Chapter II

Exclusion of the Blacks in a White World: A Journey towards Manhood and Freedom

*Black Boy* “A record of childhood and Youth” and *The Long Dream* propose to examine the quest for freedom and manhood. In many ways these two accounts of mainly Southern childhoods are strikingly similar, though set in varied circumstances. *Black Boy* and *The Long Dream*, both narratives cover a period in Wright’s and Fishbelly’s lives from their earliest childhood memories to late adolescence.

The struggle of the individual for self possession, which leads to manhood is a struggle to be fully human and free, are of the strongest unifying elements in Wright’s work. By the time Wright published *Black Boy*, he had shifted his focus in achieving internal psychological freedom, especially for people who are oppressed. This form of struggle that most often takes place in Wright’s work, is a struggle to achieve adulthood since all of Wright’s protagonists are male and there are both personal and historical reasons for this. Keneth Kinnamon points out “four basic facts of Wright’s youth—his racial status, his poverty, the disruption of his family, and his faulty education,” all of which he claims “left ineradicable scars [on Wright’s] psyche and deeply influenced his thought” as well as providing “much of the subject matter of his early writings”(4). In *Black Boy* Wright sees his family members and relatives literally and metaphorically, trying to beat and train him out of their own experiences in the white dominated society.

*The Long Dream* recapitulates *Black Boy* and his carefully documented personal experiences. Wright’s fifth work of fiction *The Long Dream* since he became a writer to be reckoned with the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Children* twenty years ago, puts the nightmarish experience of a middle class Negro undertaker, Tyree Tucker and his son,
Rex Fishbelly Tucker in terms of a long dream. *The Long Dream* covers the life of Rex Fishbelly from pre-school years to his eighteenth birthday, a span of time sufficient for a southern black man’s complete maturation to wake into the world’s nightmare of reality. The novel’s focus is not the black-white conflict in itself but the divisions it creates within and among the blacks; and this is telescoped by the friction between the boy and the father. Sexuality in relation to race and racism is the primary theme of this novel.

*Black Boy* is a depiction of what occurs when Negro sensibility attempts to fulfil itself in the undemocratic South. Here it is not young Richard who is the immediate focus but that upon which his sensibility is nourished, from his earliest boyhood until his 17th year, when he succeeds in escaping from Memphis, by boarding a train to Chicago. As he grows older, however he realizes that the root of racial hatred did not exist in any individual, but that it stemmed from an inherited system. From this vantage point he took social determinism to be a threat to his autonomy and began to wage a battle. By the time he was nineteen, he becomes aware that his life experiences “had shaped me to live by my own feelings and thoughts” (252).

The autobiographical resemblances between the author in *Black Boy* and his protagonist Rex Fishbelly in *The Long Dream* are not however confined to geography. In many respects the psychic lives of the two appear to be very close, not to mention the fact that both the protagonists seem to have shared almost identical traumatic experiences. The first part of *The Long Dream* is reminiscent of *Black Boy* in so far as it is an account of a young Negro’s experience in Mississippi. The time is some twenty five years later than that described in *Black Boy*. Both Wright and Fishbelly share certain bourgeois backgrounds. Although Fishbelly is relatively affluent and Wright frequently destitute; both are reared in a middle-class society. The lesson Fishbelly learns, however, is essentially the lesson Wright learned, and he learns it in the same harsh way. In *The Long
Dream Parts II and III, on the other hand shows how Fishbelly’s life turns into a melodrama.

A reading of Black Boy alongside The Long Dream is instructive in this regard. Both Wright and Fishbelly, for example at the age of six discover, that their fathers are having illicit relations with women. Both boys have dreadful fears of being abandoned by their mothers: indeed Fishbelly has a dream not unlike the nightmares, the four year old Richard suffered in the opening pages of Black Boy. Both boys do not come into any real contact with the brutality of the white world until their adolescent years, a fact which may account for their singular independence of spirit and defiance of caste ordinances. As a result both Fishbelly and Wright come to the conclusion that they are unable to accept the traditions and values of either white or black world and must therefore seek the meaning of their lives in different environments.

There is a difference between the protagonists of the novels The Long Dream and Black Boy. In The Long Dream the protagonist suffers from the exclusion of blacks by the whites, he does not try to prove himself for being a black, which is not his mistake. But in Black Boy the protagonist fights against it and he starts writing a book to prove himself. This shows how Wright and Fishbelly suffer due to the same problems of identity, racism, and exclusion, the way they handle it by choosing exile, and in the process Wright struggles and triumphantly expresses himself as a writer.

Wright’s Black Boy is a social document rather than a novel; what such a document shows is the fact that the oppressors are as much victims of the elemental design of racism as are the oppressed. The centre of Wright’s interest then, rests on deciphering this design in The Long Dream and Black Boy. Although blacks were physically free, the South had replaced traditional slavery with a system by which their
freedom of speech and movement was closely monitored and restricted. The culprit was not any individual white man; it was the complicity of white society that had allowed the design of slavery to renew itself in the twentieth century South.

The central theme of *Black Boy* can be summed up in the fear-hate-fear complex of Negroes. Carefully documented from Wright’s own experience, *The Long Dream* is a ritualized account of a black boy’s initiation into the two conflicting worlds of blacks and whites, a ceremony that members of both races participate in. Indeed, a major portion of character development, or more accurately character malformation, is affected by the blacks on their own kind. To insure their youths’ safety, young Richard’s family and Fishbelly’s father Tyree Tucker, together with the black community abets the emasculative process begun by whites when slavery began in the United States centuries ago. But just as surely as black parents act to destroy, they act to save.

When Wright ensures his own people he is only too aware, as he points out in *Black Boy*, that they have been excluded from the benefits of western culture and its traditions. How black parents react may be deplorable, but it is certainly understandable, at times even necessary for the survival of their children. *Black Boy* can be described as an impressive condemnation of American racism. Wright’s uniqueness must be the central consideration of every reader. It was Wright’s innate sense of dignity that had helped him to escape his racial and family background.

In *Black Boy* Richard Wright strives to have an ameliorative effect on the world. Wright simply and movingly paints a portrait of Negro life in the years 1915 to 1925. His autobiography describes how he could enlighten the reader to help in establishing a new kind of self-authentication. He articulates this new standard of selfhood and discusses his life in Jackson Mississippi, before he left for Memphis at the age of seventeen.
The *Black Boy* records young Richard’s early childhood which was crammed with catastrophic incidents. In a few short years his father deserted his mother, he knew intense hunger, he became a drunkard begging drinks from black stevedores in Memphis saloons; he had to flee Arkansas where an uncle was lynched; he was forced to live with a fanatically religious grandmother in an atmosphere of constant bickering; he was lodged in an orphan asylum; he observed the suffering of his mother who became a permanent invalid, while fighting off the blows of the poverty stricken relatives with whom he had to live; he was cheated, beaten, and kicked off jobs by white employees who disliked his eagerness to learn a trade; and to these objective circumstances must be added the subjective fact that Wright, with his sensitivity, extreme shyness, and intelligence was a problem child who rejected his family and was by them rejected.

What distinguishes *Black Boy* from any other naturalistic work is that it is the story of a man estranged from his own race by sensitivity and intellect, yet segregated from the white race by the colour of his skin. Although *Black Boy* is predominantly a portrayal of Southern society; it is also a self-portrait. Early in the book he rationalizes this passion for ego: “Because I had no power to make things happen outside of me in the objective world, I made things happen within. Because my environment was bare and bleak, endowed it with unlimited potentialities, redeemed it for the sake of my own hungry and cloudy yearning” (72-73).

An understanding of Wright’s critique of racism and of the whites’ racist South in *Black Boy* depends on not only what they, the whites, do to Richard, but also what his family does to him. His family members and community become accomplices in preventing him from ever growing up into an adult, and enjoy manhood and freedom, is clear when he says “I wrote the book to tell a series of incidents stringing through my
childhood, but the main desire was to render a judgement on my environment” (“The Author” m3).

The pre individualistic black community against the background of the Jim Crow Laws discourages individuality out of self defence. *Black Boy* illustrates that this personal quality, shaped by outer violence and inner fear is ambivalent. Within the ambit of the black family this takes the form of training the child away from those activities lying beyond the borders of the black community. And when the child resists, the parents discourages him, first with the formula that the white folks were free to do want they wanted and it was not for coloured to demand those rights, and finally with a beating. It is not, then, the family and communal violence described by *Black Boy* that is unusual, but that Wright recognized and made no peace with its essential cruelty because he could not discern where his personality ended and where it began in the process of young Richard attaining his manhood and freedom.

The centre of attention in *Black Boy* lies in young Richard’s transcendence of that oppression. In “Blueprint for Negro Writing”, Wright asserts that “theme for Negro writers will rise from understanding the meaning of their being transplanted from a ‘Savage’ to a ‘Civilized’ culture in all its social, political, economic and emotional implications”(47).

*Black Boy* capitalizes on the abnormal discord of his childhood, which haunted his mind as proof of omnipresent white malignity. This mood of surly definition was a liability in his contacts with the white world, but it also set him uneasily apart from the majority of blacks. Wright rejects the fellowship of the black community because it acquiesced too cravenly in its own subjection, Wright overstates the positivity and shallowness of black life. Thus, in *Black Boy*, there is a dearth of competent black adults
on whom the boy can model himself. A milkman takes the time to Richard how to count; a newspaper editor good naturedly explains the process of setting Wright’s story into type; and a third man patiently points out the tabloid the adolescent Wright was peddling to earn money was a Ku Klux Klan hate mongering sheet.

