

Native Darkness

A Multigenre Research Paper Based on Richard
Wright's *Native Son*

Emily Feltes
EDT 428
Spring Semester

Native Darkness

Dear Reader,

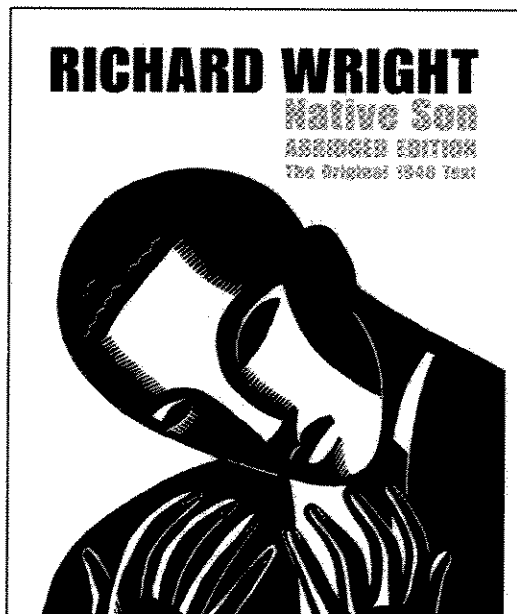
Richard Wright published *Native Son* in 1940 at the end of the Harlem Renaissance, a period bursting with African American creativity and cultural revelation. During this time of literary, musical, and artistic creation, a black middle class first appeared. While many ascended, many more starved in dilapidated ghettos.

Wright's main character, Bigger Thomas, is the epitome of devastated black youth. Completely consumed by fear, he accidentally kills the daughter of the prominent family he works for. When Mary Dalton's blind mother walks in on him helping her to bed after she drinks herself out of coherence, Bigger stifles her mumbling with a pillow in an attempt to remain unheard and unknown. He suffocates Mary while trying to protect his identity from a society that would surely burn him alive if he were caught in a room alone with a young white girl.

Here I tell Bigger's story, using multiple genres to resurrect his character, to bring to life the effects of the brutal urban sphere in which he lived. When I first read this book, I was horrified by the violence Bigger displays. Strangely, I also found myself trying to empathize with him—Would it be easy for me to kill if my spirit had never been given the chance to come alive? How would I handle being a victim of racism and poverty?

Wright states in his self-criticism, "How Bigger Was Born," that he wanted to write his work "without the consolation of tears"—that he wanted it to be so powerful and striking and sad that people would not cry in response to the devastation that is Bigger Thomas but instead think and learn and try to change.

This is the story of Bigger Thomas, a native son in native darkness, told in chapters named by Wright. I hope that in the reading of this research, others can come to appreciate, and perhaps understand, the demoralizing byproducts of racism and poverty in America.



Fear



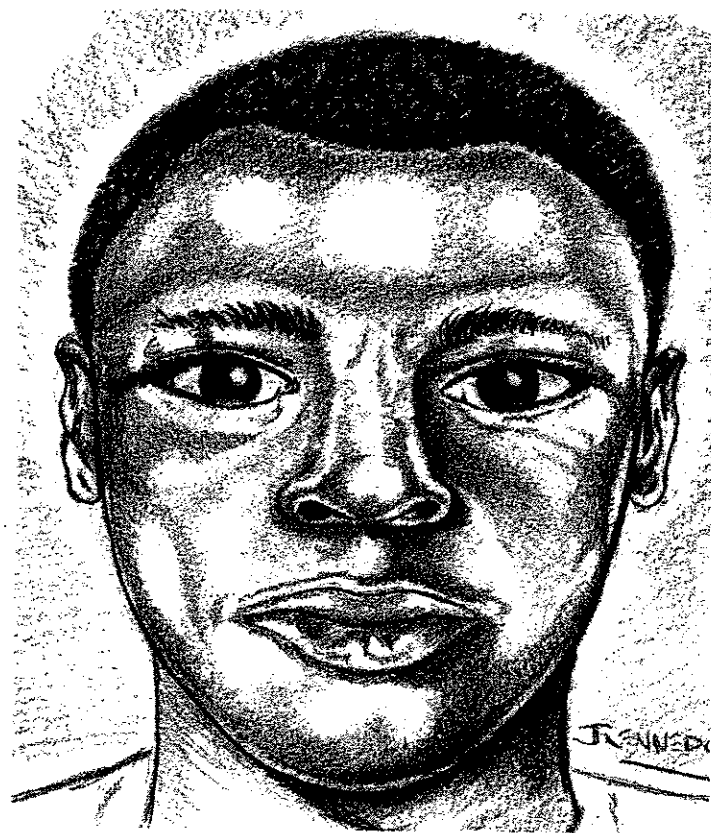
OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF
 COUNTY OF MENDOCINO
 SHERIFF
 Joel Trullie

