Chapter V

Conclusion

The dissertation has argued the search for reintegration of the excluded black American in select works of Richard Wright. After reading Mencken, Wright realises that words could be used as weapons to seek justice. This is clearly evident in Wright’s own career, as a successful black writer emerging during a period of racial oppression and economic hardship. The dissertation has proved that in his entire writing career Wright has produced twelve books two were published posthumously and each, despite Wright’s shifting political and philosophical positions, picks up one or another of the main strands of the theme of reintegration of the excluded black American. Wright embodied in his own life much that is apparently contradictory in his works. Wright’s history echoes the excluded Negro’s history in microcosm, in that it spans the years of southern feudalism, the northern urban migration, and the international arena of black African politics.

His work thus constituted an inquiry. Wright’s persistence in his investigation of Western society was an important factor contributing to the achievement of a certain consistency in his work. An artist, an essayist, a critic, a political activist, it is clear that he arranged and rearranged many times the elements making up the phenomenological display of Western development.

Wright was as much a political activist as he was a novelist. But this is not to imply that he sacrificed art for art’s sake or politics for art. He was concerned with the human condition and he chose diverse arenas in which to engage in the battle to improve humanity. While Addison Gayle and Michel Fabre emphasize the political and literary influences on Wright’s life, Margret Walker Alexander’s forthcoming *The Daemonic Genius of Richard Wright* is a psychological biography that addresses those elements of
Wright’s psyche which attracted him to the political, social literary and philosophical studies that imbue his art.

Echoing others, Saunders Redding, a noted black author, has complemented Richard Wright as one of the best Negro writers. According to Dan McCall “Wright is recognized as the father of the contemporary Black writers because when we come to [his] best work we are faced with the central question about being black in America” (93). Wright’s works offer historical and sociological, as well as psychological insights into the American character, and his background. Products of a lower class black environment, Wright’s characters are well acquainted with hunger, disease, and poverty. They learn quickly from frightened mothers and beaten fathers not to expect much from America. Their dreams of power are undercut by the reality of Jim Crow and more subtle discrimination. Ambition is discouraged; impotency reinforced. All entrances and exits are blocked.

Wright’s excluded black man may choose to suffer his fate passively or he may reluctantly accept his status as a victim. But not for long, Wright’s characters resolve to be reintegrated as citizens of America or else they evolve into sullen rebels. Suffering is tolerated not valued as morally uplifting.

This dissertation proves the seminal works of Richard Wright as compass points in the literature of Black American culture. His novels define themselves and deal with the main problems of how Negro life in America operated to develop the Negro personality. Negro culture in America found self consciousness and articulation leading the jargon of psychology and existentialism in African American fiction.
One of the Black American writers most frequently credited with making the Negro visible is Richard Wright. He examines the Southern and Northern, the rural and urban black man's behaviour, motivations and background. Wright's portraits of the oppressed Negroes were obviously drawn from his own experiences, especially his early years in the South. He has so intensely relived the themes of his youth in his literature, that a thorough knowledge of his life is very essential because Wright himself was an example of someone who transcended his environment.

This literary research is a proof of Wright's interest in the migrant southern Negro in the industrial North and the city born Negro children. Despite their traumas, the city by its very nature opens up to them possibilities of freedom. Wright warns that the subsequent generations of urban born Negroes would no longer submit to inferior status or exclusion, a prognosis of ghetto upheavals that now wrack American cities. More than Wright's creative endeavour, and what he achieved in American letters, his political and historical vision assumes greater significance. Perhaps even more significant was the man himself, for in a laudable sense he was himself the embodiment of the changes in Negro life he often wrote about, as he himself emerged from the structured, rural South to the Urban industrialized North and hence to the arena of international affairs.

Wright poignantly focused on the condition of African Americans in the rural South and the urban North. Nevertheless, his vision was grounded in the belief that the displaced African Americans were a perilous prototype of the emergent condition of urbanized mass society, escalating on a world scale. Thus the scope of his writing progressively enlarged to international dimensions.

Richard Wright changed the landscape of possibility for African American writers. Wright's defiance, his refusal to give the reading public what it had hitherto
demanded of the African American writer, his insistence on the expression of an African American voice, allowed later writers to do the same; it allowed Toni Morrison, for example, to write as she would without concern for explaining her sometimes obscure meanings to a mainstream reading public. For other African American writers, positioning themselves against Wright it allowed them to write about African American culture in a more positive way, to assume a posture not requiring that the subject of the fiction, the African American, be seen as victim.

Richard Wright’s works were a direct confrontation with the leading ideas and structures of contemporary Western political and social thought. His arena was the totality of Western civilization and its constitutive elements: industrialization, urbanization, alienation, class, racism, exploitation and the hegemony of bourgeois ideology. While African American literature is well accepted in the United States, there are numerous views on its significance, traditions and theories. African American literature arose out of the experience of Blacks in the United States especially with regards to historic racism and discrimination, and is an attempt to refute the dominant culture’s literature and power.

Not surprisingly, many Negro protagonists appear in contemporary fiction. Their experience with persecution makes them experts in alienation, “gifted with a double vision both inside and, outside of culture” (90). Their fates reflect the alternatives offered to those who suffer from exclusion, and from the struggle for individual identity. A clear pattern of behaviour emerges in African American fiction. The marginal man, the Negro, confronting a harsh environment, the scorn of fellow citizens, physical and psychological oppression, can either internalize his frustration, suffering inwardly as a victim, or become a rebel, striking out at others.
Wright not only wrote well but also paved the way for a new and vigorous generation of Negro authors. Wright’s portraits of oppressed Negroes have made a deep impression on readers’ world. The images of oppression Wright drew were obviously taken from his own experiences especially his early years in the south and it is for this reason that knowledge of his life is especially helpful. The sense of alienation is a part of Wright’s fiction may be traced not simply by the fact that Wright was a Negro living in a hostile racist environment but that he experienced a profound uneasiness among the members of his own family and the Southern Negroes in general, who allowed themselves to become subjugated by caste system.