*Black Boy* provides as Donald B Gibson asserts that the autobiography “is a recital of examples of parental rejection providing an explanation and a justification for Wright’s individualism” (493-494). Scorned by whites and feared by slavish Negroes, the protagonists are truly outsiders whose only recourse appears to be violence. It is also true that while his family rejects him, Richard simultaneously rejects them. Above all others, he rejects his father and grandmother, the two people who with their diverse and conflicting personalities, threatened him the most. Richard rebels against the authoritarian father Mr. Wright who worked as a night porter in Beale street drugstore is “forbidding”, (10) the “lawgiver in our family”(10), a giant in front of whom Richard finds himself forced to quiet a kitten whose mewing provokes his father. “Kill that damn thing! . . . Do anything but get it away from here!”(11), his father commands. Immediately resentful, Richard hangs the kitten and so, Wright tells us, enjoys his “first triumph” (12) over his father. Wright explains:

I had had my first triumph over my father. I had made him believe that I had taken his words literally. He could not punish me now without risking his authority. I was happy because I had at last found a way to throw criticism of him into his face. I had made him feel that, if he whipped me for killing the kitten, I would never give serious weight to his words again. I had made him know that I felt he was cruel and I had done it without his punishing me. (12)
Young Wright’s cunning act of interpretation is the telling point here. The meaning of Richard’s setting fire to his house in the opening pages of the book and the passage cited above demonstrate a full-blown hatred and content. It is significant to note how Wright focuses on his father’s words, how he attempts to neutralize his father’s psychological authority by a wilful misinterpretation of his statement.

One of the remarkable insight Black Boy offers is that social determination takes its heaviest toll in Wright’s family life. In Wright’s early childhood when his father deserted his family not only did Wright become a casualty of the broken family, but his father himself was a victim of the racial system in the Deep South. Wright observed about his father: “From the white landowners above him there had not been handed to him a chance to learn the meaning of loyalty, of sentiment, of tradition” (34).

Wright describes in the Black Boy a scene which depicts an infantile trauma of relative importance. Richard sees his father one last time in boyhood, at the home of his father’s mistress. He recoils from the encounter for reasons he cannot make clear to himself. Wright describes his father laughing standing next to his mistress when Wright goes in the company of his mother to ask him for money, the family to return to Arkansas. The father of course denies money for the trip. When he has left his father’s room, he delivers a judgement against his father. Richard is overwhelmed with same “My father and a strange woman were sitting before a bright fire that blazed in a grate. My mother and I were standing about six feet away. . . The woman laughed and threw her arms about my father’s neck. I grew ashamed and wanted to leave. . . ” (32). This incident created a disgusting feeling in Richard’s memory:

We left. I had the feeling that I had had to do with something unclean.

Many times in the years after that the image of my father and the strange
woman, their faces lit by the dancing flames, would surge up in my imagination so vivid and strong that I felt I could reach out and touch it; I would stare at it, feeling that it possessed some vital meaning which always eluded me. (33-34)

The fire attracts Richard, but his father’s life, finally, does not. Wright describes briefly his father’s life and character as he finds them to be many years after the scene with his father and the strange woman has occurred. His description chronicles the extent of his estrangement.

A quarter of a century was to elapse between the time when I saw my father sitting with the strange woman and the time I was to see him again. . . a share cropper, clad in ragged overalls, holding a muddy troe in his gnarled, veined hands- a quarter of a century during which my mind and consciousness had become so greatly and violently altered that when I tried to talk to him. I realized that, though ties of blood made us kin though I could see a shadow of my face in his face, though there was an echo of my voice in his voice, we were forever strangers, speaking a different language, living on vastly distant planes of reality. (34)

Whatever Wright has become, it is not because of his father. Memphis, for Mr. Wright, is:

From far beyond the horizons that bound this bleak plantation there had come to me through my living the knowledge that my father was a black peasant who had gone to the city seeking life, but who had failed in the city; a black peasant whose life had been hopelessly snarled in the city, and who had at last fled the city-that same city which had lifted me in its
burning arms and borne me toward alien and undreamed-of shores of knowing. (34-35)

The final lines record the success of young Richard, whereas his father had failed. He becomes the parent. Thus Richards grows toward manhood. Wright’s feelings about his mother are rather more complicated. The book begins with the boy almost under the whip of his mother. While she repeatedly beats him into senselessness, Richard could still say he had always felt a certain warmth with his mother, for it was she who first “taught me to read, told me stories” (23) and she helped him to read newspapers guiding him and spelling out words for him. And when Richard defies Granny and Aunt Addie, his mother, tottering in and out of sanity, smiled and “rose and hobbled to me on her paralytic legs and kissed me”(144). Richard saw how stroke after stroke, days of hurt in which she wanted only to die, had paralyzed her. His mother’s agony touched everything, “gathering to itself all the poverty, the ignorance, the helplessness; the painful, baffling hunger ridden days and hours, the restless moving, the futile seeking, the uncertainty, the fear, the dread; the meaningless pain and the endless suffering” (100). Richard identifies his suffering mother as the central representative figure for the Negro community in Black Boy, and that:

A sombreness of spirit that I was never to lose settled over me during the slow years of my mother’s unrelieved suffering, a sombreness that was to make me stand apart and look upon excessive joy with suspicion, that was to make me self-conscious, that was to make me keep forever on the move, as though to escape a nameless fate seeking to overtake me. (100)

Richard’s initiation started when his father deserted the family. Richard’s mother sends him out to buy the groceries. Richard sets out “proud” (16) and feeling “like a
grown up” (16). When he is robbed by a gang of boys in the street and beaten his mother: “She slammed the door and I heard the key turn in the lock. I shook with fright. I was alone upon the dark hostile streets and gangs were after me” (18). He arms himself with a big stick and defends himself first against the boys who stole from him and then against their parents who “rushed into the streets and threatened (me): They had never seen such frenzy. For the first in my life I shouted at grownups, telling them I would give then the same if they bothered me” (18). Richard’s victory here is a multiple one. Supplanting his father as provider of food, he triumphs over him a second time and more decisively. At the same time he overcomes his own fear.

Earlier where Richard had been afraid to go into the city streets alone now he has won for himself the right to the streets of Memphis. Richard quickly familiarizes himself with the adult world, he was attracted by the saloon which appeared mysterious to him. When he tried to keep beneath the swinging doors one day a black man dragged him in and put a cigar in his mouth and forced him to drink. The crowd of men and women in the saloon were amused. There he learns to drink, at the age of six “for a penny or a nickel, I would repeat to anyone whatever was whispered to me” (21), encouraged by the responses he got. “In my foggy, tipsy state, the reaction of the men and women to my mysterious word enthralled me. I ran from person to person, laughing, hiccupping, spewing out filth that made them bend double with glee. . .To beg drinks in the saloon became an obsession” (21).

The roughhouse amusements of the drunken crowd’s thoughtless merriment abuses the child’s vulnerability and his hunger for attention. His schooling was sporadic. Because of his mother’s early paralysis, Richard and his young brother were passed from relative to relative, with a short stay in an orphanage as well. He worked before and after
school to help support his family and to buy a few school books. After the ninth grade he had to leave school. Wright offers no commentary, no judgement about his childhood.

With Richard’s father out of the picture, his grandmother, Mrs. Wilson becomes the head of the family, and the authority figure Richard must contend with on a day-to-day basis. Granny is a fanatic Seventh Day Adventist according to Wright and from the very beginning her religiousness conflicts with Richard’s free expression: “I was dreaming of running and playing and shouting” (3), the autobiography goes, “but the vivid image of Granny’s old, white, wrinkled, grim face, framed by a halo of tumbling black hair. . . made me afraid” (3). Richard finally gets out of the house burning it down. Clearly wanting to see with his grandmother lying helpless upon her bed, “yellow flames” (5) instead of that halo in her hair.

At home in Jackson “Granny maintained a hard religious regime” (111). Under his grandmother’s supervision, Richard once again feels hunger, both physically and intellectually. For Richard, religion is more of a hindrance than a path to salvation. His education at the religious school is almost a joke and any literature other than the Bible is considered “the Devil’s work” (168) by Granny and Aunt Addie.

Granny bore the standard for God, but she was always fighting. . . But Granny and Aunt Addie quarrelled and fought not only with me, but with each other over minor points of religious doctrine, or over some imagined infraction of what they chose to call their moral code. Wherever I found religion in my life I found strife, the attempt of one individual or group to rule another in the name of God (136).
Religion is another obstacle set down by authority to make him conform. Interacting with his peers at the religious school, he comes to the conclusion that he does not need religion to be strong.

Granny’s strict religious routine tires young Richard and his family. Granny continually points her finger at Richard commanding; “Sin” (168) so that she may have the pleasure of beating him. The grandmother’s real shortcoming for Wright was her strict religious convictions with which he was always at odds. The following incidents related in *Black Boy* illustrate this observation. Richard meets the young coloured teacher Ella, who was taken in as a boarder by Granny to support the household. Ella knows that Granny forbids novels, she attempts to placate Richard by closing her book and whispering to him *Bluebeard and His Seven Wives*. “My imagination blazed” (39), Wright writes. But just as Ella is about to finish, Granny steps out on the porch and puts an end to the story, telling Ella, “I want none of that Devil stuff in my house!” (39). From Granny’s point of view, the dreamy school teacher Ella is “evil” (39) books are the “devil’s stuff” (39), Richard himself is “a foolish child” (39).

This view is directly opposite to Wright’s own views and his desire to become a writer, and not only resulted in many subsequent battles between him and his grandmother, but the lack of learning created in Wright indeed an intellectual hunger. That is all right with Richard, who appropriates the terms; that he “burned to learn to read novels and I tortured my mother into telling me the meaning of every strange word I saw, not because the word itself had any value, but because it was the gateway to a forbidden and enchanting land” (40). Wright stood up against his grandmother on whether he could or could not work on Saturdays—the Sabbath for Seventh Day Adventists. For Wright, it was mostly a practical matter, one of whether to work and eat or observe religious dogma.
and go hungry. Ultimately, though, Wright rejected most religions as just another method of further restricting and controlling the black man’s destiny.

