinent here to mention about “Blanche Kelso Bruce, the first black man to serve a full term in the U.S. Senate, refused to use the word “colored” saying “I am a Negro, and proud of my race” (Bennett. Jr, Lerone, 46). In support of the same theory of straightening the hair and bleaching the skin tone, Nayak too depicts an imaginary situation,

. . . in which all Blacks are bleached into whites through a glandular treatment discovered by a ‘colored doctor.’ Confusion follows when Blacks become indistinguishable from the whites. Normalcy returns only on the discovery that the bleached ‘Black-whites’ are ‘lighter’ in complexion than the real whites which leads, however to a complete change in ‘values’ to be darker in color now comes into fashion. (Nayak .K.Kishori, 25)

While speaking on the identity factors, generations of blacks have struggled to find a place, recognition and an identity in the society is worth discussing. Among the oeuvres which highlight the individual identity, Ralph Ellison’s ‘Invisible Man’ is a fit case to mention. It plays a significant role in explaining the experiences of Afro-American Blacks. The narrator of Invisible Man finds a true sense of racial identity, but it is a dream in American Society. Ralph Ellison is forthright in his concept on the miscegenation and sexual exploitation. In his novel
Invisible Man, the hero is ‘ginger-colored’ who is a product of the miscegenation. The race of miscegenation created by the whites makes the black to straddle between the two races – the white and the black. It is this miscegenation, where the blacks could not seek the identification amidst the mixed race. It is a creation of the stubborn whites and acceptance of the submissive blacks, which could be attributed to the cause of being identified as either as ‘whites’ or as ‘blacks’. It is an outcome of the plight of the enslaved black race. It is the ‘black blood’ that prevents them from joining the mainstream. In the United States, traditional laws dictated that any individual with a drop of blood of the Black was considered Black. The indulgence of sexual assault and violence implicated by the whites by taking control over the black women, and poured the white blood into their Negro blood. The generation which gets generated from these types of immoral relations and sexual abuse is called “Mulatto”, “Quadroon”, and “Octoroon”. The American approach to miscegenation has however, again been one of the double standards.

As a mulatto, Hughes suffers from a lack of belonging and he wants to know where he stands in life and where he is loved in aspect to the color of his skin, which he articulates in his poem “Cross”:

My old man’s a white old man
And my old mother’s black.
if I ever cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.
If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I’m sorry for that evil wish,
And now I wish her well

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder were I'm going to die,

Being neither white nor black? (1-12, Hughes Langston, 158)

Hughes, self identity and affinity towards Africa becomes well connected, as Gohar remarks, “Hughes’s identity as a mulatto, lost in the labyrinth of American history draws him towards Africa.” (Gohar, Saddik Mohamed, 94)

Historically, social-science literature has portrayed the African American family as inferior, disadvantaged and different from white families. Majors and Gordon write:

Males in America still are expected to assume aggressive, competitive, dominant, and powerful roles in society. So the black male although deemed inferior to the white male, was still expected to assume a dominant stance in his own culture. In short the black male was placed in a unique and contradictory position. On the one hand, a system that denied the black male his status in the family, made any man’s sense of human dignity and self-respect difficult to achieve. (Majors, Richard G. and Jacob U. Gordon, 17)

Richard Wright portrays his protagonist as a fighter, rebel, and identity seeker and finally as a hero whether he ends up with tragedy or succeeds in his fight with his oppressor the White. The story, “The Man who was Almost a Man” in the collection Eight Men, Richard has concentrated on an ordinary black’s unfulfilled wishes in a black American ghetto. Dave the hero of this story was an amicable, innocent black man who works on a white’s farm as a
laborer. He wanted to purchase a gun and comes with a catalogue of gun to his mother. Even
though she opposes him from buying it, at last he succeeds and gets a gun of his own. As soon
as he owned the gun, a sense of power runs in his mind. The hidden anger which was
suppressed, due to the ill treatment of whites towards him as a little boy, surfaces and makes him
to feel the sense of supremacy. It speaks evidently his unfulfilled urge of transforming as a giant
or a monster in front of the white eyes.

Whut’s the use talkin wide m niggers in the field? Anyhow, his mother
was putting supper on the table. Them niggers can’t understand nothing.
One of these days he was going to get a gun and practice shooting, and
then they couldn’t talk to him as though he were a little boy. ... Ah mol
enough to have a gun. Ahm seventeen. Almost a man. (“The Man who
was almost a man”, 11)

Dave’s mother objected his buying a gun. But he decided to buy one to prove that he was
no longer a boy and has become a man to hold a gun. The objection of his mother made him
dejected and he murmured “what is the use in talking with them “niggers”? This symbolically
suggests that there is no power for a black to decide what to do, confine within the lines of white
society. Given the circumstances, he feels that “Niggers cannot understand nothing.” Holding
the gun in his hand makes him feel masculine and thinks he has achieved something in his life,
which gives him a sense of power.