Wright has proved in his works that he has based his theory on the far reaching article, “Blueprint for Negro Literature.” Here he spoke of the value and function of Negro folklore, Black Nationalism, Marxism, and art as a weapon for changing the structure of society. It was important said Wright that the black writer must be a part of a collective structure without giving up his professional autonomy and must continue to practice in the strength which is the result of a united action. Wright tried hard to follow his own advice. He sought to strike a difficult balance between professional autonomy and the larger social causes he knew his writing could assist.

He began his writing career with a book of four short stories entitled *Uncle Tom’s Children* and ended it with *Eight Men*, a manuscript of eight short stories sent to the publisher in 1960 and published January on 23, 1961. In both books, although twenty two years apart, the battle is the same: a stinging protest, sometimes subtle and sometime starkly overt, against the second class citizenship of coloured people throughout the world. The ten books in between have often changed the battleground, but the adversaries have always been the same: the white supremacists wherever they may reside and in whatever guise they may practice their beliefs.
In the second edition *Uncle Tom’s Children* Wright added a fifth story “Bright and Morning Star,” and as a preface, the autobiographical essay “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.” All these stories “Big Boy Leaves Home,” “Down by the Riverside,” “Long Black Song,” and “Fire and Cloud” had as their theme the maturation of a black man or woman moving, or struggling to move, from childlike naivete to ripened militancy. “Perhaps it would be possible,” Wright theorizes, “for the Negro to become reconciled to his plight if he could be made to believe that his sufferings were for some remote, high sacrificial end” (222). Of course, this was not possible as Wright repeatedly illustrated.

Wright’s ideologies are strikingly interwoven in his works. His friendship with Gertrude Stein, Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus exposed Wright to the core of French existentialism. The intensity of the African American experience gave both meaning and expression to this philosophy, which provided another window through which he could see the inhumanity and negative consequences of racism and oppression.

Like his conversion to Marxism, Wright accepted existentialism as an ideology that could be developed for and applied to those who were oppressed. Wright’s nihilism largely reflects Negro experiences. Wright’s strongest fiction, written before he left the United States, deals with the problems of lower class Southern and Northern Negros. Negroes struggle to overcome the effects of slavery and Jim Crow in their land.

Wright’s portrayal of communism throughout *Native Son*, especially in the figures of Jan and Max is one of the novel’s most controversial aspects. Wright was still a member of the Communist Party at the time he wrote this novel, and many critics have argued that Max’s long courtroom speech is merely an attempt on Wright’s part to spread communist propaganda. While Wright uses communist characters and imagery in
Native Son generally to evoke a positive, supportive tone for the movement, he does not depict the Party and its efforts as universally benevolent. Jan, the only character who explicitly identifies himself as a member of the Party, is almost comically blind to Bigger’s feelings during Book One. Likewise, Max, who represents the Party as its lawyer, is unable to understand Bigger completely. In the end, Bigger’s salvation comes not from the Communist Party, but from his own realization that he must win the battle that rages within him before he can fight any battles in the outside world. The changes that Wright identifies must come not from social change, but from individual effort.

Wright’s major literary theme is based on the entire society which is mobilized to keep the Negro in its place. It also focuses on how a black’s freedom of movement is restricted and his ambition is discouraged. This is seen in his own life when he chose exile to find a solution for the exclusion which he suffered socially, amidst his own black community and in the academic circles. He suffered rejection at the hands of the white critics and publishers who frequently refused to publish his works. Leaving behind his native soil, in 1947 Wright imposed exile on himself and his family, to enjoy freedom by settling in Paris.

Wright chose Rue Monsieur le Prince which lies in the heart of the left bank, in a quarter of the city traditionally favoured by artists in rebellion against restraints upon man’s freedom. Settled here, Wright could step outside himself and reassess what he had done and actively participate in the international affairs to reintegrate his countrymen.

Any black man remaining in the United States after the age of thirty five, Wright told friends was bound to kill, be killed, or go insane. He was seeking to avoid these morbid alternatives while writing about the sociological and psychological roots of
threatening mental illness. However, he could not completely shake off the sense of enslavement.

This research has proved that his exile was not in vain. Much could be made of Wright’s European exile. The first novel to be written in Europe bears the dedication to his daughter Rachel, who was born in Paris and the last collection of fiction to be prepared for publication just before his death, *Eight Men*, bears the dedication, to his friends whose kindness made him feel at home away from his native land.

The truth of the matter may be that the strengths or weaknesses of the fiction and nonfiction written in Europe are not attributable to any physical or mental displacement, but to the continuation of Wright’s literary experimentation with methods of expressing his sociological and psychological explorations and establishing his stand as the representative spokesman of his excluded brethren.

Wright’s works and ideologies are closely knit. It brings out to the open Wright’s earnest longings to break down barriers posed by the white world. Wright became free of political dogma in exile. The basically Marxian convictions he retained made him immune to idealist philosophy. And he remained the product of his experiences: an alienated, rootless black man. Like his Cross Damon in *The Outsider*, his condition made him dangerously close to nihilism. It was not enough to sustain a person whose artistic identity had been the consequence of commitment to the interpretation of relationships between him, others, and the social environment. He needed a compelling subject to create a new arc between his intellect and feeling, one that would revive in him an optimism of will, and he found it, when he needed it most, in the Third World.

As a result of all the confusing twists and turns in Communist tactics and positions, Wright found himself growing disillusioned, not with Marxist ideology, but
with the petty and ruthless men who ran the Communist Parties of the world. Yet as long as the Party did not interfere with his fiction writing, he was reasonably content to endure the uncertain ideological trends.