WANTED

FOR THE CRIMES OF:

Being a Product of His Environment

Desperation



MENDOCINO COUNTY
 SHERIFF'S DEPT
 COMPOSITE UNIT
 M.C.I. CASE # 03-1128
 BY: Det. J. Kennedy

SEX: Male	HEIGHT: 5'5"-5'08"	Hair: Black
RACE: Black	WEIGHT: 130-140	EYES: Brown
AGE: 23-27	BUILD: thin	COMPLEXION: Dark

REMARKS: Bigger Thomas is **WANTED** for the brutal murder of **CAPITALISM**. Bigger suffocated **CAPITALISM** out of fear that she might kill him. It's true, she kept him caged like a beast all his life, in a godless hell that offered no hope, no fraction of the so-called American Dream. Because of his poverty, his race, and his fear, Bigger felt that his only chance at survival was to burn **CAPITALISM**. Now he must pay for his heinous crime.

If you have any information that would speed the process of this misguided black boy's arrest, please call N. Justice at 773-569-0098.

Historical Snapshot!

During the Harlem Renaissance and the Depression, the Communist Party became popular among African Americans in urban spheres. Richard Wright advocated Communist practices, though he later became frustrated with the rigidity of the party and condemned Stalin for his gross atrocities.

What made the Communist Party attractive to blacks? In Bobby Wilson's "Critically Understanding Race Connected Practices: A Reading of W.E.B DuBois and Richard Wright," Wright states, "My life as a Negro in America had led me to feel...that the problem of human unity was more important than bread...for without a continuous current of shared thought and feeling circulating through the social system, like blood coursing through the body, there could be no living worthy of being human" (36).

The promise of a united front with like-minded individuals who wanted equality for the masses was indeed enticing to a disenfranchised group who suffered the fear of isolation, the fear of discrimination and divide, and the fear of forever being subjugated and abused.

From Victim to Murderer

Mary: Why'd you do it? I was only kind to you.

Bigger: I was scared.

Mary: But Jan and I wanted to help you—that's why we gave you those Communist papers. We support the advancement of Negroes. And my parents donated money and created boys' homes for black youth! You shouldn't have felt threatened.

Bigger: How'd you think it would have looked if your mother knew I was in the room with you, alone, at two in the morning, both of us reeking of alcohol?

Mary: She would have understood.

Bigger: I wasn't ready to take the chance that she might *not* understand. I was a dead man in that room before I did a thing. Because I'm black.

Mary: Well that's just fine, I'm dead too, and all I wanted to do was to help you.

Bigger: You hadn't developed a relationship with me first! No white person had ever wanted to help me before—how was I supposed to believe you when I had been living in fear and distrust all my life? You only made me vulnerable to attack. Donating ping-pong tables to boys' homes wasn't helpful either. What's the point of playing ping-pong when you have to carry a knife with you to school for fear you'll be attacked? Hell, we planned all our jobs while playing ping-pong!

Fear was a big, **black**, ugly rat, coiled around Bigger's bowels. She silently crept in, grasping and scratching, shooting lethal **panic** into the pit of his stomach while he sat idly, unable to break out of the **coma** she so slyly induced. He felt the scathing presence of Fear all around him, heating him until he snapped into a **blind rage**, leaving him **clawing** at the air and her breath and the pillow and the girl. Not meaning to harm the girl but unable to let her be the reason he died. Yes, Fear gripped him and held the **noose** tight around his neck, laughing.



Eye Chart:

W E
A R E
B L I N D

Doctor's Notes:

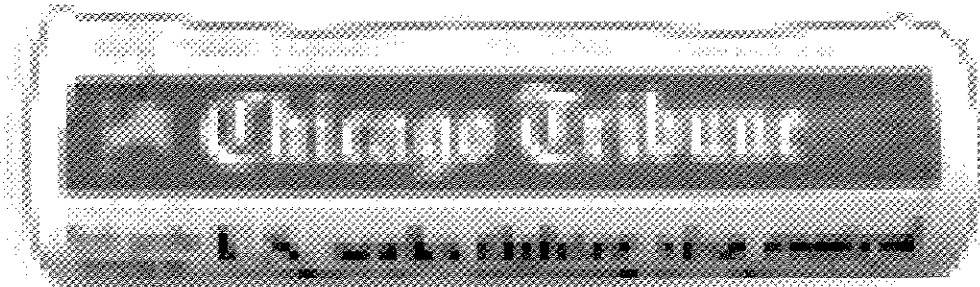
Bigger goes through life accusing everyone around him of being blind—that his mother believed blindly in a God who didn't seem to care much for Bigger or his people, that his sister was blind to his intentions when she accused him of looking up her skirt when he was doing his best to give her privacy in their constricted living space, that Bessie, his girlfriend, was blind for loving him and blind to his objectification of her—the objectification that allowed him to easily disregard her, that white people were blind to the living conditions and tragedy of black life, that he had been blind to his power.