In the gray light of dawn he held it loosely, feeling a sense of power.
Could kill a man with a gun like this. Kill anybody, black or white. And
if he were holding his gun in his hand, nobody could run over him; they
would have to respect him . . . holding the weapon in his hand, aiming it
now and then at some imaginary foe. (“The Man who was almost a man”, 18)

With the gun in hand, a feeling of elation and manliness fills in him when he looks at his White master’s white house, perhaps the white color makes him more agitated. The joy made him feel on the top of the world, as if the gun made him rebellion and a protector of the whole black race against the whites.

When he reached the top of a ridge he stood straight and proud in the moonlight, looking at Jim Hawkins’ big white house, feeling the gun sagging in his pocket. Lawd, ef Ah had just one mo bullet Ah’d taka shot at tha house. Ah’d like t scare ol man Hawkins jus a little . . . Jusa enough t let im know Dave Saunders is a man. (“The Man who was almost a man”, 26)

The new found masculinity urges him to prove himself before the society, and this proof of his identity and making the presence turns fatal when he decides to give a try to his luck. All his innocent acts are nothing but the feel of elation and imaginary sense of the happiness of being a conqueror of an imaginary monster.

Finally, out of enthusiasm he fires a trial round, which by mistake, as fate has its own way, kills the by-standing mule. To hide away his mistake, Dave is forced to cook up a story to prove his innocence. Dave always acts according to his will. He has never subjected himself to his parents. Dave never had the freedom to do what he wants and due to this he feels rejected and depressed. He was never at peace with himself or with the society which never echoed his identity. Richard Wright has handled this like a metaphor that almost all the blacks try to ruin the life of whites out of frustration and suppressed anger, but finally they end up with annihilating their own people instead of the rivals. They were unfortunately unable to turn their
pent up emotions, anxiety, disappointments, ordeals and failures towards their own people. This was evidently proved by Richard Wright from this act of killing the innocent mule, even though he wanted to show his power towards his white master. Finally to evade from the punishment and penalty he escapes from the train to somewhere hoping that he would be posing as an innocent man and live a man of his dreams.

He feels that the gun gives him safety and security from the white society and also it gives an identity to him.

He started down the road, towards the tracks. Yeah, here she comes! He stood beside the track and held himself stiffly. … the train thundered past, the gray and brown box cars rumbling and clinking. He gripped the gun tightly; … Ahm ridin yuhj ternight, so hep me Gawd! He was hot all over. He hesitated just a moment; then he grabbed, pulled atop of a car, and lay flat. Her felt his pocket; the gun was still there. Ahead the long rails were glinting in the moon-light, stretching away, away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man …” (“The Man who was almost a Man”, 26)

Given with no alternative, Dave finally forced to escape from his cruel master and his domination. The ambition for the gun makes him quit his family too. The gun for Dave proves to be a vital point of physical strength. It gives a misperception that the power to kill brings the power to control. Dave feels the need to be superior and to look down upon others, as he was identified by the whites. On surface, Richard makes the story look simple. It was a dream of Dave, an adolescent black boy, who thinks that by owning a gun the society would respect him and look up at him. Dave makes a quit as he was unwilling to face the ill treatment and the humiliation. He feels that his life is so harsh and overwhelming that for him escape becomes the
only solution. His escape marks a shift of tide in the society which conveys the blacks desire to break the chain of their past and look for new opportunities elsewhere.

“The Man Who Lived Underground” from Eight Men throws light on a black man Fred Daniels, who is forced to live under the sewage, for fear of false implication in a murder; he hides under the sewage and lives under ground to escape from the white police. It is a story of an innocent black who does not want to be black marked as another ‘bad nigger’ in the society. He finds solace, in living an ‘underworld life’ that gives him a new freedom. Richard perhaps identifies the whole story in bringing out the inner meaning. Though the life under the ground is dark, foul-smelled, abnormal to live, it gives blacks a meaning for their survival. Though the condition is inhospitable, and dreadful, it gives him a comfort by staying away from the clutches of the whites. Richard’s characterization of Fred Daniel is not the projection of an individual, but a black and the black society as a whole are the victims of white’s atrocities.

Fred Daniels almost turns ‘insane’ under the ground and is able to sleek through the hole on the wall of the sewage. He sneaks through the hole into the adjacent shops during the night and enjoys his time there without anybody’s intrusion. His act of lifting the items from the shop carries no meaning as he does not make use of it, where, Richard tries to prove that Daniels is not a greedy, cunning black, but a black with a pure innocence, who happens to be naïve.

Denial of everything to the black was the way of life for the whites. Writers at various period of time have proved and deliberated on the social malady of segregation impounded on the blacks. Even in the service of God, the blacks were kept aside. There were the White’s church and the Black’s church. The Gods the blacks were praying in Africa was no longer their God. The complexity of this different ‘Church identity’ and their yearning for love is well illustrated through Fred Daniels:
“He listened with open mouth. It was a church service. Enchanted, he groped towards the waves of melody.