Wright presents a realistic picture of the black man and advocates self-realization and change of perspective towards him and others. Bigger faces his destiny unrepentantly, yet in the prison he comes to terms with the need for a common brotherhood through his white lawyer Boris A. Max. Wright clearly uses Max to convey his Marxist assessment of the racial situation in the United States. Marxist ideology does not negate the criminality of Bigger’s actions but it justifies it under the term of its beliefs. These Marxist ideologies help Bigger to shift from an entirely racial view to a view that includes all race and class.

Wright’s work has always generated debate. His characterizations and narratives constantly unsettle those seeking symmetrical cause and effect relations of persons to the social order where he, Wright, saw none. Even where his symbols of social tyranny have been challenged by those wishing for less controversial or more precise signs of social oppression, Wright stood steadfastly by the literary and expository forms he used to mirror his view of human experience.

Richard Wright’s first novel, *Uncle Tom’s Children* brings to life post slavery characters in their full psychological and emotional depth. His next novel *Native Son*, is the story of Bigger Thomas’s short and tragic life, which plumbs the blackest depths of human experience. It was widely acclaimed as one of the finest books ever written on race and class divisions in America. *Black Boy* is Richard’s unforgettable story of growing up in Jim Crow South. Published in 1945, it is often considered a fictionalized autobiography of Wright. *Eight Men* presents eight stories of black men living at violent
odds with the white world around them, in these powerful stories, Wright takes his
readers into this landscape.

This literary research reveals a consistent pattern in the study of Southern and
Northern character portrayals. Only Wright’s southern tales contain heroic blacks
Reverend Taylor in “Fire and Cloud,” Aunt Sue in “Bright and Morning Star,” Brother
Mann in “Down by the Riverside” who sacrifice for their family and community. The
passionate, blood stained land of the South inspires some of Wright’s characters in a way
the North cannot. Thus, in “Fire and Cloud,” Reverend Taylor, depressed by the
sufferings of his starving congregation, is comforted by memories of a better time when
he “had walked behind his plow, between the broad green earth and a blue sweep of
sunlit sky; there had been in it all a surge of will, clean, full, joyful; the earth was his and
he was the earth’s” (357). On such land “he had first taken . . . a wife . . . his first-born
son, . . . growing to a strong, upright manhood” (356). The soil had nourished Taylor,
enabling him to preach, and later to challenge the town’s white authorities. A close
relationship with nature had strengthened his ties with his fellow men.

While Wright’s Northern rebels are self centred and devious, some of his
Southern characters courageously defend their loved ones. In “Bright and Morning Star”
Sue is willing to sacrifice her life to protect her Communist comrades and to avenge her
son. A monumental earth mother, she envelops her sons in “the charm and magic of her
vision” (410), and inspires admiration in the white girl who loves her son. Nobly
rendered, Sue’s death contrasts with that of Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon who die
alone and frightened. Sue, however, is killed with her son on the Southern soil and dies
secure in the knowledge that she has saved others. “Focussed and pointed she was, buried
in the depths of her star, swallowed in its peace and strength; and not feeling her flesh
growing cold, . . .” (441) as Cross does. Instead her body blends with the “rich black earth” (407) which fortified her; she becomes like the North Star, a guiding light for others.

Some of Wright’s Southern folk endure in a way that his other characters do not. They are the real heroes of his fiction. In “The Man Who Saw the Flood” a black peasant family return to their water soaked land after a ravaging flood. Certain stoicism prevails as the family gives thanks that a few possessions a stove, the water pump, some tobacco were spared. Although much else was destroyed, and their food is gone, Tom and his wife resign themselves to starting over again, aware that they will be further in debt to the white man. It is as if the people and the land are one in their determination to persevere, to recover, and sustain life. In the country side the ruinous floods and yellow mud are followed by a “high, blue, full of white clouds and sunshine . . . a gusty spring wind” (111) gives hope to the family which has survived the worst and returns to till the soil. Those who remain in the rural South sometimes perish but their lives are marked by a courage and commitment which Wright’s northern characters lack. In “Down by the Riverside” nature and white men conspire to destroy Brother Mann, who struggles valiantly to survive and to save his family.

Love for his farm keeps him from leaving during a flood; love for his family makes him battle the raging waters and the white authorities. Although he loses, Mann exhibits the same bravery as Aunt Sue, and like her defies the whites and dies on the land, “his face buried in the wet, blurred green” (326), his body returned to the earth.

This dissertation presents the paradigm of Wright’s narrative technique which based on realism as its foundation. Readers fascinated by the achievement of Richard Wright share with him a wonder about the relationship of society and the individual's
psychology. Wright gave unusual power to this interpretive conflict in his fiction, as readers of *Native Son* are aware. His public career also exemplified this pattern: besides being a creative artist Wright also served as a spokesman for the American blacks and later for the Third World people whose collective experience in history he understood through analogy with his own personal life.

Although the freedom for self actualization is denied to Cross Damon and Bigger Thomas, let it not be thought that Cross Damon is as sympathetic a character as his progenitor. Bigger Thomas’s is the cry of a hunted animal. Bigger Thomas is to be pitied. Cross Damon is to be feared; he is too logical to be pitied. Certainly in him the reader recognizes our own dilemma, but his crime is so great and his reasoning so apt that the reader watches his downfall more objectively.

It isn’t until he is on his death bed that Cross Damon realizes that futility of what he has tried to do. Motivated by unconscious psychological factors and conscious philosophical premises, Cross has attempted to live alone, in complete control of his life. Given the unique opportunity of being able to create a new personality for him, Cross can do no better. Cross’ psychological makeup was irreversible or whether he was suggesting that modern man left to his own devices would naturally end up in the depths of nihilism is not clear; it is conceivable, of course, that he was suggesting both.