Wright and his protagonists do not receive helpful guidance, but receive rigid indoctrination from their families and the black society. In the autobiographical Black Boy, the author identifies Negro religion with white repression. Both foster unwarranted shame and guilt, the Church emphasis on original sin and reinforce guilt about skin colour. In both cases the Negro is marked from birth and made to feel guilty over which he has no control. This convinces the Negroes of their inferiority. Wright describes his grandmother as being “as close to white as a black person would get, which was white” (24). Granny represents the conspiracy of white society and black church to restrain Negroes. Richard is black; his mother and brother are black; and Granny with her few drops of Negro blood is black. Ultimately they have to face the fact that white society and the black church make salvation possible only in the next life.

Some, especially Wright’s women, accept such precepts and redouble their efforts to gain entry into heaven. Others, particularly his young male protagonists, remain sceptical about a religion which values death more than life. They require answers but receive lectures or sermons. Abrupt exclamations and loud declaration stifle any questions. Wright is warned by Granny, “If you want to go to hell, then go. . . He won’t forgive you” (144). Such religious attitudes stiffen Wright’s resistance to the church.

What survives best in Black Boy, is Wright’s gentle account of his human rebirth, as a writer. At eighteen, reading Mencken, he learns audacity, the agonistic use of language, and an aggressive passion for study comes upon him. One morning in Memphis he read a newspaper editorial denouncing H. L. Mencken the editor of American Mercury. Feeling a vague sympathy for the white writer who had earned the scorn
normally directed at blacks, he sought the help of an Irish Catholic, Mr. Falk also reviled by southerners, in getting copies of Mencken’s books from the public library. The white man’s library card and a note forged by Wright secured him copies of *A Book of Prefaces* and *Prejudices*. That night Wright began to read the books in his rented room. He was startled. The lucid, raging style was that of a man fighting by words. “Could words be weapons?” (248) he asked himself. “Well, yes, for here they were. Then, maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon?” (248) Guilt about his intellectual violation of caste arrangements made Wright fearful that a difference in his outward manner would betray him, but within himself he was forever changed by the passion for literature awakened that night by reading Mencken. A new and magic world now opened before his eyes.

I had once tried to write, had once reveled in feeling, had let my crude imagination roam, but the impulse to dream had slowly been beaten out of me by experiences. Now it surged up again and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing. It was not a matter of believing or disbelieving what I read, but of feeling something that made the look of the world different. (249)

As he read such books as Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street* (it was the first serious novel he tried), Theodore Dreiser’s *Jennie Gerhardt* and *Sister Carrie*, and other works praised by Mencken, Wright found nothing less than a sense of life itself. All his experience had shaped him for the realism and naturalism of modern fiction, and he could not read enough of it. Although Wright also read the fiction of Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, it was Mencken’s work that first inspired Wright’s own literary ambitions. Later Wright also read the work of experimentalists and modernists such as Marcel Proust, Henry James and Gertrude Stein.
Against the wishes of the community, Wright continues to read and develop as a young writer in his eighth grade. His first real triumph comes when the editor of the local Negro newspaper accepts one of Wright’s stories, “The Voodoo of Hell’s Half-Acre” (165). The plot of the story involves a villain who wants a widow’s home. After the story is published, no one, excepting the newspaper editor, gives any encouragement. His grandmother calls it “‘the devil’s work’”(168); his high school principal objects to his use of “hell”(168) in the story’s title; even his mother feels that his writing will make people feel that he is “weak minded”(168). His classmates do not believe that he has written the story.

Young Richard longs to become a writer he feels that North would provide him with the required opportunity. “I knew that I lived in a country in which the aspirations of black people were limited, marked-off. Yet I felt that I had to go somewhere and do something to redeem my being alive” (169). All his life, Richard’s personality has been programmed to react with hostility and violence. Uncle Tom is the culminating episode marking a defiance expressed earlier against a number of authority figures, all women—Richard’s mother, Miss Simon, Grandmother Wilson, Aunt Addie.

Early in his life Wright himself had experienced a desire for brotherhood, a search his own identity which was lost in him. This led him slowly but inevitably to become alienated from his own people, remarking later in his autobiography, to the shock of many blacks, that he used to ponder

... the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of great hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our
memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair. (37)

When Richard was forced to participate in family prayers, church services and ritualistic all-night prayers, it became an agonizing experience. He remained basically unaffected as his personality had already been influenced by “uncharted conditions” (112) of his life.

In addition to these similarities, in Black Boy Wright recalls an incident in Memphis involving a preacher invited to Sunday dinner, the main course being “a huge platter of golden-brown fried chicken” (26). Before the boy can finish his soup the preacher is picking out “choice pieces” (26). Thus the self-righteousness of religious people affected Wright and he started to hate religion and religious people. And a bit later, his reactions to religion were as follows:

Many of the religious symbols appealed to my sensibilities and I responded to the dramatic vision of life held by the church, feeling that to live day by day with death as one’s sole thought was to be so compassionately sensitive toward all life as to view all man as slowly dying, and the trembling sense of fate that welled up, sweet and melancholy, from the hymns blended with the sense of fate that I had already caught from life. (112)

The matter of hunger is a reality for Wright, and a theme for much of his fiction. His childhood was darkened by the lack of any economic security filled with constant hunger that “mush at eight in the morning and greens at seven or later at night” (127) could not satisfy. Black Boy is dominated with references to hunger, but Wright is careful to differentiate among the varieties of hunger, though often in subtle ways. One such
aspect of hunger is the common place one of physical hunger which he experienced as a child, but apparently he attached no real significance to it beyond that of a temporary manageable condition. Richard’s mother bravely complained to the judge in the court that his father had left them and the children always suffered from hunger and that she had to raise them alone. Mr. Wright simply replied without any touch of conscience said “‘I’m doing all I can, Your Honor’ he mumbled grinning. . . . Back at home my mother wept again and talked complainingly about the unfairness of the judge who had accepted his father’s word” (27). However, the frequency of hunger increases when the family moves to Memphis.

Hunger becomes a craving, unbeatable feeling. Wright accounts of days that he and his brother went hungry or were forced to subsist on a piece of bread and a pot of tea. Back in Mississippi Wright again experiences severe hunger and try’s to sell his prized dog to obtain money for food. However, Wright learns a powerful lesson here. Refusing to sell the dog to a white girl for ninety seven cents instead of the full one-dollar and asking price, Wright returns home triumphant but still hungry, only to witness the dog being run over and killed by a coal truck. His mother’s singular comment is instructive: “You could have had a dollar. But you can’t eat a dead dog” (71).

Wright portrays himself as quick witted, although unsophisticated at times, but he is, nevertheless, able to articulate hunger as a growing, developing, quasi permanent condition that becomes the chief metaphor for black experience, more specifically, black male experience, in America. From early childhood, the enigma of race disquieted Wright. When he was driven off a job and deprived of a chance to learn the optical trade, he felt that “he had been slapped out of the human race” (190). Wright earned the limited repertoire of roles available to blacks in the South assigned and stage managed by whites, but he balked at playing them. In his fifteenth year in terms of schooling, he was far
behind the other boys, but he was ignorant of what knowledge was denied him. After
reading books by great authors he dreamed of going North and writing books. “In me was
shaping a yearning for a kind of consciousness, a mode of being that the way of life about
me had said could not be, and upon which the penalty of death had been placed” (169).

In Memphis, in order to fight against racial violence Richard feels the safety of his
own life depended upon how well he is able to conceal his true feelings from all whites.
One day, Richard’s foreman a young white man named Mr. Olin informs him that another
black boy named Harrison is going to kill Richard for calling him a dirty name. When
Harrison and Richard confront each other, they realise that Mr. Olin is playing a dirty trick
by telling each boy that the other is planning to kill him. In fighting Harrison, Richard
feels he “had done something unclean” (243) and wrong. Richard was ashamed of
agreeing but he was afraid to back out. Mr. Olin and the other men had tried to force the
two black boys to hate and kill each other in a fight for their own pleasure. They would
not hesitate to harm these black boys in their own frustration.

In the case of blacks, even a dog bite does not claim the sympathy of the white
man. Richard was frightened of dogs when he was working in the brickyard his owner’s
dog bit him. Teeth marks on his thigh showed “deep and red” (162) when he tells the
white man, his boss, about the incident he laughs it away “‘Hummmm,’ he grunted… ‘A
dog bite can’t hurt a nigger’” (163).

An assessment of the realities of Wright’s South could not be complete without
some mention of what young Richard perceived as the treachery of his own people. One
such portrait is that of the principal of Richard’s junior high school. When he was
graduating his ninth grade Richard considers the principal to be a pawn of the white
power structure. As such, Richard perceives that the principal’s role is more to retard the
development of black students by teaching them to conform to what white folks want rather than encouraging the students to think, speak, and act freely.

Richard quotes the incident of his graduation address. The principal wants Richard to deliver an address to appease the whites in the audience, which the principal himself has written. Wright, however, insists upon delivering his own speech, much to the consternation of the principal. After a heated exchange and the principal’s further efforts to manipulate the situation and subvert Richard’s resolve, he prevails, fully aware, however, that his victory is temporary because of the principal’s power to prevent him from obtaining suitable employment. That night his friend Griggs comes to his house and urges him to deliver the speech in the way the principal wants it. Young Richard’s uncle, Tom, also felt that the principal’s speech was better. But Richard was determined to have his say. In order to save him, his classmates pestered him saying “Richard, you’re a fool. You’re throwing away every chance you’ve got” (177). Wright feels that the educated blacks, like the principal, failed to empower the youth.

There is a curious detachment in this autobiography, as if the author had so covered up his affection that it can no longer be revealed. Such wounds have made young Richard indignant and tight lipped. Richard Wright’s account is a horrible testimony of the terms on which ten million black people lived in the South.