Perhaps everyone is blind in some respects. Oftentimes, people fail to see themselves and others clearly. Sometimes light doesn't refract the way it should, leaving the world with distorted images and fractured sight. Once individuals become aware of what has been blinding them, they develop a new sense of self, a new power relationship with themselves and the world in which they exist. They alter their perceptions of those around them, they take actions they never would have dreamed of taking before, and they feel that they must seek justice for what they have been unknowingly deprived of for so long.

Bigger was once blinded by fear. He was paralyzed and could not see any other choice but to act out of rage and terror. He could not clearly see or think through the situation that seemed to bar him of any chances for survival in the world. After blindly acting, realizing what he had done, and finishing the crime, Bigger made the transition from blindness to clarity. Wright says, "The whole thing came to him in the form of a powerful and simple feeling; there was in everyone a great hunger to believe that made him blind, and if he could see while others were blind, then he could get what he wanted and never be caught at it" (107).

While Bigger's blindness crippled him at one time, his freedom from it allowed him to envision his own agency: despite the fact that he had committed a crime that was motivated by fear, he had done something out of his own will. He had tricked people—people who were themselves still blind.

Flight



Black murderer flees

CHICAGO—Bigger Thomas, alleged murderer-rapist, fled a Black Belt apartment this morning.

Authorities are scouring every black residency on the South Side demanding to know if the inhabitants have any information about the whereabouts of the villain. More than three hundred strong white men have taken their honor and their guns to the streets in order to track down Thomas, who will be taken into custody for extensive questioning upon arrest.

Just hours ago, the remains of Mary Dalton's body were found in the furnace of her home—the same furnace that Bigger Thomas was responsible for tending.

"We were just trying to get him on his feet," said Mr. Dalton, who is known for his philanthropy in the Negro community. "Now look what's happened to our poor Mary."

Thomas was last seen sprinting across rooftops early this morning in an attempt to evade police forces. A map has been drawn of all the buildings that have previously been checked in order to speed the chase.

No motives for the murder of Mary were mentioned, but it's clear that this black beast couldn't keep his greedy paws off her. Neither could her Red boyfriend, Jan.

Jan is currently being withheld for questioning at the Cook County Jail. He was with Mary the night she was brutally murdered, according to Thomas. Police found Communist Party pamphlets in the Negro's bedroom, leading them to believe that Jan may have been involved. Surely, a Negro wouldn't be smart enough to try to murder such a high-class young lady on his own. Authorities suspect vile conspiracy.

Furthermore, the ransom note that was left on the front steps of the Dalton residence was signed "Red," with the Communist hammer and sickle crudely scribbled at the bottom.

"They can run, but they can't hide for long," said the Cook County Sheriff. "Let this be a lesson to all you dirty rats out there: keep your hands off our women or pay. I'll find you, and justice will be done."

Survival!

The exciting new game that focuses on trying to make it when the whole world is against you! As a black man living on the South side, will you survive your environment, the time bomb ticking against you, and the obstacles thrown at you at every curve? Will you become allow yourself to be villainized or will you become the villain?

Game Rules:

1. Begin by warding off rats in dilapidated one-room apartment buildings. Avoid the toxic stench of too many bodies in too close proximity. Carry a frying-pan-rat-smacker with you at all times. *Leave home to avoid reality.*
2. Spend monotonous afternoons in employment agencies trying to get a job so your family won't starve. Repel fearful, disapproving glances of middle-aged white employment office clerks. Repeat this process time and time again even though you have been turned down or fired because you're black. *Move to a poorer, worse neighborhood when you can't find a job.*
3. Develop a tough guy attitude and accuse your friends of vicious crimes against you in a despairing attempt to place yourself in a power position. *Let your emotions take you away.*
4. Steal what you don't have the resources to obtain. *Run from the law.*
5. Sweat fear in the presence of white men and always do as you are told. *High-tail it out of there once you have done your job.*
6. Never allow yourself to become trapped in a position where you are alone with a young, white female. You will be guilty without having done anything. If you take action to hide your association with a young, white female—for example, if you kill her to protect yourself—you will be caught. *If you flee, you will be caught.*

WILL YOU SURVIVE?