Richard Wright’s work is always reaching beyond the simple event to catch all the complexity of emotion that surrounds it. The horseplay of the first part of “Big Boy Leaves Home” directly leads to and contrasts with the frenzied tragedy of the shooting and the lynching. Sarah’s downfall is not a rape but a complicated emotional experience that she cannot understand, and Silas’s response is no conventional indignation at a sexual affront but hopeless resentment of the ultimate invasion of his personal life.
Rev. Taylor becomes the focal point of innumerable forces in his community; white fear, white hatred, white tyranny, black desperation, black timidity, black courage. There is a thematic progression in these stories, each of which deals with the Negro’s struggle for survival and freedom. The pathos of the story lies in the precariousness of the lives of the Negro community.

The characters in these short stories are for the most part, uneducated, inarticulate, and have neither the time nor the inclination to cultivate or verbalize their feelings in their terrible struggle for physical survival. Early in his career a proletarian novelist and always a protestor, Wright used violence as a tool to express outrage. The violence done to him and his people is compensated for fictionally. His heroes retaliate where he could not. Placed in revelatory climactic situations, these cornered protagonists strike out often, maiming and murdering the aggressive whites. Hence Wright must show them for what they are in terms of their reactions to certain situations particularly in circumstances where violence and injustices cry out for immediate decisions. Sometimes they are in flight after having killed a white person and their recognition of their hatred is their first sense of freedom.

The characters move towards a kind of inevitable doom because they have violated the impossible conditions of their caste. It is a kind of irony that once they have come to recognition of themselves and realization of the world that made them they are destroyed physically. Wright’s characters die like martyrs, stoic, unyielding, in their new found truth about themselves and their vision of a freer, fuller world for their posterity. Yet their short happy lives have not been lived in vain; the vision of a humanity at peace with itself and free to explore its potentialities completes the tone of Wright’s short stories.
This dissertation concentrates in tracing the sources of Wright’s hero. Through this epic canvas Wright paints the black society at large. Not the least is his own experiences, expressed not only in *Black Boy* but also in his speeches and essays, since much of what he fictionalized he had earlier suffered himself. Because of Wright’s early association with the Communist Party during the time when he was learning his craft, his fiction was always marked by the influence of the proletarian school of writing. Wright emerged successfully from his initiation rituals, while his heroes do not. For initiation does not necessarily guarantee social acceptance, especially in America.

Though Wright condemns the blacks for lacking traditions and kindness, he nevertheless empathizes thoroughly with the experiences of his race, blaming the whites for the Negroes’ shortcomings since they have refused his people the full benefits of Western culture. Wright identifies with the most debased of blacks; his novels give them strong voices to protest against their condition.

As a result, at the end of the book, Fishbelly Tucker in *The Long Dream* becomes, isolated, victimised and castrated, is left with the responsibility of continuing his existential search for self, because of the conditions in the United States. Fishbelly’s initiation has resulted in alienation; the initiate has become a victim through the rituals of sacrifice, regression, and defeat. The dream ends in flight.

The blacks fled the nightmare of their lives by migrating North, to the large industrial cities. What happened to their dreams is illustrated by Wright’s *Native Son*, *The Long Dream* and *Black Boy*, all present detailed accounts of black male childhood in Southern America are the perfect preludes which explain the behaviour of young men like Fishbelly and Bigger Thomas. Wright gives the reader very few specifics on Bigger’s early life, concentrating instead on the results of unremitting mistreatment. And so, it is
with a better understanding of Fishbelly and Bigger Thomas their suppressed and unexpressed attitudes that one turns to these, protagonists born and raised in the Deep South.

Wright comments convincingly on the sickness of southern society. Forced to kill or be killed for violating the sensibilities of a white woman, Big Boy shoots the woman’s male companion. Having killed a man, he seems destined forever to kill other creatures in order to live. The South has forced one more black boy to leave home burdened with premature manhood. Saul Saunders kills the white librarian who tries to seduce him and in the court he surrenders himself to destiny without any qualms.

The common aspect seen in these heroes, then, is the development of a metaphysical rebel. None of the men accepts his condition; all in one form or another, with varying degrees of success, attempt to create a self for them in an otherwise fluid society which is perversely determined to fix their identities for them. Because they are black they have a tougher time of it than other men. But they are undoubtedly representative of the modern man in search of himself. These men may be victims, but they are not passive. The young Wright in the Black Boy struggles valiantly to preserve his integrity, Fishbelly Tucker fights a losing battle, taking on the entire Southern social structure. Bigger Thomas thrashes out through bloodshed. Cross Damon murders repeatedly to protect his dearest possession, his complete freedom. When Silas’s wife is seduced by a white salesman, Silas kills as many white men as he could, and stays on in the house which has been set on fire by the white folks. The gentle Mr. Mann who killed Mr. Heartfield, because the latter had tried to shoot him first for taking away his boat during the floods gives way to the violent Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon. Rev. Taylor after his baptism of lynching by the whites is convinced strongly that freedom is achieved
through collective action. And Fred Daniels, seeing all this pointless violence and cruelty that men wreck upon them, emerges from the heart of the world to plea for brotherhood. Wright’s hero cries out for immediate universal justice.

This research while analyzing Richard Wright’s treatment of religion has arrived at the truth that he regards Christianity as a negative force, fostering self hatred and shame and depriving blacks of their cultural inheritance. It was not until the 1920s, however that religion was repudiated in the works of Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Nella Larsen. The new development paved the way for Richard Wright and his literary descendants, whose condemnations of Christianity dominate twentieth century Afro American literature. Wright’s black Christianity emphasizes humility, submission, and other worldliness all of which consign Negroes to living deaths. In Black Boy, Native Son, and “The Man Who Lived Underground,” autocratic churches, self serving preachers, and hysterical congregations exude death and darkness. Protagonists like Bigger Thomas and Fred Daniels find little in religion to guide them and much to make them rebel.