The touchstone of fraternity among his young Richard’s associates was his feeling toward white people and of the hostility he held toward them, the degree of value and honour he assigned to race. None of this, he tells us, was premeditated but sprang spontaneously out of the talk of black boys whom he met at the crossroads and, while still comparatively a child, often years a dread of white people came to live permanently in his feelings and imagination.
Richard Wright learned to hate white folk before he had anything more than casual and unimportant relations with them. This hate he acquired from his own family only in small part; mostly it came from other Negro children. As a consequence, when he did come into personal contact with whites, he saw them as types of the enemy, not at all as other human beings. That is, he saw what he had been taught he would see, not what was before his eyes. As a Negro child he learned to see white people in very much the same way that white children learn to see Negroes. “I had already grown to feel that there existed men against whom I was powerless, men who could violate my life at will” (73).

*Black Boy* which so skilfully synthesized the style and themes of his earlier fiction, was to be the last book published Wright in his lifetime. He died two years later, at the age of fifty two. His own experience which he described as “the white hot face of terror” (55) and observed quite early on that fear was the most poignant emotion which dominated Negro life. In *Black Boy*, one such experience is encapsulated in the episode of the murder of Wright’s Uncle Hoskins in Arkansas. Uncle Hoskins was the purveyor of a lucrative, though illegal, liquor business that had long been coveted by local whites. Because Hoskins would not relinquish his enterprise at the insistence of the whites, he is murdered in his saloon. Moreover the threat that they would kill the rest of the Hoskins’ family made them to flee for their lives under the cover of darkness. Wright called this his “first baptism in racist emotion” (49).

Although the early twenties was an unfortunate period of intensified racial strife in the South, Wright’s life was shadowed by the threat of violence. In the earlier part of his record he writes: “I had never in my life been abused by whites, but I had already become as conditioned to their existence as though I had been the victim of a thousand lynchings” (74).
In the *Black Boy* the murder of Bob Greenly, brother of young Richard’s friend, Ned Greenly is elevated to myth like status in the mind of Richard Wright. Bob was working at one of the hotels in town. Richard had become acquainted with him through Ned. Ned weeping softly relates how his brother Bob had been killed by white people. They had taken him out on a country road and had shot him on the pretext that he was having an affair with a white prostitute in the hotel. “Bob had been caught by the white death, the threat of which hung over every male black in the South” (172).

He relates the things that affected his life, the drama, the superstitions, the religious meetings, the relatives, along with the inner turmoil of being continually suppressed by the white race. In his own words he states, “I hid my feelings and avoided all relationships with whites that might cause me to reveal them” (273).

After having been summarily dismissed by a white employer for not having the “right attitude” (182) young Richard seeks out a friend his old classmate Griggs who worked for a capital street jeweller who has the gift of adjustment to the white world. The friend asks:

“Do you want to get killed?”

“Hell, no!”

“Then, for God’s sake, learn how to live in the South!...” (183)

He begins his first substantial dealings with whites in order to get a job and plays the part his friend Griggs takes him to explain the rules of the game. He tells young Richard that he must always remember that he is black. He admonishes young Richard to learn the ways of the white people because the black man is always under the scrutiny of the whites. Therefore he continues, “When you’re in front of white people, *think* before
you act, think before you speak. Your way of doing things is all right among our people, but not for white people” (184). Wright’s response to this advice has been quoted by scholars to understand the mind of the man.

One of Wright’s major goals in Black Boy is to shatter the stereotyped image of the Negro who appears to be happy and to carefully distance himself from the defensive behaviour, talk of the black boys he meets. The most popular subject at lunch hour meetings in the basement of an office building in Memphis was “the ways of white folks toward Negroes” (229). He offers a rich sampling of the strategies of forgetting or numbing their daily miseries, of blandly dissembling true feelings; cures, whiskey, numbers games, or the scatological humour of a piece of doggerel which barely contains the speaker’s anger, like the petty thievery that whites encouraged because it made them feel safe and superior. He tried to fathom how Shorty, an intelligent black man, could stoop to being kicked at the back by a white man for the sake of a quarter. Shorty’s patter and willingness to clown filled Wright with disgust and loathing. Shorty’s perverse showmanship repelled him. When he once ventured to protest to Shorty, the following colloquy took place:

“How in God’s name can you do that?”

“I needed a quarter and I got it”, he said soberly, proudly.

“But a quarter can’t pay you for what he did to you”, I said.

“Listen, nigger”, he said to me, “my ass is tough and quarters is scarce”.(229)

Though he recognizes that Shorty’s role playing was, in an oblique fashion, a way of manipulating the white man, of mitigating a position of weakness, Wright feels that it
is unclean and dehumanizing. Wright’s intention is to point out that the racist system 
produced a way of life that was forced on black people. Wright is trying to show how this 
gross state came about. He explains:

I began to marvel at how smoothly the black guys acted out the roles that 
the white race had mapped out for them. Most of them were not conscious 
of living a special, separated, stunted way of life. Yet I knew in some 
period of their growing up – a period that they had no doubt forgotten- 
there had been developed in them a delicate, sensitive controlling 
mechanism that shut off their mind and emotions from all that the white 
race had said was taboo. (196-197)

Young Richard had refused a nickel from his father because it was tainted money, 
a bribe that would corrupt his integrity. Later, for similar reasons, he would spurn a white 
man’s offer of a dollar to buy food. He refuses the communist party’s offer that he drops 
his writing and go to Switzerland as a delegate to an international conference. Wright is 
as much critical of black women as of white men, because black women expect and 
readily condone white man’s behaviour. Once Richard witnessed a black maid who was 
slapped playfully on her back by a night white watchman she accepts the incident in a 
matter of fact way and told the indignant young Richard who had witnessed the incident 
“They never get any further with us than that, if we don’t want ‘em to’” (198).

In Black Boy in November of 1925, Richard arrives in Memphis, Tennessee ready 
to live on his own. He walks down Beale Street-a street notorious for its bad reputation 
until he sees a large house with a sign that says rooms. Not knowing whether it is a 
boarding house or a whore house, he is hesitant to enter until a large mulatto woman 
beckons him to come inside. The woman, named Mrs. Moss, lives with her daughter,
Bess. She hopes that Richard will marry Bess, and continuously praises everything he does. Bess instantly declares that she loves Richard, fawning over him and combing his hair. Richard is unimpressed by what he calls her peasant mentality, but he is tempted to take advantage of her. When he tells Bess that he wishes to be friends, she decides that she hates him.

When young Richard works at a white table he marvels at the cruelty of white people toward each other, their compulsive obscenity, and their reflexive meanness. Negroes think of the people on the other sides of the tracks as a threat. *Black Boy* recounts an incident in which Wright was once wrongfully accused of addressing a white employee Pease at an optical company without using the title Mr. Another white employee Reynolds later corroborated the accusation by telling Wright: “Didn’t you call him *Pease*? If you say you didn’t, I’ll rep your gut string loose with this f-R-g bar, you black granny dodger! You can’t call a white man liar and get away with it!”(190). Consequently Wright was forced to leave his job. A half decent white man Mr.Crane, the owner of the optical shop cannot believe that his workers have beaten Richard and keeps asking “which one”(192) it was. But *Black Boy* shows us it is no “one” (192). Wright discovers that all these white men who oppressed the black were not individuals but belonged to a huge system.

Meanwhile Richard also begins to hear of the communist party’s activities, but pays no heed. When the 1929 Stock Crash occurs, his pay decreases and there are no positions open for a regular clerk. Richard desperately seeks employment in white neighbourhoods and in the downtown business districts in order to contribute to the support of his family. He discovers when he does so, that the demands to accommodate him according to the dictates of the whites become even more insistent and less flexible than that exerted by his own family. A distant cousin who was a super intendment in a
Negro burial society offers Richard a job of selling insurances, which he accepts. His job allows him, for the first time, to explore the lives of the black people in Chicago. Most policy holders were illiterate and poor: like many other salesmen, women who are unable to make regular insurance payments offer sexual favours to the agents. Not only did the black insurance agents view their black women as property, but they participated in swindles that would cheat illiterate policy owners out of money by switching policy needs.

Wright writes during that year he worked for several burial and insurance societies that operated among Negroes, and he was awakened to a different black experience. He discovered that these burial societies, with some exceptions, were mostly rackets. Some of them conducted their business legitimately, but there were many that exploited the ignorance of their black customers. Richard wanted to give up being an insurance agent, so that he will not be a party to this dirty game. But the fear of starvation made him to continue to work.

In Wright’s South it was unthinkable for a black boy to aspire to become a lens-grinder, much less to harbour the ambition to become a writer. When Richard is thoughtless enough to reveal his true aim in life to one of his white employers, the response is predictable: “You’ll never be a writer…Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head?” (147)

Richard held a series of trivial jobs for short periods quitting some to work for better ones elsewhere, being sent away by others because of his refusal to comply with the whites dictates. In Chicago Richard is employed as a postal clerk, where he meets an Irish fellow whom he can relate to. He is eventually introduced into a literary circle where several of the members are in the Communist Party. Richard joins the John Reed Club a
Communist organisation for the arts in the hope of learning to write and publish. Due to inter club politics, Richard is elected as the executive secretary of the club. At the National meeting in New York, where members will discuss the dissolving of the clubs. Dejected, Richard is defeated in the vote to maintain clubs and the John Reed Clubs are officially dissolved. Richard gains little hope that the black community can unite to overcome their obstacles. His hope becomes manifested in his involvement with the Communist Party. Although the ideals of the Communist Party appeal to Richard, he is somewhat naïve when he places his faith in a political institution. Richard believes that he can single handedly unify the political and cultural needs of the black society through his writings.