From Victim to Murderer

Mary: Why'd you run?

Bigger: What else was I supposed to do?

Mary: Stand and tell the truth!

Bigger: And who would have believed me? Besides, it didn't matter that it was an accident. You were dead. They knew I did it. I had to get out of there.

Mary: What good did it do you?

Bigger: Obviously not much. I'm dead too, aren't I?

Mary: How'd they catch you?

Bigger: They invaded the homes of all the black people living on the South side. They gathered hundreds of white volunteers to search for me. They found Bessie, my girl, who I killed after you because I could not take her with me and expect to get away. They blasted me with freezing water until I finally fell over, defeated.

Mary: Well, you pay for your sins.

Bigger: Oh yeah? Who pays for the sins of Capitalism? Who does penance for the vile crimes of racism and classism against the people of color, people of low socio-economic status? Who does time for herding all the black people into the worst neighborhoods and making it so we can't get out? Where's the atonement for starving children on the street? The inequality? The lack of educational opportunity?

Mary: So you ran.

Bigger: Wouldn't you?

AGENCY: (n.)

1. Something Bigger attains the only time he exerts any power over the rich, white class that oppresses him—when he kills Mary Dalton and flees.
2. “As long as he could take his life into his own hands and dispose of it as he pleased, as long as he could decide just when and where he would run to, he need not be afraid” (Wright 149).
3. The feeling of having one's destiny in one's grasp.

Historical Snapshot!

Richard Wright, author of *Native Son* and many other works, including his autobiography, *Black Boy*, was one of the premier black authors of the Harlem Renaissance. He was born the grandson of slaves on September 4, 1908. His father deserted his family while they were living in Memphis and Wright fled with his brother and mother to Jackson, Mississippi during his high school years. While in Mississippi, he acquired some of his most lasting impressions of racism. These were not easy years for Wright, but his mother, a school teacher, encouraged him to pursue his education and helped him to develop his love for writing and literature.

He eventually migrated to the Midwest, as many African Americans progressed out of the racist South, and settled in Chicago—which he made the setting for the story of Bigger Thomas, a native son born into the brutal confines of the city. In his later life, Wright joined the Communist Party, which offered an outlet for black Americans. Wright flourished and developed relationships in a group that did not constantly judge him guilty based on the color of his skin.

He moved to New York City to become the Harlem editor of the *Daily Worker*, a Communist publication with all the latest party news. Wright later denounced the Communist Party when he became frustrated with the rigid policies and Stalin's influence, and he began writing for the anti-communist anthology, *The God That Failed*—always eager to express his views through writing.

Wright intended *Bigger* to represent the limitations society placed on black men during the early 20th century—the same limitations he felt growing up in the oppressive South. Other subject matter Wright discusses includes: Southern lynching, black migration to urban environments, and his life growing up in the South. He became highly interested in Haiku and wrote over 4000 poems in his later years. He died November 28, 1960. (<http://en.wikipedia.org>).

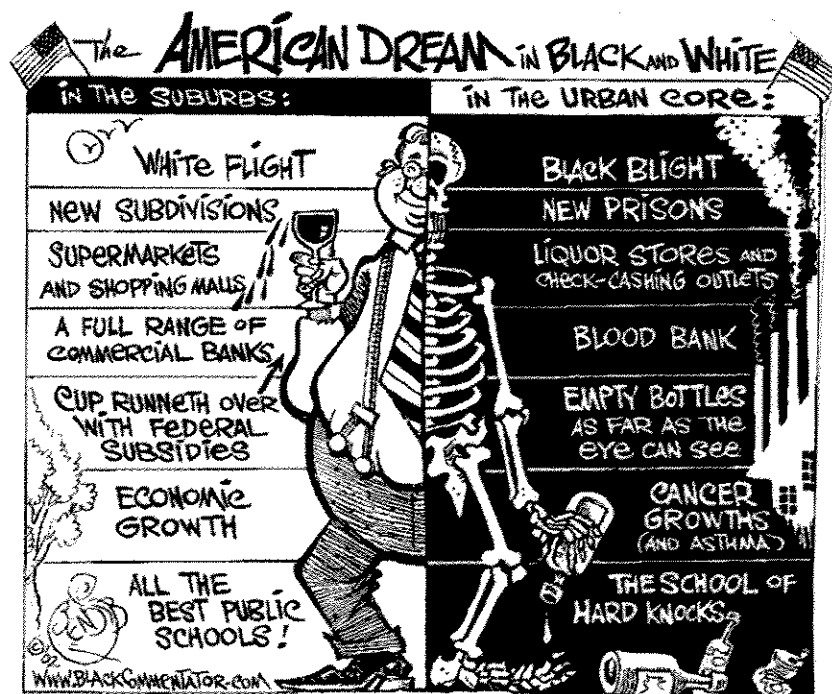
Obituary for the American Dream

The American Dream flew away and was shot down today in one of Chicago's roughest neighborhoods. The Dream allegedly flew at the same time Bigger Thomas was tried for the murder of Mary Dalton.