Wright recreated his religious experience in his fiction. He reflects religious experiences which include hot, close, suffocating church, the symbols of fire and water, of Christ writhing on the Cross spell death and damnation to his black protagonists. In The Long Dream the Reverend Ragland delivers a “stomping” (329) dramatic funeral oration in the church, as Fishbelly hears the theatrical reverend and the hysterical congregation welcome God’s judgment on Tyree Tucker. Like Wright, Fish condemns the church’s necrophilia. Filled with burnt bodies and a suffering congregation, the church symbolizes physical and spiritual death.
Wright associates the charred flesh in the Reverend Ragland’s church with the mutilated body of Bobo, a black youth burned alive by whites in “Big Boy Leaves Home”. In “Fire and Cloud”, “a ring of fire” (387) encircles the Reverend Taylor as he is whipped and forced on bended knees to say the Lord’s Prayer, emphasizing his humility and submission to God’s will. A white mob’s fiery cross greets Bigger Thomas when he is returned to the scene of his crime. Even working in a church can result in death as Saul Saunders discovers in “The Man Who Killed a Shadow.”

Religion appears in *Native Son* mostly in relation to Bigger’s mother and Reverend Hammond. Bigger’s mother relies on her religion as a source of comfort in the face of the crushing realities of life on the South Side. Bigger, however, compares his mother’s religion with Bessie’s whiskey drinking an escapist pastime with no inherent value. When Reverend Hammond gives Bigger a cross to wear while he is in prison, Bigger equates the cross with the crosses that are burned during racist rituals. In making this comparison, Wright suggests that even the moral province of Christianity has been corrupted by racism in America.

Cross Damon’s relationship with his mother contains a love hate vacillation. He associates her with the God in which she so firmly and so simply believes. He would reject that God as a force of hate and punishment rather than of love, but this would also mean rejecting his mother. His love hate feelings are a symbolic cross he must bear, an ambiguous problem he can neither understand nor resolve.

Understandably then, most of Wright’s protagonists, like their author, reject the church. They are unable to reconcile Christ’s saintly crucifix with the K.K.K.’s fiery cross. To embrace the former, as their submissive mothers do, may prolong their lives, but they rebel and are unwilling to pay the price of emasculation and death of the spirit.
Like Wright, they also feel that their slavish behaviour in the presence of the whites is reprehensible but may be necessary; grovelling before God is contemptible. Furthermore, they cannot believe in their mothers’ insatiable God who demands complete obedience and sacrifice of all earthly pleasures. Such a God, Wright believed, worsened the Negroes’ plight, depriving them of dignity and initiative. Such a God turned sons against mothers. In the *Black Boy*, Wright struggled from surrendering himself to his grandmother’s and mother’s religious beliefs.

Wright asks why many people are fated to be like the Bible’s Job, sharing the same ambiguity of existence, “fated to live a never ending debate between themselves and their sense of what they believed life should be . . . it was as though one felt betrayed, but could never determine the manner of the betrayal” (24). In an epigraph to the novel Wright quotes from the poetry of William Blake, whose mystical symbolism attracted him, and from the Book of Job. God advises Job to obey His word without questioning the suffering of the righteous. Cross, like Wright himself, sees religion as a refuge from thinking, a refuge sought by the oppressed, even though it is only an illusion. Cross envies his mother’s religious belief which his intelligence prevents him from using it as a form of escapism. Thus religion had not helped the excluded to break down the religious adominations which restrained him from enjoying freedom from guilt.

And Cross is afraid. “Afraid of what? Nothing exactly, precisely. . . And this constituted his sense of dread” (23). The short story “The Man Who Killed a Shadow” recalls some of the thematic elements of *Native Son*, and it demonstrates Wright’s continuing interest in the psychology of fear. In addition to his feeling of loneliness among other blacks, Wright had also experienced dread of whites by the time he was ten years old. Although he had never been personally abused by whites at this age, he nonetheless knew their capacity for hateful acts.
This dissertation has brought to the forefront Wright’s custom in books, where he has quoted epigraphs from literature, philosophy, psychology and other fields and these precede each major division of all his novels. In *Savage Holiday* he quotes from among other works Sandor Ferenczi’s *Sunday Neuroses*, *Freud’s Totem and Taboo*, and Theodore Reik’s *The Unknown Murderer*. The extract from Freud reads, “… in the very nature of a holiday there is excess; The holiday mood is brought about by the release of what is forbidden” (9). In *The Outsider* Wright has also quoted from Friedrich Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, *The Bible*, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Hart Crane. In *The Long Dream* the reader finds Wright quoting from Dylan Thomas, Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*.

While studying about exclusion in his works, Wright gives significance to narrative technique as the foundation on which the reintegration of the excluded black America rests. His narrative constructs and human passions as drawn in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, *The Outsider*, *The Long Dream* and *Eight Men* demand attention. Whether he adequately portrayed men and women, children and society, in acceptable ways very often has to do with the angle of vision one has as a reader. The different perspectives of Wright’s works must be understood by the reader to bring about an appreciation of him. His resonating, dramatic voice of text is at the centre of this research on Richard Wright who, in the final analysis, is a classic American writer and, in the best sense of the term, a controversial one, too.

A narrative shift from showing to telling occurs when Wright’s protagonists feel compelled to confess their crimes. Wright gives his protagonists’ mouthpieces, who are, in turn, delegated the role of communicating what has been told to them. For Wright’s protagonists, these moments of articulation are necessary, and they serve to link isolated men to the outside world. In *Native Son* and *The Outsider*, the spokesmen are prepared to make statements to the world. At the close of *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas’
representative Boris Max, asks him, “Is there anything you want me to do on the outside? Any message you want to send?” (385) And when Cross Damon lies on his deathbed in The Outsider, Houston asks him. “Is there anything, Damon, you want me to tell anybody?” (585)

This dissertation is a proof that Wright strives to inextricably bind together the world of the novel and the world at large together. As his narrative plan progresses up to articulation and collaboration, his protagonists move through a series of steps. In these works, however, reintegration occurs in a gradual and steady manner to come to a completion in the future. If and when the protagonists do achieve human contact, their terrible sense of exclusion will diminish and eventually disappear.