Jesus, take me to your home above

And fold me in the bosom of Thy love . . . (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 31)

The singing and praying voices came from the other side of a brick wall. The sound made Fred more excited and he wanted to watch the service without being seen. But at the same times, he thought, “Whose church was it? . . .” (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 31). Even before the Almighty the people were separated because of their color, there is a white church and a black church, but one God. Richard proves the racist approach of the whites even before the Creator of all, the God. Watching the sermon for a long time makes him numb and drops to the dirt. “Pain throbbed in his legs and a deeper pain, induced by the sight of those black people groveling and begging for something they could never get, churned in him.” (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 32)

The main point of Fred’s story is his innocence with no keenness on materials. He is not a thief, not a culprit, and he has no wants. All he wants is to be considered as a human with good qualities, like the blacks in general wants to be identified with. This nature is well described by Richard in the incident where Fred enters the shop through the hole,

Holding the bag, he thought and laughed. There was in him no sense of possessiveness; he was intrigued with the form and color of the money, with the manifold reactions which he knew that men aboveground held toward it. (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 53)

Similarly, the fear in him brings to the brink of forgetting his own name and identity; it narrates the tragic truth of human psychology and the sensitivity of a human character either
black or white. Taking a pragmatic view and the loneliness undergone by Fred, his isolation results in hallucination and is reflected when Fred tries to type his name in the typewriter;

Oh, yes! He had forgotten. He would now write his name on the typewriter. He inserted a piece of paper and poised his fingers to write. But what was his name? He stared, trying to remember. He stood and glared about the dirt cave, his name on the top of his lips. But it would not come to him. Why was he here? Yes, he had been running away from the police. But why? His mind was blank. He bit his lips and sat again, feeling a vague terror. But why worry? He laughed, (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 61)

Richard never mentioned the protagonist’s name in this story. Throughout his narration the character was mentioned as by the pronoun, “He”. Richard, tactfully, creates an idea for the readers to understand that the story is not pertaining about one single Black, but the entire blacks in the society, who are almost leading a life in the sewage. In another incident in the story the “he” tries to type his name in the typewriting machine but struggles to recollect his name, at last he types as “Fred Daniels”. Here, Wright symbolically reminds the readers not only the plight of the protagonist in remembering his name, but also the plight of the ‘forgotten blacks’ who lost their identity. Thus it is a nameless and rootless struggle the blacks undergo in the society leading their miserable life. Richard projects his own people’s identity which echoes well in this story.

Despite his escape from the threat of being convicted as a criminal by the police, Fred did not feel the comfort within him, he seemed to be lost. Though his escape was from the conflicts and chaos of society, his understanding of the world above him was fearsome. The wrong notions of the whites on the blacks in general cause a barrier, and led to negative identity on
blacks, thus made them to be submissive. The traumatic experience of the blacks can be felt in every incidents and coincidences narrated by Richard.

While hiding away from the whites for no fault of his, Fred peeped through the hole and watched the harassment meted out to the watchman and the boy to make them confess the crime which they had not committed.

He crawled through the hole he had made in the brick wall and the exertion afforded him respite from tension. In his underground world, he felt happy to move around again tried to explore the basement store with no intension but to spend the time and make himself happy. When he entered the basement of the radio store, he stopped in fear, hearing loud voices.

“Mister, I didn’t’ steal the radio! I swear!”

“No, sir! I didn’t steal the radio! I got a radio at home,” the boy’s voice pleaded hysterically. There came to his ears the sound of another blow.”

(“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 68 & 69)

The sight of torture meted out to the watchman and the boy, brings Fred to his sense to go and accept the crime that he committed unintentionally with no motive whatsoever. “The guilty familiarity of what he saw made his muscles tighten . . . His heart pounded as he saw one of the policemen shakes a finger into the watchman’s face.” (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 69)

The policemen refused to believe the watchman, as it is already preconceived by them that the theft has been committed by him. More than that, his being black, made them more aggressive. As the policemen refuse to accept the version of the Black watchman, Thompson, the watchman shoots himself to death.
Although Fred accepted his crime to the police, they chided him away as a mad nigger’s (Black’s) words and do not believe him. At last he convinced them and took them to the sewage entry to show them what had taken; “All right,” Lawson said. “Show us.”

He walked to the centre of the street, stopped and inserted a finger in one of the tiny holes of the cover and tugged, but he was too weak to budge it. Unconvincing but surprised Police Officer did not show his anger at the same he still holds a sense of doubt on Fred and asked,

“Did you really go down in there, boy?” Lawson asked; there was a doubt in his voice.

“Yes, sir. Just a minute. I’ll show you.”