Police managed to shoot the Dream as it was fleeing from the crowded courtroom. Cause of death: gunshot wounds and horrific battery from authorities.

The Dream is survived by Apple Pie, one of its closest relatives, and by Fear, Betrayal, and Injustice, three of its arch-enemies.

There will be a funeral at 12:00 a.m. behind the bars of the jail cell in which Bigger Thomas is scheduled for execution.



Fate

What You Need to Birth and Breed a Bigger

Cramped spaces
Pained faces
No choices
Unheard voices
Fear, Poverty, Chains, Knives
Broken homes, endangered lives.

Greed, Grief, Filth, Smoke
Gasping for air, a muffled choke.

No time
High Crime
Scraping for money
Isn't it funny
How the other half lives
And no one gives
A shit
About the Biggers who sit
Waiting for redemption
And fail to mention
Isolation, Starvation
Degradation, Annihilation.



The dramatic adaptation seeks to ask:
“What made Bigger who his is?”
“Is the “negro sex killer” of tabloid headlines
a monster or the creation of many centuries
of black experience in America?”

<http://www.offoffoff.com/theater/2002/nativeson.php3>

In Bigger's Defense

A Poem Using the Voices of Bigger's Lawyer, Max, and Bigger Himself

“He was guilty before he was
killed!”

“Listen,
I've talked with this boy.
He has no education.
He is poor.
He is black.”

“Hope of a better life?
He knew he did not have a
chance.”

He lives in darkness.
(Wright 403).

Killed. They killed me dead. I guess it was
my fault but no one would
listen.

I am black.
Black outside and inside. I've lost all
hope.

Chance is not something common to me.
I am nothing.
I may be a native son of America, but
I live in darkness.



QUESTIONS:

How can people hope to raise themselves if they are being segregated into unsafe living conditions?

If children see crime all their lives, how can we expect them to break the cycle they have been socialized into?

Apartment building in a black section of Chicago, Illinois, April 1941 Russell Lee,

FACT: "Chicago's South Side "black belt" contained zones related to economic status. The poorest blacks lived in the northernmost, oldest section of the black belt, while the elite resided in the southernmost section."



FACT: Due to the geographic isolation of the Black Belt and to discriminatory policies concerning the education of African Americans, there was often no place to "put" young black children. Thus, African American kindergartners in this photo are being herded into the Ida B. Wells housing project to receive their substandard lessons.

QUESTION: What are the psychological implications of making five-year-olds aware that they are not even worthy enough for a proper school building?

Ida B. Wells housing project, Chicago, Illinois, April 1942 Jack Delano, Photographer

Photographs and information taken from "The African American Mosaic," a division of the Library of Congress website. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam011.html>

Confession

I must have done something to deserve this;
Well I guess I did, I smothered her,
suffocated her until she got real quiet,
too quiet,
then panicked and burned her body in the
furnace.

Now I face the electric chair
and grim old Death is staring me down,
shooting rays of venom into my last hopes.

I had it hard coming up—
all of us packed like sardines:
One room,
No Father,
Ugly rats with their
ugly rat eyes,
laughing.

I could have done that job good,
carting Miss Society around
listening to her Communist Bullshit
and union rhetoric.
But baby, even the Communists can't save
me now.

They didn't save you either.

I guess I deserve this end.
Only played tricks and evaded reality
before...
Guess I wouldn't have amounted to anything
anyway.

And I got a confession to make:
I'm not sorry.

From Victim to Murderer

Bigger: Do you think I expected any other fate for myself? I was bound to get caught up in some mess like this. Every one I know does. It's part of the system.

Mary: Do you really believe you couldn't have been different? You couldn't have stood for something good, made yourself better?

Bigger: I couldn't even get a job working in a store, how do you think I could have brought myself up?

Mary: But we were willing to help you.

Bigger: You keep saying that, and maybe you were, but I couldn't understand that at the time. When everybody's always out to get you, you have little faith in good souls, especially if they have white skin. Maybe this was how it was supposed to be. Maybe I didn't have a choice. I was born in the gutter and died in the gutter—just like my absent father and Jesus-loving mother will. I just wish it could have been different for my little brother. He knew I was in a mess—he knew and he was so young. I wish I could have protected him from the fear and the hate and the violence that got me into this mess.