The first two stages of this narrative plan have been especially important in commentaries on Bigger Thomas’s dilemma in Native Son, which turns upon the notion that fear leads to an act of violence. As Mr. Max, the defence lawyer tells the judge in his courtroom speech, fear engenders Bigger’s crimes: “Fear and hate and guilt are the keynotes of this drama!” (357) In The Outsider, Cross Damon describes this same fear as the one seen in animals and the most important experience of human existence can be defined as fear. Damon’s words describe the state of anxiety overwhelming Bigger Thomas at crucial points leading up to his crime. This fear engulfs Bigger in the courtroom when he is faced with a sea of white men: “… constricted, taut, in the grip of a powerful, impelling fear… He wanted to leap from his chair and swing some heavy weapon and end this unequal fight.” (344)

The second step in Wright’s narrative plan involved two important stages concealment and self discovery. Bigger’s self discoveries are summarized in Boris Max’s statement about the crime: “But, after he murdered, he accepted the crime. And
that’s the important thing. It was the first full act of his life; it was the most meaningful, exciting and stirring thing that had ever happened to him” (364); “It was an act of creation!” (366) Donald B. Gibson, for instance, claims that “the focus of the novel is not on the trail nor on Max, but on Bigger and on his finally successful attempt to come to terms with his imminent death” (729). Yet after Wright explores the need for self discovery and self-mastery, he advances to the results of articulating that discovery.

Bigger tries to speak, for an unfulfilled desire to communicate lies behind his frustration and hopelessness. Since Bigger cannot articulate for himself, Max does not fully understand him. Thus Wright appropriately develops these passages through third person omniscient narration. Wright uses a fictional voice that articulates even when those within the fictional frame cannot.

Bigger’s need to speak, the impulse to reveal the interior self, is much stronger than the constraints of inarticulate speech: “His talking to Max had evoked again in him that urge to talk, to tell, to try to make his feeling known. A wave of excitement flooded him. He felt that he ought to be able to reach out…” (323). For Bigger this act of articulation is entirely new, but dissoluble part of his need to express why he killed.

Bigger has spoken by choice and realizes it, and this act opens up the new possibility that he will be heard. Speech alone can link Bigger with the culture that has excluded him. Max appeals to the court’s duty to hear Bigger: “Shall we deny this boy, because he is poor and black, the same protection, the same chance to be heard and understood that we have so readily granted to others?” (348) Ironically, Wright purposefully excludes Max’s speech from Bigger’s own understanding, and in doing so, Wright stresses Bigger’s immature self awareness: “He had not understood the speech, but he had felt the meaning of some of it from the tone of Max’s voice” (370).
Max fails when he attempts to understand the deeper emotional content of Bigger’s crime. Bigger’s brief statement of his feelings at the close of the novel baffles Max, leaving him bewildered and scared: “Bigger saw Max back away from him with compressed lips” (391). Max’s efforts in understanding Bigger falters, and indeed his “eyes were full of terror” (392) when Bigger asserts that his crime is integral to his identity.

Fred Daniels, the protagonist of Wright’s “The Man Who Lived Underground”, experiences a similar version of this movement from fear and “terrible exclusion,” through crime and concealment, to self-discovery. He, too, finds excitement and meaning in the idea of revealing his crime to the world. But his attempt to unite himself with the outside society is a delusion and the vision destroys him. Fred Daniels has no lawyer to tell, but he decides he must tell someone and so chooses his accusers, the police. The inevitable desire to speak overcomes Daniels in the isolating, inhuman underground: “He shuddered, feeling that, in spite of his fear, sooner or later he would go up into that dead sunshine and somehow say something to somebody about all this” (66). Telling is not enough; when he speaks to the police, he needs a deeper understanding: “He saw that they were not understanding what he was saying. He grew frantic to make them believe . . .” (83) This desire for a spokesman costs Daniels a fatal mistake: these men will not listen, and Daniels was correct at the moment he realized “the images stood out sharply in his mind, but he could not make them have the meaning for others that they had for him” (87). The police shoot him and send him to obscure, meaningless death down into the swirl of sewer water in the underground.

Wright first explores Cross Damon’s need to tell someone about his crimes, “He had to talk to somebody! But to whom? . . . he had to collaborate and help keep the secret” (573). Damon’s choice of Eva Blount as his confessor is born of her love and
trust for him. It is her insistence upon her trust, however, that finally disqualifies her as a true collaborator. She, like Boris Max, is unable to accept the personal confession of a murderer. But Damon persistently asks that she hear him: He yearned for the sight of Eva. Once again Wright’s protagonist needs to be understood completely. But the pressure upon Eva to acknowledge and collaborate with acts themselves sends her through a window to her death. Eva simply cannot accept the idea of murder, and she remains outside the outsider. With her and in her Damon has no one to “collaborate” (573) with him against the laws that would judge him guilty.

When Houston lets Damon off the legal hook, Damon becomes frantic at thought of his aloneness. He fears that the world will not know of his crimes, and thus collaboration will dissolve back into isolation. Wright uses the word collaborate in a new context in The Outsider to show the tragic circularity of aloneness, the black man’s return to self from the fleeting community of only one other collaborator Ely Houston: “Suddenly he wanted to beg this man not to leave him” (572).

In Houston, Wright creates a collaborator who does not look on with terror and then retreat to silence. Houston asks Damon, echoing Max in Native Son, “Is there anything, Damon, you want me to tell somebody?” (585) Damon answers at least with the full knowledge that Houston understands him. Nevertheless, Wright heavily qualifies the position of the protagonist, even one with a genuine collaborator.