Johnson stepped forward and lifted the cover; it clanged against the wet pavement. The hole gaped round and black. As Fred entered the Manhole first and asked the police men to follow him, their pre-conceived idea made them not to believe or follow him, for them a Black was bad, evil or even criminal. Even, when a black man came forward to accept his ignorance, if it did not suit the whites, they will push it aside or ignore, because they already knew, and believed that the Black was not worth the consideration. Finally, Richard ended the story with the death of Fred. The finale of the story ended with the conversation between the other two policemen Johnson, Murphy and Lawson.

“What are we going to do, Lawson? Murphy said.

“We are not going to follow that crazy nigger down into that sewer, are we?” Johnson asked.
It brings out the essence of cruelty and the preconceived mindset of the White police and their ultimate response to an innocent black. Richard tries to emulate that, at every given opportunity; the blacks are never trusted and are degraded. The Policeman, Lawson never tries to verify the truth, but acts on his personal judgment that blacks are useless who needs to be condemned and he justifies by saying, “You’ve got to shot his kind. They’d wreck things.” (“The Man Who Lived Underground”, 91).

The tragic climax utters loudly that whites determine the destiny of blacks at every stage. The identity of blacks in America was a conflict between the whites prejudice and blacks reality. Richard wished to depict the life of black to the white society by demolishing the myth that the blacks were dull, sickening, and funny and of course obedient. The roles in his novels brought out the real life tragedy intermingled with a desire of the black to get themselves accommodated in the society. His own experience in the society included the violent confrontations, conflicts, and racist oppressions. Most of his characters reflected this ideology one way or the other.

The characters in general took up violence to prove themselves. This phenomenon can be attributed to the lifestyle of Richard during his childhood as well as adolescence where he underwent a difficult period which turned him to become a rebellious person not only in his family but also in the society. This again reflected the identity, the blacks try to achieve. The individual characters spoken by Richard need to be translated not at the face value but considered into a global status of the blacks verses whites, because whatever the misery, the suffering, the segregation forced on the blacks were not their own making but a cause for them to turn rebellious, aggressive and violent to prove themselves. Yet they are part of the society and not a discriminatory factor to be kept aside or degraded for the mere fact that they are blacks.

*Long Dream* happens to be a ‘whistle blower’ and Richard has tactically used his literary skill in bringing forth the miseries of blacks. Eventually this bears the identity factor for the
blacks to be considered for what they are. In Long Dream, the story is spun around the family of a prosperous black undertaker who manages multiple business activities of renting houses, running a whore house and burying black dead bodies. In this story, Tyree Tucker, the black business man is described as a man of determination, who wants to make a place for him. His prominence in the story derives how a black wants to be recognized even though he is pushed to the pitiable conditions.

Fishbelly, the son of Tyree Tucker, also an ambitious young black, brought out in a decent family life style, wants to prove as a man of worthy. Although Tyree Tucker runs the illegal business of prostitution, it is the white police and the white customers who give him the cover to run the business of which Tyree takes advantage of at the same time he bribed the white police to run his business. However, humble he may be, there lingered an undercurrent of untrustworthiness between Tyree and the whites because the whites envied the growth of Tyree Tucker but unable to contain him. The police wanted let him operate his business because they were getting a good remuneration as bribe and remained untainted. As fate takes the fold, the twist in the story happens with the fire accident in the brothel house. Taking this as the right opportunity, the white police pound, as wolves’ pound on the sheep, on Tyree and implicate him for the entire accident. A shrewd, Tyree, wants to come out of this situation to prove that he is innocent and used for the whites, by the whites. The ‘cancelled checks’ that he possess comes handy for him, particularly made out for the Chief Cantley and asks him to help him and bring him out of the situation. He threatens the white police with the ‘cancelled checks’ which are his main alibi for Tyree and a trump card to come clean of this case. But, the white police who do not wish to get entangled in this mess try to eliminate Tyree and thus succeed.

While the case is being processed, to seek justice for what has happened, Tyree argues that he would appear before the jury provided there is a proper black representation among the
juries. Thus through the request of Tyree, Richard proves his point to the world about the non-representation of blacks in the judicial system. Richard emphasizes the reality, that the blacks want their representation for equal justice, equal opportunity and equality in all respects. However, the adamant white police oppose his idea and they do not give him the opportunity that he asks for. This particular attitude is to prove that the jury system is still one-sided and is in the hands of whites; hence equal justice does not prevail.

But Tyree, realizing that his life may not end up peacefully since he is at the wrong side of whites, somehow passes the ‘cancelled checks’ to his son Fishbelly. The story ends with the death as a punishment for Tyree. Fishbelly manages to escape to another land, Paris to his friend Zeke who comes handy in helping Fishbelly in his cause. To prove the innocence of his father, at last he finds a man of virtue and a man of words - a white jury, and he hands over the cancelled checks and pleads him to take the right and lawful action against the culprits.

Richard brings out the feeling of the blacks and portrays how they came from and how they were brought from Africa. He depicts their sense of color and what it means to them, what they have achieved and what they seek.