Mary: Do you think there's any hope for the future?

Bigger: If you're black, and you're poor, and you don't know what to do with yourself, it's really hard to see a great future. Maybe if we grab hold of what we know is true. Maybe if my brother just sets his eyes on some goal and doesn't stop until he gets there and doesn't take no for an answer. Maybe if you stop killing us before we have a chance. Maybe if we think more before acting, and don't let themselves get caught up in the moment, the chaos, the cycle.....then maybe...

Cook County Jail, 1940

In Nine-teen-forty,
a young black Chicago man
is dead before birth.

Cook County Prison,
located in Chicago,
is a pre-trial

holding residence
where criminals wait for the
telling of their fate.

Does heaven reserve
space for young black murderers
who never knew God

in life?

<http://www.co.cook.il.us/agencyDetail.php?pAgencyID=25>

Brutal: (adj.) grossly ruthless or unfeeling; befitting a cold-hearted beast

Ignominy: (n.) disgraceful or dishonorable quality, conduct, or action

Grotesque: (adj.) departing markedly from the natural, the expected, or the typical

Grim: (adj.) ghastly, repellant, or sinister in character; savage

Execution: (n.) the result of a performance (or crime)

Raucous: (adj.) boisterously disorderly; disagreeably harsh or strident

Terror: (n.) a state of intense fear; violence committed against another

Hopeless: (adj.) having no expectation of good or success

Oppressed: (adj.) crushed or burdened by abuse of power or authority

Murderer: (n.) one who kills (with malice?)

Agonizing: (adj.) to suffer extreme pain or great anguish

Shame: (n.) a painful emotion caused by the consciousness of guilt

<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/>

Works Cited

- The Black Commentator*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 26, 2006.
http://www.blackcommentator.com/8_cartoons_black_and_white_amer_dream_pr.html.
- Cook County Jail. "Agencies." *Cook County Info Center*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 23, 2006. <http://www.co.cook.il.us/agencyDetail.php?pAgencyID=25>.
- The Library of Congress. "The African American Mosaic." *A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of Black History & Culture*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 24, 2006. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam011.html>.
- Offoffoff Theater. "Doing the Wright Thing." *Review: Native Son*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 20, 2006. <http://www.offoffoff.com/theater/2002/nativeson.php3>.
- Miriam Webster Online*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 22, 2006.
<http://www.m-w.com/>.
- "Richard Wright." *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from the World Wide Web April 24, 2006. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Wright_%28author%29.
- Wilson, Bobby. "Critically Understanding Race-Connected Practices: A Reading of W.E.B. DuBois and Richard Wright." *The Professional Geographer*. 54 (1) 2002. 31-41.
- Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. NY: Perennial Classics, 1940.
- Wright, Richard. "How Bigger Was Born." *Native Son*. NY: Perennial Classics, 1940.

Notes

1. The first genre appearing is a letter to everyone who reads this paper. In it, I address the subject matter of my work—Richard Wright’s *Native Son*—and give some background information about the story and the time in which it was written. I make readers aware of some of the questions that went through my head while reading Wright’s work that served as motivation for my exploration of it, and I set up a purpose for my paper—to reconstruct Bigger’s story while examining the debilitating effects of racism and poverty in America—so that my readers have some understanding of the direction in which my research will take them.
2. I divided my paper into three sections—Fear, Flight, and Fate—the same three sections Wright divides his work into. Dividing my paper this way gave me an organizational and thematic structure to follow and base my writing upon. I chose to highlight the titles in white on a black background to emphasize their importance in the course of events in Bigger Thomas’s life.
3. Page three is a Wanted ad I created for Bigger Thomas—but I did not use rape and murder as the crimes he was wanted for. I chose to highlight Bigger’s desperation and the fact that he was a product of his horrific environment so as to keep the focus of my paper on WHY I believe Bigger acted as he did. Toward the bottom of the page, I personify Capitalism in the place of Mary Dalton in that the Daltons are often viewed as a symbol of wealth and capitalism in Wright’s work.
4. I repeated the expository element of Historical Snapshot in order to highlight two main influences of Wright’s work: The Communist Party (page four) and Wright’s own life (page eleven).
5. I repeated the genre entitled “From Victim to Murderer,” a series of dialogs between Bigger and Mary Dalton, in each section. These are fictitious conversations made up to illustrate Bigger’s fear, reasons for running, and destiny as a criminal. In the first two dialogs, Mary begins, speaking as the murder victim; however, in the final conversation, Bigger begins, speaking as the victim of a crippling social position imposed by the wealthy, empowered society that Mary represents. I wanted to make the point that both Mary and Bigger can be seen as victims of the system in which they live—that perhaps the blame should not only be placed on Bigger, but also his oppressors.
6. Page six consists of a visual that is meant to represent an eye chart and an accompanying piece explaining the concept of blindness in *Native Son*. Wright repeats the theme of blindness by making Mrs. Dalton physically blind and by writing about the blindness Bigger perceives in others. These genres are meant to point out that everyone is blind to certain aspects and truths about their circumstances—that often we function without clarity, and that the effects of this blindness can keep us ignorant of our power.