Richard becomes disillusioned with the Party’s goals, and tries to sever all relations with the Party. It is ironic that the Party members also consider Richard an intellectual and shun him because of his status. Richard joins the Party because they are blind to race, but he does not consider that they are biased toward other socioeconomic factors, such as education. To Wright, this is astounding that they can label someone who has grown up in poverty as bourgeois. Their ignorance toward Richard’s background serves to isolate him from the Party and the Communist vision.

Yet a new hate had come to take the place of the rankling racial hate. It was irrational that Communists should hate what they called “intellectuals,” or anybody who tried to think for himself. I had fled men who did not like the color of my skin, and now I was among men who did not like the tone of my thoughts. (369)

Richard is disgusted with the political organisation and decides that the only way to reach the common man and evoke a reaction from society is through his writing.
I would hurl words into this darkness and wait for an echo, and if an echo sounded, no matter how faintly, I would send other words to tell, to march, to fight, to create a sense of the hunger for life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressibly human. (384)

The young man going North, scarred and watchful, in search of redemption by meaning, has remarkably little connection with the four year old boy, impatient for the dream of running, playing, and shouting. Wright’s purpose is to explain his fall from impulse into care, and his inevitable explanation will be social and historical. Yet much that he loses is to his version of the family romance, as he himself describes it, and that which vanishes from him can be ascribed, retrospectively, to a purely personal failure; in him the child was not the father of the man.

But his life was not all bleakness, bitterness, and torment. Even his Seventh-Day Adventist relatives with their narrow and often mean orthodoxy could not prevent him from revealing in the magic possibilities of folk superstitions, the cool sensuality of the dew on his cheeks, the tantalizing melancholy in the tingling scent of burning hickory wood, the blue pink crawfishes, the aching glory in masses of clouds burning gold and purple from an invisible sun, the serials of Zane Grey, and the books he borrowed from the public library. And while it is true that Black Boy presents an almost unrelieved picture of a personality corrupted by brutal environment, it also presents those fresh human responses brought to its world by the sensitive child.

Described in Black Boy and several recent biographies, Wright’s life reflects a migratory pattern which began in rural Mississippi and ended in cosmopolitan Paris. A desire to escape persecution and humiliation caused him first to leave the South and later the nation. The decision was not easy, for it is apparent that he thought of himself as an
American and also missed the South whose beauty and folk culture he describes in *Black Boy, Uncle Tom’s Children*, and *The Long Dream*.

The most important distinction *Black Boy* bears as an autobiography is Wright’s intention to become a spokesman for the voiceless black youth of the South. Such a technique makes *Black Boy* a unique autobiography just as a similar technique makes *Native Son* unique novel. Wright describes Bigger as a conscious composite portrait of numerous individual blacks he has known in his life. What had, at first, disturbed Wright was not the failure of many blacks and whites alike to see the facts of racism, but their inability to recognize malice in the mind of white racists.

All his life, Richard Wright refused to comply with the whites’ expectations of him; he rebelled intellectually and managed, after moving to France, to lead a fairly normal, rewarding life. In Wright’s case, the whites’ attempt fails; he transcends his situation and environment to become a prominent international literary figure. But Wright remained obsessed with the number of victories chalked up by the white community, and, therefore, spent the rest of his life renouncing a society that left individuals unfulfilled and isolated from human compassion and companionship.

In *The Long Dream* Richard Wright concentrates on sexuality in relation to race and racism. Through the boy Fishbelly Tucker, six years when the novel begins, eighteen when it ends, the psyche of the contemporary Deep South Negro in Clintoville is explored. The novel’s focus is not the black white conflict in itself but the divisions it creates within and among the blacks; and this is telescoped by the friction between the boy and the father. Just as he is being brutally awakened to the ghetto reality in which the Negroes around him live, Fishbelly begins to see Tyree Tucker, his father, as he really is: a man desperately trying to buy a cynical respectability and independence from the white
folks. An undertaker across the board the only profession, he instructs his son, in which a “nigger”(45) can be independent, though they will eagerly lynch him, no white will touch a dead nigger and a trader in flesh under the table. Tyree has become knowingly a thrall of the most unsavoury elements of local white power, who cushions his pride with a wealth and influence unrivalled in black Clintonville, and palliate his conscience by posing as righteously realistic champion of his race.

*The Long Dream* is an intimate description of how black boys in the American South react to what is taught them at school, in the press, in church, in their homes. Though black, they react positively to the dominant values of the white world in which they live that is, sex and money. Their conditioning takes place in an atmosphere charged with greed, lust, betrayal, a world in which justice is bought and sold, where money means love, and love means money. Here is the portrait of a black boy Fishbelly who longs to be an American and, if he prefers money to honesty, it is because he has seen his corrupt father Tyree Tucker become rich through corruption. If Fishbelly has an attitude of contempt for other blacks, it is because he has seen that that is the way to success.

Fishbelly senses that his whole life is a nightmare. He has a problem of confusion of values. Bitterly, as he rejects the white man’s world, he can never get rid of a suspicion that the white man may be right. He is not merely alienated from the culture in which he was born; he is alienated from reality. He can escape and can become relatively free from fear and pressure, but he justly wonders whether he can find himself.

Fishbelly does not really know who or what he is because of the exclusion that he suffers from his own community and the whites. His concept of himself as a young boy is one of a conflict of values. He does not agree with his father Tyree Tucker’s ways of
getting along in the world, but his own methods of trying to fight the whites fail in the end, and he too suffers in the hands of the unjust white man.

Dreams play an important part in *The Long Dream* which begins with sex as the five-year-old Rex Tucker is being tucked into bed by his mother and dreaming of a big, angry fish trying to swallow him. Shortly afterward, Rex Tucker accompanies his father fishing, and watches him clean a catch by scooping out the entrails and bladder. Seizing the bladder, Rex Tucker blows it up like a balloon, and it reminds him of a pregnant woman’s belly. As a joke, his friends and his father begin to call him Fishbelly, and the name sticks. Thus Fishbelly (Fish for short) used throughout the novel, is always intact with sexual associations.

Fishbelly’s acquisition of his new nickname foreshadows the sexual awakening of the black boy, his desire to have sex with a white woman, precisely because it is the biggest white imposed taboo he can break. “He knew deep in his heart that there would be no peace in his blood until he had defiantly violated the line that the white world had dared him to cross under the threat of death” (157).

A few years later he has his first encounter with racist whites. Taking a note from his mother, to his father at the family’s mortuary, he is manhandled by white men gambling in an alley. They force young Fishbelly to cast dice, for one of them who believes that the frightened boy’s tears are “like virgin’s blood” (16) and will bring him luck. When Fishbelly reaches the funeral home he is shocked to see his father sexually relating to an unknown woman in the storeroom. This causes Fishbelly to dream about it which Wright describes in sexually suggestive language.

The racist attitudes towards black sexuality is vaguely hinted at by the dice players become explicit as Fishbelly and his friends, now teenagers, visit a local fair on
“Colored Folk’s Day” (42). They gaze at partially dressed white girls, as the blacks are denied entry, they attend a similar show presenting black girls. Later on, a white prostitute comes from a trailer proposing to them but they run away from such “lynch-bait” (48).

Another parallel passage from The Long Dream Fishbelly Tucker, who resembles young Wright, also recognizes suicidal tendencies in black communities. Visiting a “hit the nigger head” (44) booth at this local fair, Fishbelly and his friends are encouraged by white onlookers to attack the nigger head. In a scene reminiscent of the Wright Harrison in Black Boy fight, the youths comply, bombarding their own image and increasing their own self-hatred. In another episode they taunt and assault Aggie, an effeminate black boy whom they feel threatened their masculinity. Sensitive and compassionate, Fishbelly is troubled by his behaviour. He realizes that “to quell the war in his heart, he had either to reject it in hate or accept it in love. It was easier to hate that degraded black face than to love it” (46), he flees America to avoid being killed or becoming a killer.

When Fishbelly and Zeke are arrested for trespassing on the white man’s land, a sadistic police man threatens them with castration. It is Tyree’s influence on the chief of police Cantley that Fishbelly is allowed on parole, Tyree knows how to win over the white man. Tyree believes that for a Negro to get along with a white man, he has to beat him at the white man’s game. “...Let me tell you the secret, Fish. A white man always wants to see a black man either crying or grinning. I can’t cry, ain’t the crying type. So I grin and git anything I want.”(142)

While white men freely exploit Negro women, black men can be castrated for even looking at white women. The black man poses as a threat to the white males so Negroes are diabolically ensnared and punished. Frequently white women act as lynch
bait, luring Negroes to their deaths. In *The Long Dream* Fishbelly and his friends hide in the basement of the Tucker’s burial home and frighten young women as they pass overhead. When one white lady collapses hysterically, the boys are terrified of being accused of rape. Their fears are legitimate, as later illustrated by the murder and mutilation of Chris, a black youth caught with a white prostitute. Chris Sims worked in the West End Hotel who was his friend and hero of all the peoples in the neighbourhood.

Perhaps the single most impressive ritual of being initiated into manhood and the threat of violence becomes a reality for Fishbelly when he witnesses the murder and castration of the young Negro, Chris Sims for having a white mistress. Although this ritual of punishment and execution is indigenous to black American culture, it is often ignored or denied by the whites, it’s very perpetrators.

Chris Sims, 24 years, a black bellhop at a local hotel, is more or less seduced by a white prostitute who lives there. When she becomes bored by him she turns him in, not only to get rid of him but to rid herself of guilt. The towns people, enraged that one of their lily white women has been violated by this black beast, set out on a man hunt to track down and destroy this dangerous creature. Once they have captured Chris they torture and mutilate him until no semblance of the human remains and throw him in a ditch.