In his works Wright has sharply pointed out that the remedy to exclusion begins in this narrative pattern with one collaborator, by necessity a white man. This is all Bigger Thomas, Fred Daniels, and Cross Damon ask for in their struggles to free themselves from the exclusion, guilt, and fear, America has bequeathed them. Criticism of Native Son and The Outsider stresses the theme of the “outsider” (331), the existential problem
of self in relation to community. Whether the outsider be a black man may not matter to Wright, considering his portrayal of Houston, but the black protagonist is especially prone to a “deep sense of exclusion” (xvii) that must be counteracted if he is to find his place in America.

In “The Man Who Lived Underground” Daniels is doomed when he is misunderstood from the outset: the men Daniels tries to tell represent the essence of the vast system in America which has excluded and condemned men like him. *Native Son* ends more optimistically by offering Bigger Thomas a spokesman who does convey something the plight of the American black, even if he cannot communicate fully Bigger’s personal dilemma. The Bigger Thomas’ need to tell themselves, but they also need others to tell for them because they “had lived outside of the lives of men. Their modes of communication, their symbols and images, had been denied” (386). Yet collaboration must finally be shown, acted out, not just told: in political terms.

Wright’s fiction progresses up to words about understanding and collaboration, not to actions that confirm the black man’s place in a community of Americans. In fact, all three works assert the black man’s existential aloneness. Houston, too, is an outsider, and he is only one man. His collaboration with Damon isolates him from his community and from the legal system that should govern both of them.

Wright viewed his role as a writer in precisely the terms of the collaborator. He found his commitment to art in a parallel commitment to tell about and to collaborate the crimes of Bigger, in *American Hunger*, he claims “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 hunger for the life that gnaws in us all, to keep alive in our hearts a sense of the inexpressible human” (135).
Wright may have tried to become a Communist because he saw in its politics a partial collaboration with black man in America. Communism failed Wright because the methods it used to act out ideas conflicted with the very ideas it articulated, but he used his anti Communist novel, *The Outsider*, to continue the quest for a collaborator and for reintegration.

Wright’s narrative pattern holds out the hope of counteracting exclusion and despair, a hope that is verbalized but not fully realized as action. When District Attorney Houston asks Cross Damon if there is anything to tell, Damon answers: “Tell them not to come down this road… Man is all we’ve got… I’m legion… I’ve lived alone, but I’m everywhere…” (585). Damon can depend upon the fact that Houston will neither slant nor misconstrue the meaning of his exclusion. Finally, it is human contact that these men find so necessary.

Through Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon and Fred Daniels, Richard Wright speaks not for rebellion and existential criminality, which traps all three protagonists in prisons of isolation, but for reintegration of the excluded American. They feel loss and emptiness where there should be human communication and compassion. As Wright expressed it in *American Hunger*, “I headed towards home alone, really alone now, telling myself that in all the sprawling immensity of our mighty continent the least-known factor of living was the human heart, the least-sought goal of being was a way to live a human life. Perhaps, I thought, out of my tortured feelings I could fling a spark into this darkness” (134).

Wright’s makes use of images and metaphors to paint the physical and emotional landscape which displayed exclusion. Adapting the traditional polemic of *black* and *white*, Wright uses the colour white to represent the obstructions which deny Bigger’s
humanity and black and its associated image of the wall to signal Bigger’s entrapment and physical impotence. Striking image patterns therefore collaborate with Bigger’s characterization to express the tragic theme. While the colour black clearly exemplifies Bigger’s physical relationship to the white world, white further strengthens Wright’s portrayal of Bigger’s dilemma by underscoring the moral disorder of the powerful white world.

Snow is dominant image in *Native Son*, joining the colour white and the metaphor of blindness to form an image group that evokes the hostility, the insensitivity, and lack of perception of the white world and emphasizing the unnatural power the white world holds over the Black. The white colour of snow is traditional image of danger and destruction that symbolizes the malevolence of the white world and by implication identifies Bigger’s animal like will to survive. Because the snow surrounds, impedes, and betrays Bigger as he flees for his life and because he must fight against it to survive, this image evokes his defiance at the same time that it represents the animosity of the white world. Although it snows during all of Book II, the figurative function of snow increases its impact as Bigger flees for his life. Nine references to snow pervade the single paragraph that describes Bigger’s escape after the reporter takes the shovel from him.

In Wright’s short stories, *Uncle Tom’s Children* the reader comes to understand that Big Boy’s hunger is one that goes deeper than physiological hunger; his yearning to go North to freedom and a better life becomes something he and his friends develop a hunger for, much like Wright’s personal realization in *Black Boy*. A similar situation is presented in a later story, “The Man Who Was Almost a Man,” from *Eight Men*. In this story, Dave Saunders’s voracious appetite for food parallels his insatiable hunger for a gun, manhood, and what he anticipates will be “a new way to live” (Gayle 176). Dave Saunders, like Big Boy and Wright himself, also leaves home. Furthermore, Dave’s
hopping the train to what he perceives is manhood and freedom recalls the end of *Black Boy*, where Richard Wright himself stowed away aboard a train that sped toward the North.

In “The Man Who Lived Underground” what makes Fred Daniels different from the others is that he is not merely a victim of a racist society, but that he has become by the very nature of his experiences a symbol of all men in that society, the pursuers and the pursued. The underground man is the essential nature of all men and is composed of dread, terror, and guilt. Fred Daniels is then Everyman, and his story is very nearly a perfect modern allegory. And Fred Daniels knows that all of the ways men attempt to persuade themselves that their lives are meaningful and rational are delusions. What he discovers at bottom is that all men are murderous and in love with death.