7. Page nine is written as the rules of a game—the game which Bigger had to play in order to survive. I mean to point out some of the obstacles Bigger faced on a day to day basis that led to his fear and his attempted flight from his condemned state.

8. On page eleven, I chose to write an obituary for the American Dream, rather than an obituary for Bigger, who presumably dies at the end of the novel by the death penalty. I wanted to make the point that not everyone has the same opportunities for attaining the American Dream—that any hope Bigger had for any aspects of the American Dream were destroyed with his act of crime, that was not premeditated, but the result of the excessive fear placed upon him by his oppressors.

9. I chose to include a cartoon on page eleven to mirror my obituary for the American Dream because I feel that *The Black Commentator* displays an accurate representation of the American Dream for both whites and blacks.

10. “What You Need to Birth and Breed a Bigger” (page thirteen) is a poem that copies the style of Raymond Carver’s “The Palette.” It lists all the conditions needed to create a persona like Bigger Thomas, and includes the devastation of his environment.

11. “In Bigger’s Defense” is a two-voiced poem, with the voice of Max, Bigger’s lawyer, appearing in the left column, and the voice of Bigger appearing in the right. The quotations within Max’s lines are real quotes from Richard Wright’s text, taken from the court-room scene where Max gives Bigger’s defense.

12. I found Wright’s concept of black-only neighborhoods in Chicago intriguing, so I researched living conditions on Chicago’s South Side—the setting of the novel. I thought it was interesting that realtors segregated blacks into the worst neighborhoods, disallowing them to raise themselves up. Page fourteen is a picture genre with accompanying facts and questions I posed in relation to the socialization of black youth in areas that tell them they are unworthy from birth. The questions are meant to be pondered by readers and to display insight into why some of these neighborhoods become so rough.

13. “Cook County Jail, 1940” is a series of Haiku poetry asking whether or not Bigger will be forgiven for the sins of his fate.

14. The final genre of my paper is an acronym of Bigger Thomas’s name, using words and definitions pertaining to himself and his situation, which can also be read as sort of a poem:

Brutal Ignominy--
Grotesque, Grim Execution
Raucous Terror
Hopeless Opressed Murderer
Agonizing Shame.

Self-Assessment of Lit-Based Multigenre Paper
(EDT 428/528)

Name Emily Feltes Date 04/25/06

Full Title of Paper Native Darkness

1) What surprised you by the process of writing this paper?

I was initially surprised by the amount of difficulty I had creating this paper. I could not think of a unifying theme, though I am very passionate about *Native Son*, and I didn't have any idea how put historical and creative pieces into a cohesive, fluid unit. Going into this paper, I was very excited about the prospects of writing a nontraditional research paper, but after much frustrated thinking and deleting, I became very frustrated.

Later, when a lightbulb went off in my muddled brain, I was amazed by the ease with which I was able to write documents that fit well into my paper. I think I learned a lot about myself and organization and about the power of brainstorming and writing down thoughts as they come. Rather than panicking because I didn't know what to write, I found that when I sat down and planned various avenues that my paper might take, I had a much better sense of how to craft a productive, meaningful piece of writing.

2) Tell what was hard about writing this paper and explain why.

It was very difficult for me to figure out how I wanted to organize this paper. Richard Wright's work is beautiful and heavy and complex, and I didn't want to leave important parts of the story out. I also didn't want to simply summarize the events and turn in a surface-level document.

I had a difficult time trying to find unifying elements because I did not want to include a quotation at the top of each page like the girls used in the examples in our course packets. While I think their papers were superb, and while I think the quote idea really does tie everything together crisply, I wanted to do something different so that my paper didn't resemble everyone else's. Once I developed the idea of splitting my paper up into sections with the same titles Richard Wright uses—Fear, Flight, and Fate—I began to envision where I wanted my paper to go, what I wanted to do with it, and how it should be organized. Dividing the paper into these three sections also allowed me to include the repetition of the themes suggested by the titles. Had I not come up with this idea, I would have been at a loss, because I spent much time thinking about how to get my paper to work, and for a long time, I couldn't come up with anything and became very frustrated.