The term identity is beautifully portrayed through the character “Fishbelly”, Tyree Tucker’s son in Long Dream. The following dialogue illustrates the color consciousness which gives their identity as blacks;

“My mama’s black. My papa’s black and that makes me back.” Fishbelly said.

“And where did your mama’s mama’s mama and your papa’s papa’s papa come from?” Sam next wanted to know.

“Now, just stand there and tell me what is you?”

“Fishbelly’s a African! Fishbelly’s a African!”

“I’m black and I live in America and my folks came from Africa.”
Fishbelly summed up his back ground .” “That’s all I know.”

“Your folks was brought from Africa,” Sam sneered.

“We awready in America, you fool!” Zeke yelled.

“You niggers ain’t nowhere. You ain’t in Africa, ‘cause the white man took you out. And you ain’t in America, ‘cause if you was, you’d act like Americans -“

“I’M AN AMERICAN!” Zeke thundered.

“Nigger you dreaming!” Sam preached.


You can’t live like no American, ‘cause you ain’t no American! And you ain’t African neither! so what is you? Nothing? Just Nothing!” (LD, 31, 32)

Richard wails here silently about the homelessness and rootlessness of blacks through a childlike conversation among Zeke and Fishbelly and other friends. Their straddling on both the race, and country and their inability to prove their self identity, due to the double stand of whites
who were actually strangers who came and occupied their home, made them to indulge in this conversation.

Appearance plays a major role for recognition. There is no denial of the fact and there could be no second opinion on how the blacks struggle to get acceptance by changing their appearance by their hair doing or taking all sorts of efforts to show themselves fair. In the society they lived, black consequently means ‘shame’ as Prof. Randoll L.Kennedy states “And white adults disciplined their children by telling them that unless they behaved, they would be carried of by “the old nigger” or be made to sit with niggers or be consigned to the nigger seat which was, of course, a place of shame.” (Kennedy, Randoll L, 87)

Richard touches the same sentiment giving greater emphasis on hair dyeing. Their natural curly hair becomes a focal point of rejection, hence they wanted to straighten their hair, and detest their own healthy and curly hair. The prominence of the personal appearance is differently emphasized by Richard on his readers as he adds:

Jake Lamb’s wife plagued Fishbelly with the issue that weighed heaviest on her heart. Mrs. Lamb, an enterprising woman, used the front room of her house as a hair dressing salon. Amid fumes of burning oil, Mrs. Lamb would pull sizzling iron comb through kinky, greasy tufts of hair to kill it and make it straight, straight like the hair of white folks.

Mr. Fish, “Mrs. Lamb would begin.” is we ‘colored folks,’ is we ‘Africans,’ is we ‘Americans,’ or is we just plain old black folks? That’s what I want to know. We was black when we came from Africa a long time ago, but since then we been all mixed up with red blood, brown blood. We ain’t white, ‘cause our skins got color in ‘em and we ain’t
black, no more. Now, white folks call us ‘colored’; but ain’t that ‘cause
they don’t know what to call us? (LD, 180)

As the story moves, Fishbelly is caught by the police for a petty mischief. Being a black,
he is shown with the usual treatment as any black gets from the white police. Upon his father’s
intervention and the receipt of dole of bribe, the white police release Fishbelly. On his way
home, he witnesses an accident where he sees a dog hit, laying on the road howling a death cry.
Seeing the pain, Fish takes pity on the dog. Since he feels it cannot survive, to relieve its agony,
he kills the dog.

Richard in his own style unfolds this sequence;

The dog yelped, waging its tail. He lingered. Naw, he couldn’t leave a
wounded animal like that… its back was broken. Fishbelly’s voice burst
out in a throaty whine of resolution: “... Got to kill ‘im so he won’t suffer.
(LD, 121)

After much hesitation and self-pity, unable to leave it as it is to wallow in endless pain, he
kills the dog. At the same time, he hears another mourning voice and finds a white man
entangled under a car. As the white man calls for help, he tries to lift the car to save him. Fish
makes an attempt to lift the car, but the heaviness is beyond his strength. So he struggles hard. In
this process, he loses his temper, when the white abuses him by calling ‘nigger.

“Heeey, boooy … Booooy!”

“He stopped and peered down into a welter of tree trunks and foliage, but
could not nothing.” The voice was gasping, panting...

“Booy, help m-me ...” A twisted mouth was calling… (LD, 124)
The hinge of the door was deeply embedded in the man’s shoulder blades, and above the door was the weight of the car. Yeah, he had to try to lift that door and relieve the man’s pain, and then he would run to the highway and stop a card and ask for help” …. He bent and tugged at the end of the twisted door. “G-goddammit, q-quick, nigger!”