To Tyree this is one of the facts of life for a Negro man. It is to be despised, but nothing can be done about it. Tyree shows Fishbelly an example of what he has taught him. As Tyree prepares for burial the mutilated body of Chris Sims Tyree says: “one more black dream dead. . . a dream that can’t come true.”(79) As Fishbelly comes to see it, every black man can dream, but the white world will see to it that the dream becomes a nightmare.
Tyree is very definite in his opinion of his place in the total scheme of things. After Chris Sims’ lynching he points out to his wife, Emma, about the power of the white people and how it is difficult to live amidst them. Tyree’s reaction to this discovery is a nervous relief: “Yeah. They killed ‘im’” (70), he says. “And I’m glad!” (70) He is glad because he sees Chris as the sacrificial animal on the white’s altar: “. . .We can live only if we give a little of our lives to the white folks. . .” (70) He hates the whites for demanding victims and the blacks for yielding them even though he knows it is necessary. Fishbelly is not surprised to hear his father say reverently, “Chris died for us” (71). Chris’s death buys every black man a little more time to live. Thus Tyree moans the Negro’s position in the white world.

In The Long Dream while Chris Sims is hunted by the whites, Tyree Tucker rushes frantically to school to pick up his son, fearful of such a fate for his son. Although Chris Sims had been a well-liked young man, Tyree overcomes any emotional involvement he might have had with the youth in order to convert his experience into an objective lesson for Fishbelly. He shouts at his puzzled son, “NEVER LOOK AT WHITE WOMAN! YOU HEAR?” (64) Fishbelly, completely baffled by his father’s bizarre behaviour, is nevertheless convinced that he is witnessing an important event since his intuition tells him that he is watching his own initiation drama unfold. Fishbelly is warned to avoid white women for his own safety. And so, to save his son’s life, the father reinforces the whites’ teaching that black men have no right to white women. Because the information is couched in less than frank language, Fishbelly is more perplexed than educated by the admonition not to look at white women. “The notion of ‘looking’ at a white woman seemed so farfetched as to be funny, but he feared the fear that was now showing on his father’s shadowy face” (65) his mother symbolically hugs him in a gesture
“taking leave of his childhood, of his innocence” (65). While Chris is being beaten to death across town, Fishbelly is learning the cold facts of stepping into black manhood.

Not only is Fishbelly being instructed in how to act towards white women, but he is discovering for himself the other side of his parents’ self assured manner; that is, their absolute fear of Whites. When he sees his mother’s face is “bloated with fear” (63) he is repelled, unwilling to accept her as the mother he has known:

Were these scared and trembling people his parents? He was more afraid of them than he was of the white people. Suddenly he saw his parents as he felt and thought that the white people saw them and he felt toward them some of the contempt that the white people felt for them. (63)

After his father has screamed at him, “They outnumber us ten to one! . . . TEN TO ONE! YOU HERE?” (65), He hears his father say, “‘be a man, son, no matter what happens’” (66). But Fishbelly cannot accept this advice that so obviously conflicts with his father behaviour; furthermore, his father’s object fear shames him.

Having never before been confronted with “this business of white people” (67), Fishbelly is filled with anxiety. He cannot understand why no one has ever discussed the problem before, either at school or in Church. He feels betrayed, isolated, lost. And once again, in a pattern that will remain with him all his life, he sees blacks through white eyes and “…what he saw evoked in him a sense of distance between him and his people that baffled and worried him” (67). From this vantage point he deduces that the white world is the real one, that the blacks lead non-lives. How blacks arrived at this negative state he cannot determine, but Fishbelly realizes that cringing in fear is not a solution to the problem. Thus, even before the ritual is complete, Fishbelly has recognized his own alienation from the rest of the blacks.
He is intrigued by the fact that black men die because of white women especially because the women in the picture do not look at all dangerous. And Tyree’s warning, “When you in the presence of a white woman, remember she means death!” (64), has only increased Fishbelly’s fascinated preoccupation with the type. So far, the lesson is back firing on Tyree.

And that night, as on so many nights following significant days, Fishbelly dreams. And his dream contains, “a repetition of a recent impression of the previous day” (33). The dream’s content reflects the same conflicts that the day had in store for Fishbelly: sex, race, and fear. In the dream, Fishbelly is in his parents’ bedroom. There, under his mother’s chair he sees a Fishbelly covered with hair; as he stoops to examine it, a white clock begins thundering, “Don’t. Don’t.” (82) at this point a locomotive’s smokes tack touches the belly and swells it to enormous proportions. Finally it bursts and blood pours out and

. . . he saw the naked bloody body of Chris with blood running to all sides of the room round his feet at his ankles at his knees rising higher he had to tiptoe to keep blood from reaching his mouth and it was too late it was engulfing his head and when he opened his mouth to scream he was drawing in blood . . .

Tyree proudly lets Fishbelly into the main business secret, not simply satisfy with the embalming business as an undertaker he says

Son, Chief of Police Cantley knows me for twenty years. Friend of mine… By Gawd, I done buried many a black man he done shot to death. I did ’im favours, fixed up dead black folks he beat up, fixed ’em so you couldn’t tell from looking at ’em that they’d been beat to death. (142)
Tyree Tucker was a well to do undertaker largely because of the rent and profits he received from a house of prostitution which was given police protection by Cantley, the white chief of police. The later exacted from Tyree Tucker one half of the profits from the disorderly house. Tyree Tucker and a Negro physician Dr. Bruce made a good deal of money from a firetrap known as Grove which they operated as a disreputable dance hall openly frequented by prostitutes. Cantely also shared in these profits and therefore allowed the firetrap, to operate even though the fire prevention ordinances were being openly violated.

Another stage of Fishbelly’s maturation is his sexual initiation. Tyree tries hard to indoctrinate him with his own way of life. He wants Fishbelly to develop a taste for black flesh rather than be tempted by white taboo, or by foolish ideas of equality. When his father Tyree Tucker takes him to a towering, wooden tenement which was known as the Bowman Flats, run by Maud Williams and owned by his father, Maud’s daughter Vera becomes Fishbelly’s first sexual partner. There he is made completely familiar with sex. “Fish, I’m taking you to a woman tonight. I want you to git some sense into your head and know what life is.” (148) Tyree’s warning has the opposite effect, the taboo stimulates the attraction.

All the young Negroes of high school age in Clintoville were sexually promiscuous. That was emphatically true of Fishbelly, Zeke, Tory, Chris, Gloria, Vera, Gladys, Betty, Tillie and the others involved in the story. Richard Wright makes no effort to present his Negro characters in a favourable light. However, all this is reality blamed on the white people. The Negroes of Clintoville were practically forced to become immoral lawbreakers, protected and abetted by the whites. As Fishbelly sensed it, the Negro
You existed in the bosom of the enemy, shared his ideals, spoke his
tongue, fought with his weapons, and died a death usually of his choosing.
Fishbelly wondered if it would always be like that. Black people paid a
greater tribute to the white enemy than they did to God, whom they could
sometimes forget; but the white enemy could never be forgotten. God
meted out rewards and punishments only after death; you felt the white
man's judgment every hour. (289)

Fishbelly learns of his father’s mulatto mistress, Gloria Mason, who speaks and
acts white. Although he prohibits his son from engaging himself in sexual relationship
with a white woman, Tyree himself is attracted to whiteness that same day Fishbelly and
Zeke go to the Grove night club and choose their girls. Fishbelly takes up the light
skinned Gladys and Zeke prefers the yellow coloured girl. Fishbelly begins to spend more
time with Gladys than in school. As he turns fifteen he fails examinations drops out of
school altogether and begins to work for his father. At this juncture this story shifts from
Fishbelly’s sexual maturation to the social structure of Clinteville, Mississippi, as it is
ruled overtly by the dominant white supremacy.

Much to his pious mother’s dismay Fishbelly leaves school at sixteen and goes to
work for his father Tyree Tucker, whose aptitude for making money Fishbelly seems to
have inherited. Fishbelly refuses to go into embalming, rather he wants to be a business
man like his father. If his father was not willing to hire him he’d work for someone else.
It was a “clean declaration of independence”(188). Tyree understood that and did not
wish to go against the nature of his son, so he hired him. “I’m your boss! You going to be
a man now.’(189) Thus Fishbelly asserts his independence in his growth towards
manhood. Fishbelly’s initiation into the corrupt business world where he had connections
with the white folk. When it came to collecting the rent at Bowman Street, 120dollars
from Maud for the brothel house she maintained, out of it twenty dollars will go for the rent and the rest will be a fifty-fifty split between the chief of police Cantley and Tyree Tucker. He not only acquires sexual experience but at this early age, has a mistress Gladys and an apartment to keep her in.

When a fire breaks out in the Grove dance hall Gladys dies along with some forty other young people. This catastrophe is the starting of the rest of the action of the novel which brings out to the open both the municipal corruption in the white authoritative establishment of Clintoville, as well as the interrelated exploitation of the black town’s people by their own community leaders. Fishbelly realises to his misfortune that his father, Tyree Tucker is owner of the dance hall Grove, and various other illicit establishments, and an agent of corrupt white municipal officials in the exploitation of vice in the Negro section of Clintoville. Tyree who has paid the police regularly to keep them away from enforcing the fire regulations on any of his buildings, and is now charged with criminal negligence. When the night club burns, the chief of police, Cantley demands the return of a number of cancelled cheques that could easily be used to incriminate him. Tyree surrenders most of the cheques but retains a few to make sure that the chief will think twice before bringing charges against him.

Tyree Tucker seeks to blackmail the chief of police, Cantley into helping him escape prosecution. He has carefully hidden cancelled checks of draft payments to Cantley over a five year period. When Mayor Wakefield visits Tyree and warns him that the families of the dead people in the dance hall are going to sue him for manslaughter and that it was better for him to sell all his property and defend himself.