It was also slightly difficult for me to find a balance between my creative writing pieces and my historical criticism or research-type documents. Whenever I added the research in, it seemed to break the flow of the paper. I really had to play with the layout and order of pieces until I felt that I achieved some sense of flow throughout my paper.

3) What could you have done to make your work more efficient/productive?

While I did write this paper over a period of at least two weeks, I wish I would have developed a more rigid writing schedule. I think that if I had tried to write 2-3 pieces each day, my work would have been much more productive. I wouldn't have necessarily chosen to include all of my writing, but that way I could include all my best pieces.

I also would have liked to have done more extensive research so that I had a better idea of Wright's involvement with the Communist Party and his participation in the Harlem Renaissance. I read a lot about these topics, but I think my paper would have only improved the more I learned about Wright's life and his motivations for writing *Native Son*.

I think one more check-day would have been good just to keep us all on our toes. I also think I would have loved a peer editing day where we could bring in pieces to share with each other and brainstorm about ideas for our papers. I could have taken the initiative on my own to talk to my peers about my writing and where I thought it was headed, and I'm sure I would have acquired some helpful ideas. I think that I would definitely look into talking my paper over with more people if I were to write another multigenre research paper.

4) Were the lessons that your peers provided productive in getting you to produce writing you could use in your paper? Any advice?

Yes! I think the lessons my peers provided were productive and effective because they got me thinking about possible genres to use and strategies to make my writing effective. I ended up using two out of the three genres presented during the first class period—the dialog and the newspaper article. I might not have thought of doing a journalistic type piece—but it worked out perfectly and allowed me to give a synopsis of a main event—Bigger's flight—in a creative way. I did not feel that the third genre, Traumarama, was appropriate or fitting to my paper, but it was a fun, explorative type of writing that I had never done before. It's always good to get the creative juices flowing!

I wish we had done these lessons earlier because by the second class period, I was already nearly done writing my paper, and I didn't feel that I wanted to go back and add more genres. I realize there is a time constraint, however, and that it's very difficult to fit everything into one semester! I also would have found it helpful if each group gave a one page handout on their lesson topic—I would keep these and potentially use them later!

5) What did you further learn from the process of creating this multigenre look at your chosen piece of literature? (By all means, consider the research you did as well as the actual writing all the genres and putting together the papers)

By examining *Native Son* through a multi-genre lens, I was able to see aspects of the characters in a new light. I could explore the intricacies of their actions and attitudes while gaining a deeper understanding of the context of Wright's writing based on the

research I conducted for the historical aspect of my paper. For example, I found myself empathizing with Bigger a great deal more after writing about his fearful, tragic way of life and the environment and confines that I believe were partially responsible for his destruction. Bigger may be a murderer, but he has also been denied humanity all his life. It was interesting to explore a way of life completely opposite my own and try to get into the shoes of a character so that I could know him better.

I find that whenever I have the chance to write creatively about a subject I become intensely focused on it. I try to explore it from various angles, and I usually gain a new perspective from examining issues from many different standpoints.

In addition, I learned a lot about the history behind Wright's work. I was unaware of the huge African American involvement with the Communist Party in the 30s and 40s and I was able to get a much greater sense of Richard Wright's motivation and goals for his work. I enjoyed exploring Wright's connection to the Harlem Renaissance and was very excited to see the historical and creative aspects of my paper come together.

6) What is your advice to future students who embark on creating Lit-Based Multigenre Papers?

My greatest advice would be to choose a piece of literature that you are passionate and excited about further exploring! This can be a very fulfilling, enjoyable experience if you want to learn more about the literature you are researching, but I could also see how it would be very difficult if you were apathetic about your choice. Fortunately, I think *Native Son* is a fascinating, shocking, wonderful piece of literature that should be read by everyone, and thus I didn't mind putting a lot of time and thought into the creation of my research paper.

I would also suggest choosing a piece that is somehow historically or culturally relevant. The more history behind your work, the easier it will be to find valuable research related to it.

I would suggest doing a LOT of brainstorming before you begin writing this paper. You will want to create a meaningful, evocative representation of your literature, and it's helpful to have some sort of plan about how to accomplish your goals. For example, I was feeling really overwhelmed because there was SO much I wanted to include, and I didn't know where to begin, but once I sat down and outlined the types of genres I could possibly include, the ideas I had, and the message I wanted to get across, the task of writing the paper became easier. Organization really helps!

It's also helpful to write this paper in several chunks or even one piece at a time, rather than trying to sit down and write the whole thing in one or two nights. Writing pieces in segments and then putting them together allows you to really think about where each piece fits in and if it fits in at all. But, by all means, if you find yourself on a role, then write, write, write!