“Fishbelly sucked in his breath; …“Nawsir,” he breathed, taking a backward step.” (LD, 124, 125)

The word ‘nigger’ hurts Fish. As Rondall L.Kennedy quips, “No one knows precisely how it attained its pejorative, abusive meaning.” (Kennedy, Rondall L, 86)

“Fishbelly was poised, collected now. The suffering white man had called him nigger! He had an impulse to turn and run, but pity and guilt held’him still.

“Y-you hurt bad?” he asked the man softly.

“G-goddammit, nigger! S-stop talking and h-help me ….” The voice faded and the man’s head sagged.

He stood undecided. Stifling panic, he approached the man again, his arm lifting slowly. The man’s head lolled weakly to one side and, for a long moment, his eyes were closed. Fishbelly watched the gray eyes open and stare at him; then, impulsively, the man’s right arm flung out and white fingers tried to seize hold of Fishbelly’s right leg.

White fingers clawed frantically in the blood-soaked grass and grasped a clod of earth and hurled it feebly. It fell short of Fishbelly’s right foot.

“Naw, naw,” Fishbelly protested.” (LD, 125)
He abandons the whiteman and leaves the site. The message of this simple incident is to prove that the Black should be treated with self-respect and his humaneness should be considered with dignity. “Nigger” is a word that degrades a black, Richard echoes that Identifying a black as ‘nigger’ is unacceptable and they no longer take these remarks hands down.

Whites with their superior nature, treat the blacks like dogs. The humiliating word “Nigger” becomes intolerable and abusive. At the same time, while pleading for mercy and seeking help a white’s ego could not stop ill-treating a black. The resentment of Fishbelly, to accept the abuse of the white, proves that both stand at their values. The incident pictures the white’s attitude that they demand and expect blacks to serve them at any cost and it is their duty to work for the whites. But here Richard projects the same formulae, by making Fish to save the dog and leaves the white man to die. Here, Richard hints the whites that this is the end of all the humiliation and atrocities the blacks were subjected to.

This sequence further informs the white society a message that however humane the Blacks act may be, they are seldom identified for their goodness or efficiency, but are given a sub-standard treatment.

The tenderheartedness and compassionate attitude are well explored in “Big Black Good Man” in *Eight Men*. Although this story takes place in a different shore, it is the enactment of feeling between the white and the black. Throughout the story the speaker (narrator), Olaf Jenson mentions of a big black giant character named David; Richard speaks of the attitude of whites in general against the black. In this story, Olaf Jenson a white and a night porter, an employee in a lodge at Copenhagen, describes his life and is a content man. Speaking about his life, he happens to come across the big black giant. The mere sight of Big Black giant makes him insecure as he identifies it as a bad element. Deep in his mind he feels a strong desire not to serve him. The mere physical appearance of the ‘Big Black Giant’ forces Olaf to obey whatever
he is asked for. When this black man vacates the lodge, Olaf feels it as the “end of this nameless terror.” “Tomorrow night was the 6th night and that ought to be the end of this nameless terror.” (“The Big Black Good Man”, 102)

The story of “Big Black Good Man” is a good example of how a black, due to his appearance, could be construed as bad. The narration continues with a twist, when the ‘Big Black Giant’ vacates the room, he goes close to Olaf’s desk and takes the measurement of his collar by running his hand around Olaf’s neck, which scares him to death. As a matter of fact, this makes him so nightmarish and makes him upset that he leaves for his home.

With this simple story line Richard builds an emotional bondage between Olaf and the giant black man. The incident has made him so upset that Olaf imagines and dreams of something bad happening to the big black giant. He imagines the freighter, on which the giant travels, has dangerous leaks and sea water flux in, drowns the ship together the black giant.

So much of his imagination and dislike towards big ‘black’ giant that he dreams of a ‘white shark’ swallow the carcass. He describes even the bones would be ‘black in color’. Unlike the usual violence and death, this story ends with a good note that after nearly two years the ‘Black Giant’ returns to meet Olaf. At first sight, Olaf becomes agitated and thinks that the ‘big black giant’ has come back again to harass him; hence he even contemplates of shooting him. He says, “. . . and I thought you wanted to kill me.” He further states “I was feared of you . . . You are a big black good man.” (“The Big Black Good Man,” 109)

This beautiful story line brings forth the humaneness that goes unnoticed and is prevalent among the blacks. Richard wants to stress this point to his readers through his character “Big Black Good Man”.
Richard exposes his characters differently. Like the story, ‘The Man Who Lived Underground,’ in “Big Black Good Man” Richard introduces the main black character as a narrative, from someone viewpoint. The expression from Olaf on a black man as “Big Black giant man” is a personal reference of the black man’s physical appearance. The name is never mentioned to the readers until the midway of the story, that too only with a reason. By this way Richard reminds the readers that the black is referred only by their color and appearance unlike the whites. The name holds little or no meaning. For a white, a black is a “black” nothing but a “black”.

