

***Native Son* – A Black Murderer’s Journey to Becoming White**

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Abstract

Richard Wright’s critically acclaimed novel, *Native Son*, published in 1939, is still relevant today regarding the racial issues it addresses. The novel itself is not just a protest-novel advocating racial equality, it is also a mirror to the psyche of black people in general, unveiling their inner struggles under racial oppression. While this novel depicts the racial issues back in the 1940s, it still, unfortunately, resonates with some African Americans now. There is no denying that the white supremacist ideology still exists, for instance, Michael Jackson bleaches his skin because a white skin is what he lacked in the music industry. It is therefore no hyperbole to say that some black people may crave to bear a white skin, and Bigger, the protagonist of *Native Son*, is no exception. As a racialized subject and a murderer, Bigger’s character is callous but resonating among black readers. His murdering Mary and Bessie is the turning point of his life, which, provokes his inner struggle of his identity and purpose. Many may see Bigger as merely a criminal, but Wright goes beyond this contention into digging out the seeds for his formation to a murderer, which, later in the novel reveals to be white supremacy. Many black people, as such, look up to white supremacist ideals and are caught up in a complex psyche attributed to their blurred identity. Therefore, with this essay I would ponder whether Bigger’s journey to becoming white is successful in three different perspectives: double consciousness, masculinity and symbolic-death.

Reflection

Through this capstone project I have gained a more holistic perspective on black literature and racism. JanMohamed’s readings have inspired me to delve into the deep end of the internal struggles of a black man back in the Jim Crow era. Initially I disagreed with his way of analyzing racialized black males with a sexist approach – saying that they are weak in the system which makes them females in a symbolic sense.

Yet, after understanding the situation of the Jim Crow era I came to accept this approach and it has become one of my perspectives in dissecting *Native Son*. I also learnt more about the role of symbolic death among racialized subjects, that it allows them to revel in freedom despite their restricted rights, which, led me to also analyzing the novel in a more philosophical fashion. I am grateful to have Prof. Michael O'SULLIVAN to be my supervisor, for each of our meetings is thought-provoking, and had it not been his guidance I would not have reached a deep understanding of *Native Son*.