Wright is an advocate, not a judge: he sees race from the view point of the Negro, and one does not look to him for any withdrawn, balanced appraisal of issues. Corruption
is corruption and Wright exposes it. Tyree Tucker does not speak for the author in his outbursts to McWilliams, the White lawyer, genial and direct, tall, forty years old and speckled. Tyree in order to escape his dire situation of being sentenced in fair seeks for a reformatory lawyer, so he asks Dr. Bruce to find him one brave white man in Clintoville who can face corruption. After much thought Dr. Bruce speaks about the white lawyer Mc Williams, whose moral code of conduct is not to accept or take bribes. This outspoken and liberal Southern reformer had even stood in the last election against the Mayor. At last Tyree is convinced that he has found his lawyer, who will tell the world that it is the white authorities who have made him to become the corrupt person that he is. Tyree Tucker confesses to Mc Williams, the white lawyer “I ain’t corrupt. I’m a nigger. Niggers ain’t corrupt. Niggers ain’t got no rights but them they buy. . . ., if we niggers didn’t buy justice from the white man, we’d never git any. . . .” (273). He speaks for his own desperate solution of the problem and Wright shows where that solution leads.

The climax of the book is the true aggression shown by both Tyree Tucker and Fishbelly. He feels that if he helps his father to hide the missing cheques, he is conniving at the perpetuation of the status quo that he has decried as humiliating and abhorrent. Eventually he abandons his social convictions in favour of his family loyalty and comes to his father’s aid. Entangled with the whites, both do everything they can to protect themselves and their fortune. Filled with fear and distrust, they plan and scheme against the whites, knowing all that they scarcely stand a chance. When Tyree Tucker is shot by the police he has served, Fish, outraged, goes into a violent tantrum, pounding on the furniture and the walls, and threatening to kill.

On his deathbed, Tyree tells Fish: “‘We won, son!’ . . . ‘They didn’t git my money and that chief’s done for. . . I’ll be fighting that sonofabitch from my grave! You got to go it alone. They done me in, but forgot it. We won!’” (297). But Tyree maintains his
attitude of outward subservience to whites as he warns Fish: “I’m trying to save you, son. Do what they say! They ain’t got no claims against you, ’less you make ’em scared. . . You won’t ever want for anything. . . Look at that letter. . . It’s my will. Make like you believe what they say. Let this blow over. . .” (297).

Although Tyree Tucker has money, it cannot save him from being murdered by the police chief Cantley who fears exposure of his corruption. After Tyree’s death, Fish is warned by some well-meaning friends Dr. Bruce and Tyree’s mistress Glorya who were also involved in Tyree’s business. They advise him to leave the town, as they plan to do the same; but Fish is determined to stay and fight it out. The police, still trying to get Fish to surrender the remainder of the cancelled cheques which is the leading evidence against Cantley. He traps Fishbelly with a white woman they have sent to his apartment with Fishbelly in custody on a false rape charge, they press him even harder to get the cheques.

Fishbelly is aided by the white reform minded lawyer, McWilliams, who tries to fight corruption and expose the chief of police Cantley. The lawyer McWilliams has almost obtained Fishbelly’s release when the latter discovers that his black cellmate is a stool pigeon planted by the chief of police Cantley to try to get Fishbelly to confide in him. Fishbelly realizing that he has been tricked: he attacks the stool pigeon, as a result is sentenced to serve seventeen months in addition to the six he has already served. When he completes his sentence he is again approached by Cantley, who is eager to make a deal under which the black whorehouse and the police payoffs will be resumed. Fishbelly knows he must leave his environment behind him; he finally becomes convinced that his father was right after all, and that it is not possible for a Negro to be a man in Mississippi. After turning over the incriminating evidence against the police chief Cantley to the lawyer McWilliams, Fishbelly goes to Memphis for a flight to New York and a connecting flight to Paris. He tells McWilliams, “I think u honest,”(337) and he
wonders if there is sufficient justice left in Mississippi to permit Cantley’s conviction for some of his crimes.

At the end of the novel, Fishbelly is finally released and his salvation is flight to France, like Wright’s own solution. With six thousand dollars from his father’s illegal businesses, he steals away, taking a plane to New York and from there on to France, a country that a black soldier friend has described as “no heaven... folks just more like real human beings than them crackers in Mississippi” (372). Fish’s European journey is not undertaken for economic advancement. Since he leaves behind his father’s business but represents his attempt to survive to escape death.

Young Fish most clearly represents aggression as a response to prejudice and discrimination. He is not willing to accept subordination even to the extent that Tyree does. Tyree tells his son: “White folks know damn well that if they give us half a equal chance, we’d beat ’em, come out on top—’ ‘But I want a equal chance!’”(143) Fish interrupts his father.

At the end of his servitude, Fish exemplifies a direct form of avoidance as he flees to France. Fishbelly kills no one; he is not like Bigger Thomas in the Native Son or a Cross Damon in The Outsider. He prefers to leave an environment that would in time destroy his manhood or force him to kill. Fishbelly a young gentleman with anger welling up inside him much like Richard Wright himself he follows the advice of his friends and escapes to the sanctuary of France. His childhood friend Zeke who had served in France during the war and decided to remain there writes to Fishbelly of the comparative freedom he has in that country, and urges him to join him there as soon as he gets out of jail.

Dear Fishy-O;
Fish, I told you in my last letter you ought to come to France. Man, you got some money and that is all it takes over here. Get out of jail and come over here and take a long rest from all of that white folks mess. France ain’t no heaven, but folks don’t kill you for crazy things. These white folks just more like real human beings than them crackers back there in Mississippi. . .

Your pal,

ZEKE. (372)

Thus Fishbelly makes up his mind to go to France because he longed for freedom which was denied him in America, and spends little time observing conditions in other parts of the United States en route. Fish’s European journey is not undertaken for economic advancement since he leaves behind his father’s business but represents his attempt to survive, to escape death. Wright suggests that Europe and the United States are viewed differently by white and black Americans.

Tainted by his father’s connections and afraid, Fishbelly joins the thousands of Negroes fleeing the South. At best he will, like Wright, find a place where he can live with dignity. But it is doubtful that he will discover a sanctuary which possesses the South’s beauty. For along with the nightmare, Fishbelly bids farewell to “. . . the overhead sun, making shadows flicker over glittering green grass. Blue and yellow butterflies swung over mounds of tufted earth” (102). Gone is the terror but also the innocence of his youth, an innocence which Wright’s urban rebels never know. On the Memphis New York plane to France, Fishbelly is treated as an equal by the white people for the first time in his life. Fishbelly is strapped into his seat by an attractive blond hostess, and he holds his breath as his eyes scan her golden hair and white skin. On the
plan from New York to Paris, he sees an attractive white woman “the dreadful taboo” (378) sitting ahead of him, but for two hours he avoids looking at her, finally forces himself to stare directly at her. “The woman was as unreal and remote as had been that bleeding white man he had left to die under that overturned Oldsmobile on that far-off summer day when fear had robbed the world of its human meaning” (378-379).

He enters into a discussion with an Italian American on the plane who tells Fishbelly that he is on a trip to his father’s birthplace, and he relates the story of his father’s emigration to America, the land of opportunity. Fishbelly thinks to himself, “That man’s father had come to America and had found a dream; he had been born in America and had found it a nightmare” (380) could he ever make white people understand how they destroyed black lives? The young white man further questions about the conditions in the South and finds himself denying that Negroes are treated so badly. Thinking things over, he comes to the conclusion that it might be better to lie and declare that the world in which he has existed up to now did not really exist at all.

Above all, he was ashamed of his world, for the world about him had branded his world as bad, inferior. Moreover, he felt no moral strength or compulsion to defend his world. That in him which had always made him self-conscious was now the bud of a new possible life that was pressing ardently but timidly against the shell of the old to shatter it and be free. (383)

The central emotions of the novel are irony and bitter humour; a continuing fear and hatred of the white man’s (and white women’s) world: an acute kind of psychological insight which is unredeemed by human sympathy or compassion. As fiction, The Long Dream is so remarkable, so true, the most depressing, and tragic.
On the one hand he was intending to portray the growth of Fishbelly from childhood to manhood in psychosexual and social terms. On the other hand he was describing the complex sociological and political arrangements that exist between Tyree Tucker one of the leading Negro families of Clintonville with whom the white power structure would have to negotiate.

“Now, I own the house where I’m taking you,” Tyree explained, pausing in the middle of the sidewalk, holding a blazing match to his cigar, and eying the passers-by as he puffed. “I ain’t in this business, son. But I’m broad-minded. You got to be broad-minded in this life. . . . The woman running this flat rents it from me and she’s a straight sport. You can trust her. Now, Fishbelly, nobody, not even your mama, knows I own this place; nobody knows but them that need to know. So don’t go around mentioning my name about this place. The chief of police lets this house run and he gits a cut of what this house makes; I give it to ’im every Sat’day night. (149-150)

The very delicate interrelationship between subjective self concepts and individual social and caste status has seldom been so successfully managed in any of Wright’s other fictions.

The attention of *The Long Dream* shifts back and forth between the protagonist Fishbelly and his father Tyree Tucker. Fishbelly grows up with the father toward whom is feelings are deeply ambivalent. At critical moments in his life Fishbelly measures his growth and self-awareness according to his changing attitudes towards Tyree Tucker. Because of his father Tyree Tucker and his mother Emma, being both solid figures of the Negro middle class, they imbue, in Fishbelly with a respect for the power of money and a
sense of social position in relation to the poorer Negroes in the community. Tyree Tucker loves his only child and tries to teach him how to survive and succeed in the South. Fishbelly is bullied by his father who tries to toughen him to deal with life in the South. Sympathetic to Tyree’s plight, Wright illustrates how America undermines black families by depriving Negro men of self respect.

Tyree is not just another stereotypical Uncle Tom, but a complicated mixture of pride and expediency, driving ambition and unscrupulous practices, a protective father but a bad example to his son. Tyree has his own ideas about how Negroes must get along in the white man’s world. In the presence of whites, he is what the whites call a good nigger, he seemingly accepts his subordinate position. He constantly debases himself in the presence of whites. Also he has made himself the indispensable Negro contact in the Black Belt. As an undertaker he frequently patches up dead black bodies beaten by the police. But all this does not indicate that Tyree accepts his inferior position. He knows he is a black man in a white man’s world. He uses the authorities just as they use him.