*Native Son* dramatizes the identity factor of the blacks in a different tone perhaps on a rougher terrain. The story initially portrays a simple lifestyle of a black youth entangled in a poor urban life style. It is only after meeting Mary and Jan, Bigger Thomas comes across the other side of whites who are not only liberal but respects everyone as equals. “He felt something in her over and above the fear she inspired in him. She responded to him as if he were human, as if he lived in the same world as she. And he had never felt that before in a white person.” (NS, 506)

Being a communist, Richard brings in the communist philosophy through the white characters, Mary and Jan. He stretches this thought from the mind set of Bigger to express what a communist would look like and what a communist does. When Mary goes into an old building, Bigger Thomas wanders to think what Mary indents to do by entering the building. He wonders, “But, if she had gone to meet those Communists? And what were Communists like, anyway? Was she one? What made people Communists?” (NS, 506)

There can be no two different views that by *Native Son*, Richard brings out the ill effects of racism not only particularly on black people, but also on the society as a whole. Discreetly, he interweaves certain points with the ideologies of Communism in the story to stress his
propagation of mutual and equal respect for the blacks, to be identified as equals. At the same time the story also moves inconspicuously forward to help the reader to understand why some of the events are unfolding the way they are. Bigger is further surprised by the manner in which both Mary and Jan move and mingle with him. This however, surprises Bigger to come to terms, when he was accepted as equal by Mary and Jan. The intention of a Black is to be respected and identified with dignity is suggested through the conversation between Jan and Bigger Thomas.

“First of all,” Jan continued, putting his foot upon the running-board,
“don’t say sir to me. I’ll call you Bigger and you’ll call me Jan. That’s the way it’ll be between us. How’s that?” (NS, 507)

The friendly approach of Mary and Jan kindles a specific question of how Bigger Thomas reacts to it. Due to the cross-cultural barriers, Bigger’s psychological impact becomes more invert when Bigger confronts himself of being Black. Richard further goes to the extent of describing the confused mind set of a Black whose identity is not easily recognized. The reality aspect of being a black is well explained when Bigger thinks, “He was very conscious of his black skin and there was in him a prodding conviction that Jan and men like him had made it so that he would be conscious of that black skin.” (NS, 508)

He further echoes the views of Blacks by asking, “Did not white people despise a black skin?” (NS, 508). This phrase can be considered as the double edged knife, by asking such a question. Richard, through Bigger, intends to prove that it is the black skin that makes the whites to shower hatred upon the Blacks and he wants the Whites to make a self-realization. Amy Carreiro perceives, “Unintentionally and paradoxically, Mary and Jan emphasize Bigger’s color by minimizing its importance. … Their behavior is alien and unsettling, placing Bigger in unfamiliar territory.” (Carreiro, Amy E, 251)
Racism thus pushed the blacks to the virtue of being looked down, even by themselves and Richard tends to advocate against the sense that the whites were superior by color and the powerlessness of black towards the white. This is nothing but the confused state of mind of the slave, imagining themselves with the negative identity. Richard further adds on to express this inner feeling of Bigger as “…a No Man’s Land, the ground that separated the white world from the black that he stood upon”. (NS, 508)

The story takes a dramatic twist with the accidental murder of Mary and the disposal of Bessie, his black girl friend to bury the truth of the killing of Mary. Dr. Lale Demirturk, in her “Teaching Richard Wright in Ankara Turkey” suggests that “Bigger was forced into the situation.” She further adds, that, “Bigger’s situation was not just “fictional.” It was the reality itself.” The real fact of survival is provoked upon Bigger to fight it out and prove his identity as the circumstantial victim and not the murderer as any black are identified with. Given the circumstances and with the nature of the incidents, the public in general and the police in particular hunt for the blood of Bigger, because the incident is committed by a Black. Richard describes the fear of a black in such a circumstance, “The reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place. She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman” (NS, 527). There, however, is not the fear of a victim but the psychological fear embedded upon the Blacks of how they are looked upon and how they are convicted by the White society.

Deep down the mind, Bigger tries to justify his action and reaction on the accidental murder of Mary. Though by nature Bigger is timid and a loner, the turn of event makes him bold. In other words Richard proves a point that in general Blacks are timid and shy but circumstances make them to be forcefully rigid and alter them. As Bigger echoes,
“All one had to do was be bold, do something nobody thought of. The whole thing came to him in the form of a powerful and simple feeling; there was in everyone a great hunger to believe that made him blind, and if he could see while others were blind, then he could get what he wanted and never be caught at it.” (NS, 543)

It is a salvation and the identity that a black seeks. The self-expression of Bigger takes a dig on the cultural gap between blacks and whites. Richard has crafted the protagonist Bigger to move beyond this point to obtain equality between the races.

Bigger Thomas’s character is the foremost feature in building up Native Son. His life and actions show how racism has affected the society and what it has created. The life of Bigger is not unrealistic. By scrutinizing the essay of Richard Wright, called ‘How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,’ One can find that Bigger was created by compiling characteristics from different people he had known all his life.