The dissertation proves that the excluded black man and woman were never allowed to attain their potentials as humans. Throughout his fiction characters are blocked from reaching maturity. When they act like adults, when they try to protect their families, for instance, or improve their farms, or advance in their jobs. Their actions are interpreted by whites as trying to act like whites. The titles of Wright’s first three published works, *Uncle Tom’s Children*, *Native Son*, and *Black Boy*, contain references to non-adults; only posthumously does the reader find anything as positive as the title *Eight Men*, and even in that work the manhood of all but one of the characters is at issue. Black males are perpetually boys in the eyes of the white man in Wright’s world. And to be a boy is to be nonexistent in Wright’s world.

Richard Wright creates a dependent and incomplete black female character in *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, *The Long Dream*, and in *Uncle Tom’s Children*. Wright has, perhaps unwittingly, created through the characters of Bessie, Bigger’s mother, Cross’s
mother, his own mother, aunts, grandmother, Gladys in both *The Outsider* and *The Long Dream*, Dot, Emma, etc. Semblance of womanhood because there is no satisfactory development and portrayal of black manhood in these works. These characters are only created and sustained as Cross Damon recognizes they can be: “Men made themselves and women were made only through men” (51).

The ambiguity of Fishbelly’s existence in the last of Richard Wright’s novels to be published before his death illustrates the dilemma of all Wright’s other major fictional characters and of Wright himself. Wright is speaking for many Fishbellys, many Bigger Thomases, and many other men who must live underground, hidden from themselves and others.

Wright’s harsh experiences with cruelty, unreal and ambiguous had made his life seem nightmarish. The infusion of this perception of reality into his writing gave his work its strength and its goals. Both strength and weaknesses came from an intense desire to detail and underscore the hell, the shadow world a black man had to endure. At times he gave in to the temptation to editorialize, to polemicize, and to arrest his narrative with abstract psychological or sociological comment; at other times he was able to combine a poetic lyricism with the harsh, brilliantly evocative prose of cruelty that made black readers say he was honest and accurate. That same prose made some white readers say Wright exaggerated; it was prose from which no white reader could receive cathartic release.

This thesis lays bare to the world Wright’s calling as a writer to bring about the reintegration of the excluded black. At the heart of Richard Wright’s literature, is a desire to understand humanity and convey this truth in a way that is unmistakably real to the
reader. Out of his childhood Wright develops a longing to know, to understand and to express the purpose and meaning of his life.

Richard Wright’s literary reputation is increasing as the years pass and critics most of them still white, begin to understand that his often rough style and content are a form of eloquence as admirable as another writer’s smoothness. Wright fought with words and hit hard. As a teacher, Wright taught that Marxism, Black Nationalism, and the unification of the world’s nonwhites against the virulence of white supremacy was the way out of an ambiguous existence in a white world.

In 2008, the centennial of Wright’s birth, assorted appraisals of the bond between Wright’s literature and politics arose in scores of conference papers and lectures around the United States and in Western Europe. Such a linkage between art and social change was the chief topic among critics and scholars elicited by every addition to the steady republication of Wright’s out of print works and new availability of uncensored versions of previously published writings, as well as the initial appearance of hitherto unknown and in some cases unfinished texts.

The dissertation has also argued that there is a revival of interest in his works in the recent years. In the surging, turbulent 1960’s, Wright’s name would be cited by American Black Power militants and moderates alike, in a revival of interest in his work. Stokely Carmichael, co-author with Charles V. Hamilton of Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (New York, 1967), spoke at Lincoln University, the Pennsylvania school which had trained such black leaders as Langston Hughes, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and Kwame Nkrumah. He urged the students to read Richard Wright and Frederick Douglass, and to rename their school after a black man—perhaps calling it

There is also a great respect for Wright among other black militants. In his autobiography, *Die Nigger Die!* (New York, 1969), H. Rap Brown says that Richard Wright together with W. E. B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, and Marcus Garvey was a major influence on his thought. The greatest militant of all in the 1960’s, Malcolm X, never met Wright but paid tribute to his memory by visiting Julia, Wright’s oldest daughter, in Ghana, 1964; later he visited Ellen and Rachel, Wright’s widow and second daughter, in Paris, and reported this occasion in his *Autobiography* (New York, 1965).

Black writers who have been deeply influenced by their inspirational father include James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and John A. Williams. Many were to see Wright as a black man concerned with human rights, who told it uncompromisingly in the way it really was. Richard Wright’s works could be considered for future researches. The following significant areas can be brought to the world view, an assessment of the Great Migration where inevitably nothing changes. Disenchantment grows finally erupting in violence. Meaning is found not in the past but in the present, the protagonist’s identity depends on action.

A study of the South’s treatment of people who were not white and what Wright himself called “the essential bleakness of blacks’ life in America” (45). The terror of white violence and reprisal, the stark realities of hunger, poverty and the added treachery of fellow blacks are worthy of in depth study. The effect of having all culture wiped out, and the oppressive black Christianity will make an interesting study. The non-fictional works, essays, lectures, Haiku poems all present a kaleidoscopic picture of the Third World. Psychoanalysis as a theory can be recommended for a holistic understanding of
Richard Wright as a Writer. His importance transcends the concerns of a strictly literary criticism, and reminds the critic of the claims of history, society, political economy and the longer records of oppression and injustice that history continues to scan.

The thesis has examined the search for reintegration of the excluded Negro sensibility which is socially and historically conditioned, and that the western culture must be won and confronted. Wright has perfectly presented that the excluded black American is a by product of western civilization and that he needs to be reintegrated not only with self realization and courage but America should accept him as its own.

The most significant event of 1960 affecting the literature of Negroes throughout the world was the untimely death of Richard Wright in a Paris clinic on November 28th at the age of fifty-two. Undoubtedly his was the strongest, most listened to, most unchanging and most uncompromising literary voice that the coloured world could claim.

This dissertation places a strong argument that Wright pleads the cause of every man who is oppressed. The gray world of Richard Wright, with its fears and hopes, is more than the world of one man or of one race, although it is most keenly felt by those who have been taught to consider their black skin as a stigma. In the final analysis it is skin to the world endured by much of mankind in general.