“The white folks in this town hate me,” his father continued in a bitter whisper. “They hate me ’cause I’m independent. I buried the black dead. They wouldn’t touch a black man’s dead body even to make money, so they let me bury ’em . . .” (65)

For instance, when Fishbelly is arrested for trespassing, he is questioned extensively and threatened by the police, but when Tyree tells the police that Fishbelly is his son, Fishbelly is let free, paroled to his father.

In the novel *The Long Dream*, Tyree Tucker, who after years of interacting with the doctrine of white supremacy has managed to raise his family from the level of semi poverty to a status that passes in the state of Mississippi for Negro affluence. In the
presence of white men, Tyree bows and scrapes, proudly declaring himself a good nigger and a resolute opponent of racial equality. To Fishbelly he explains that there is no other way for a Southern Negro to get ahead. Tyree believes that the only way he can stay on top is to be a part of the white corruption that controls his immediate world. By exchanging favours for favours, he believes he is building security for his family in a society where no other way is open and this is telescoped by the friction between Tyree Tucker and his son Fishbelly.

His father Tyree’s sudden change of attitude had filled Fishbelly with wonder; there had been in those changes a bitter pride, but also a black defeat. He knew intuitively that his father, hating the demands of the white folks, had made a bargain with himself to supply the blood that he felt that the white folks wanted in order to buy a little security for him, but, since his security could be had only by making victims of black men, he hated the black men too. All of which meant that he was consumed by self hatred. By getting the whites on his side, Tyree is able to manipulate them. Tyree is surely one of the most fully realized characters in all of African American fiction.

The chief of police Cantley is frustrated by the very duplicity that the racist system he serves inculcates. For all his greed, corruption and cruelty, he is portrayed realistically in his relationship towards Tyree and Fishbelly. Nevertheless towards the end of the novel he screams at Fishbelly.

“Goddamn you, you black sonofabitch! I wish to hell I could believe you!” Cantley screamed. “But you can’t tell the truth!” . . . “I swear to God, I don’t know what we can do with you niggers. . . We make you scared of us, and then we ask you to tell us the truth. And you can’t! Goddamnit, you can’t!” (342-343)
There is a real sorrow in this and an approach to love. It is in the poignant vision of the
two races locked in terrible degrading embrace that Wright, a truly proud Negro has
isolated the essence of the tragedy.

Abused by society, by their lovers, and husbands, Wright’s women emerge as victims who tolerate much pain. In *The Long Dream*, Emma Tucker meekly endures Tyree’s promiscuity and bullying for many years until his death in a whorehouse where
unlocks her repressed hatred. She stood with more wounded dignity than grief showing in
her dry, hot eyes. “That her husband has been slain in a whore house was an unforgivable affront” (302). Fishbelly was stupefied. So she knew about Gloria… This was a new
Emma, an Emma who had at long last emerged when the shadow of Tyree had gone from
her life. “Could this defiant woman be the meek creature who had had the habit of
effacing herself at the merest inflection of Tyree’s strident voice? She had hidden her hate
of Tyree so well that he had never suspected it!”(302)

Wright through his characters shows a wide range of responses towards religious
escapism. In the tradition of the Reverends Green, Homer Barbee, and Gabriel Grimes,
Ragland the pastor in *The Long Dream* encourages passivity and obedience. The
relationship between Ragland and his pitiful congregation parallels that of whites and
blacks. As God’s self appointed spokesman, he commands and chastises the faithful who
echo his praise of death and the afterlife. Some of those who died, he argues, were
sinners, called to account before God. Others were the virtuous, summoned to enjoy the
kingdom of heaven. Thus whites are freed of any responsibility and Negroes discouraged
from questioning their fate. This is the God whom Mrs. Tucker worships and Fishbelly
denies in *The Long Dream*. “It ain’t Gawd I feel; it’s the white man” (329). Fishbelly is
tempted to scream at his mother.
Motivation for rebellion in *The Long Dream* is much the same as it is in *Black Boy*, although it is not played up so much. The Negro characters feel the effects of suppression as it affects their everyday lives. The feelings of Fishbelly and his friends are brought in a spontaneous imitation of a conversation between a Negro man and a white man.

Sam, indignantly: “I’m talking about us getting good jobs, Mr. Zeke. We black folks…”

Zeke, haughtily: “What you niggers always whining about? I ain’t your master! Go get you a job! Make a job! We white folks made ours, didn’t we? When you ask me for justice, you make yourself a slave. Nigger, get away from here and stop bothering me. Get out of my house, or I’ll shoot you--!”

Sam, enraged, draws a gun and shoots Zeke: “Bang! There! I shot you first!” (105-106)

All of Richard Wright’s books deal with the effect of prejudice on the black’s attitudes toward oneself and one’s own group and this has contributed in the shaping of Negro identities, including his own. It appears for the first time in Wright’s fiction in *The Long Dream*, in a conversation among Fishbelly Tucker and his friends who mock their African heritage. Provoked by Sam, son of a black nationalist, who thinks Negroes ought to acquire African identity denied them as Americans. They explode, angry at being reminded of their background.

Sam tries to prove to the confused and uncomfortable Fish that if he was no longer African he certainly could not say he was an American, “‘Nigger, you dreaming!’
Sam preached… ‘You can’t live like no American, ’cause you ain’t no American. And you ain’t no African neither! So what is you? Nothing! Just nothing!’ . . . Zeke and Tony walked off. Fish had not known what side to take” (35).

As a young boy, most of Fish’s aggression is verbal. He and his friends discuss whites and their dislike for them. They fear to take stronger action, and are so often shut off from whites that they do not have the chance. In The Long Dream Fishbelly’s psyche of the contemporary Deep South Negro is explored. Divided into three parts “Day Dreams and Night Dreams,” “Days and Nights” and “Waking Dream”. Through his presentation of Fishbelly’s maturation, Wright continually signifies that a ritual is taking place; to support the larger ritual of growing up, he has included several minor ones, such as the ritual murder of Chris Sims, the bellhop, the ritual of sexual initiation, and the ritual of death as exemplified in Tyree Tucker, the undertaker.

The controlling image of the book is the dream, as expressed not only in its title but also in its epigraphs, Fishbelly’s dreams themselves, and comments made by his father. Moreover, the dream also contains the element of recurrence, the daily cycle of waking and sleeping, the reappearance of the day’s activities in dream form. The section titles illustrate another aspect of the book’s theme, the tension between desire and reality. Complementing the dream motif are the ritual implications of Fishbelly’s initiations and his eventual expulsion from society. Since Fishbelly is forced to encounter and live with this tension he becomes, like other Wright’s heroes, a man in quest of meaning and identity, searching for manhood and freedom and where these quests take him is the content of The Long Dream. Its narrative pattern is the ritual of initiation. Fishbelly undergoes the same rituals that generations of black youth before him have experienced.
In *The Long Dream* Wright has his characters explain this hatred of the white man for the Negro, as a fear upon the part of the white man. The only way therefore, for the basically inferior white man is to retain his unnatural position of superiority is to keep the Negro intimidated, poverty stricken and politically helpless. Wright implies that Negroes can never live normal and free lives in American South, perhaps not even in the American North.

Despite the naturalistic philosophy that underlines Wright’s vision of black life, the miracle of *Black Boy* is that its hero, by the time he left for Chicago, had not become the patient, humorous, subservient black man of the white myth. Nor did he end up as either the degraded, grinning, and perpetually frustrated Negro. Throughout the book Wright is at great pains to create manhood as a direct challenge to the overwhelming forces of the white society. The hero’s spirit remains unbroken. However, what distinguishes *Black Boy* from any other naturalistic work is that it is the story of a man estranged from his own race by sensitivity and intellect, yet segregated from the white race by the colour of his skin.

*Black Boy* addressed itself explicitly to the problem of the relationship between determinism and self realization. It focused directly on his literary project and even echoed Wright’s earlier assertion in "How Bigger Was Born" that in writing *Native Son* he had resolved to permit no pity. *The Long Dream* had much in common with the fiction Wright produced during his American period. Besides a setting within the community of southern blacks, the portrayal of the central character Fishbelly resembles that of Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*. With its anticipated sequels *The Long Dream* was to be a crystallization of Wright’s fictional techniques and natural subject into a comprehensive Bildungsroman.
The Long Dream is an illustration of the artistic problem in all of Wright’s work: he was a crusader rather than a writer. In Black Boy Wright is not only alienated from the dominant white society but also from his own race since he abhors the concept of accommodation which they embrace albeit unwillingly. Afraid of disturbing the delicate equilibrium between the two races, the blacks complicate each other’s socialization and individuation processes by pressuring their own to maintain the status quo, to play the role demanded of them by whites. And Ralph Ellison, argues that this preindividual state is induced artificially by blacks in order to

. . . impress the Negro child with the omniscience and omnipotence of the whites to the point that whites appear as a human as Jehovah, and as relentless as a Mississippi flood. Socially it is effected through an elaborate scheme of taboos supported by a ruthless physical violence, which strikes not only the offender but the entire black community. To wander from the paths of behavior laid down for the group is to become the agent of communal disaster. (95)

In The Long Dream and Black Boy lies Wright’s most important achievement: he has converted the American Negro impulse toward self annihilation and going underground into a will to confront the world, to evaluate his experience honestly, and throw his findings unashamedly into the guilty conscience of America.

In Black Boy and The Long Dream Wright suggests the cause for the black man’s alienation. Victims of racial oppression, they learn the fear and danger of being black in America. They are forced to conceal their true feelings and deny their positive feelings Wright and Fish are alienated from their real selves they become bitter, frightened men. The outcome of their initiation is fully victimization and renunciation.