As the story unfolds, circumstances lead to the killing of Bessie, his girl friend. He is forced to kill Bessie to save himself as he no longer feels that she can be trusted with the information, because she’s too scared. Racism is also what makes Bigger who he is. To explain this Richard takes the big risk in crafting the drama in Mary Dalton’s bed room after her return from meeting Jan. The mere sight of a black person found in a white woman’s bedroom would immediately be identified as a rape drives Bigger to cover himself. This negative impact forced on the black by the white makes the theme for Native Son. He leaves this to the wisdom of readers by saying “He had committed murder twice and had created a new world for himself.” (NS, 671)

Richard Wright wants to show what white oppression has caused black people to become. Bigger is a prime example of this with his anger and aggression towards white people. He
violently attacks the practice of racism and preaches about equal right and communalism. In *Native Son*, he creates a black character that is white person’s worst nightmare. But at the same time, he elaborates given at every opportunity how the Whites pound upon the Blacks, as the newspaper heading explains,

REPORTERS FIND DALTON GIRL’S BONES IN FURNACE.
NEGRO CHAUFFEUR DISAPPEARS. FIVE THOUSAND POLICE SURROUND BLACK BELT. AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME.
COMMUNIST LEADER PROVES ALIBI. GIRL’S MOTHER IN COLLAPSE. (NS, 673)

Richard further goes on to add the agony and pain Bigger experiences, which is very important for the development of the novel and this further proves what damage racism can do to the black society. Here Bigger Thomas does not represent himself, but he represents the whole black society. As many events fold and unfold, the mind set of Bigger, in identifying himself and the conjunction of his inner self towards the society where he stands, makes the reader understand the situation that drove Bigger to his plight. The confused mind of Bigger is well drawn to prove the point why he could not identify himself and move along with the society. “Mr.Max, we’re all split up. What you say is kind ain’t kind at all. I didn’t know nothing about that woman. All I knew was that they kill us for women like her. We live apart.” (NS, 773)

In similar context while arguing in the Court Room before the Hon’ble Judge, Boris Max, Bigger’s lawyer, rightly voices on the living condition of Bigger. This however, is not the living condition of one Bigger Thomas in particular, but several Thomases as well as the Blacks living in similar situations amidst the White society. In other words, it reflects the self-realization of blacks.
This boy is young, not only in years, but in his attitude toward life. He is not old enough to vote. Living in a Black Belt district, he is younger than most boys of his age, for he has not come in contact with the wide variety and depths of life. (NS, 798)

Bigger’s life and his actions show what racism can create in society. *Native Son* is a powerful novel that doesn’t cover up any ugly truths about the black race; however, it makes them more reasonable. By framing this character, he not only brings a story but also tries to break the illusion the world has upon the black society. It is a sense of freedom that he wants everyone to taste. The other side of Bigger i.e. the humane face, is projected to tell the society that Bigger the black has a heart and he is a human being too to be loved and cared, not an “wooly headed black lizard” (NS, 829). Finally bidding Adieu before Bigger takes the never returning journey, Richard eventually proves himself as the fine craftsman of his protagonist, and the story is ended with the acceptance of reality when Bigger shows his connection and acceptance of Jan. “Tell … Tell Mister . . . Tell Jan hello . . .” (NS, 850)

In extreme circumstances, Richard’s protagonists indulge in killing. This killing act gives them an identity, though negative, but makes their presence felt. Generally they do not go after killing, but situation drags them to commit the crime. Richard vents out the anger, his personal anger as well as the anger of the entire black race. For them killing gives a feeling of satisfaction to chases away their loneliness and brings them into the limelight. The murder of Mary in the *Native Son* makes Bigger the most sought after. Through him Richard teaches the white society that Bigger is not the murderer. His lawyer argues that the society killed Bigger long back. In *Black Boy* the protagonist kills the innocent kitten and at the beginning of the story *Native Son*, Bigger kills the rat. All these show the dissatisfaction and hatred a black has in his mind and does not know how to express it.
The harshness of the events and the climax create hollowness in the mind of the readers as Richard Wright is fully aware that Bigger cannot escape justice since what he has done was wrong, but feels that the punishment is far too severe. Richard hopes that the society would forgive for what Bigger was and understand why he behaved in the manner, as he was the creation of the society as Boris Max points out. It is also true that Bigger feels that no one understands him. Through his protagonist, Richard, projects number of living Bigger Thomases in the real life and that they are the creation of the society.

Identity pictures one of the attitudes of human predicament. Richard makes use of his characters in multi-dimensional facet, through Fred Daniels and Dave; he portrays the curiosity and innocence. In Long Dream, both Tyree and Fishbelly show their courage and determination, whereas Bigger Thomas, who proves a big hit as a young black American trying to break the shackles, identifies himself with conviction and maturity.