

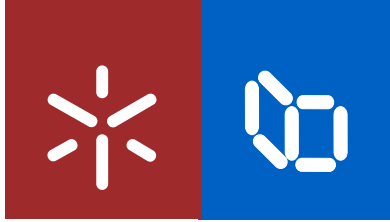


**Universidade do Minho**  
Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas

Bruno Rafael Pereira de Sousa Teixeira

**"I, too, am America":  
Richard Wright's literary pursuit of justice**





**Universidade do Minho**

Escola de Letras, Artes e Ciências Humanas

Bruno Rafael Pereira de Sousa Teixeira

**"I, too, am America":  
Richard Wright's literary pursuit of justice**

Dissertação de Mestrado  
Mestrado em Língua, Literatura e Cultura Inglesas

Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação do  
**Professor Doutor Jaime José Becerra Costa**

## **DIREITOS DE AUTOR E CONDIÇÕES DE UTILIZAÇÃO DO TRABALHO POR TERCEIROS**

Este é um trabalho académico que pode ser utilizado por terceiros desde que respeitadas as regras e boas práticas internacionalmente aceites, no que concerne aos direitos de autor e direitos conexos.

Assim, o presente trabalho pode ser utilizado nos termos previstos na licença abaixo indicada.

Caso o utilizador necessite de permissão para poder fazer um uso do trabalho em condições não previstas no licenciamento indicado, deverá contactar o autor, através do RepositóriUM da Universidade do Minho.

### ***Licença concedida aos utilizadores deste trabalho***



**Atribuição-NãoComercial-Compartilhalgal**

**CC BY-NC-SA**

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

## **AGRADECIMENTOS**

Em primeiro lugar, gostaria de agradecer à minha mãe por sempre me apoiar nesta jornada nem sempre fácil pela Literatura, nunca esquecendo as amigas maternas e a família materna em geral que foram um grande apoio numa área de resiliência como as Letras.

Depois, gostava de endereçar um agradecimento aos meus queridos companheiros da Literatuna (TLUM) pelo companheirismo e por me ajudarem a crescer e a chegar à pessoa que sou atualmente. Um especial obrigado à minha madrinha tunal Mariana Rolim por sempre acreditar em mim e me fazer sentir que eu era capaz de prosseguir o meu caminho.

Gostava de agradecer às minhas afilhadas e amigas de licenciatura Vera Carvalho e Sónia Costa por dias e noites de tertúlias literárias e académicas. Agradecimento ao meu compadre Pedro Maia pelas aventuras na escrita criativa com o projeto Sarcasmos Irónicos.

Um agradecimento à minha grande amiga e colega de mestrado Bárbara Ferreira por me acompanhar nestes longos meses de resistência e resiliência que me permitiu redigir a dissertação. Agradeço também aos meus colegas de turma do primeiro ano deste Mestrado pelo enorme espírito de união durante o primeiro ano e pelas longas conversas intelectuais e galhofas nos tempos livres. Um agradecimento à conterrânea e amiga minha Ana Fonseca por sempre se preocupar em saber se a minha dissertação ia correndo dentro dos conformes. Um agradecimento ao meu outro compadre Sebastián Ribeiro por sempre me motivar em alturas que me ia mais abaixo.

Não queria deixar de agradecer a alguns professores que, ainda na Licenciatura, me fizeram voltar a gostar de Literatura numa altura em que andava mais desmotivado. Um obrigado também aos professores do primeiro ano do mestrado por me transmitirem uma forma diferente de olhar para a Literatura.

Por último – mas não menos importante – queria agradecer ao mestre que me guiou neste caminho: o Professor Doutor Jaime Costa. Agradeço-lhe a disponibilidade incessante que teve para comigo enquanto meu orientador. Admiro sua vasta sapiência e a alegria com que ensina e transmite conhecimento. Levo na memória nossas reuniões repletas de debate de ideias. Ensinou-me que nenhuma ideia é ridícula quando há um mínimo de pertinência nela.

## **STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY**

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

## ABSTRACT

### **“I, too, am America”: Richard Wright’s literary pursuit of justice**

The strangulation of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer contributed to providing an arena for police brutality and maybe a change in perspective regarding the intervention of the authorities in the name of law and order. Unfortunately, all the reasons that brought about the birth and the growth of civil rights movements in the 1960’s are still alive and well in western multicultural societies and most especially in the US. Left-wing politicians do consider the fight against those remnants of the past as essential for modern societies; right-wing politicians consider that a maneuver of Cultural Marxism.

Despite being less remembered after his death, Richard Wright is an author who cannot remain forgotten. *The Man Who Lived Underground* remained for 80 years in the darkness of a drawer in order to see the light of an age, fundamentally, not very different from the one in which it was written. Its publication in 2021 sheds light upon a character who is similar to George Floyd, a protagonist taken to martyrdom by a society full of silences and inaction when confronted with segregation and injustice.

With a focus on Richard Wright and his latest posthumous work *The Man Who Lived Underground*, this dissertation aims to understand the connection of this novel to the era in which it was written.

**Keywords:** African-American Literature; George Floyd; Langston Hughes; Richard Wright; Twenty-First Century.

## RESUMO

### **“Eu, também, sou América”: a busca literária de Richard Wright por justiça**

O estrangulamento de George Floyd às mãos de um agente da polícia contribuiu para proporcionar uma arena para a brutalidade policial e talvez uma mudança de perspectiva relativamente à intervenção das autoridades em nome da lei e da ordem. Infelizmente, todas as razões que provocaram o nascimento e crescimento dos movimentos de direitos civis nos anos 60 ainda estão vivos e de boa saúde nas sociedades multiculturais ocidentais e mais especificamente nos Estados Unidos. Políticos de esquerda consideram a luta contra esses resquícios do passado como essencial para as sociedades modernas; políticos de direita consideram isso uma manobra do Marxismo Cultural.

Apesar de ser menos lembrado após sua morte, Richard Wright é um autor que não pode permanecer esquecido. *The Man Who Lived Underground* permaneceu por 80 anos na escuridão de uma gaveta de forma a ver a luz de uma era, fundamentalmente, não muito diferente daquela em que foi escrito. Sua publicação em 2021 dá luz a uma personagem que é similar a George Floyd, um protagonista levado pelo martírio de uma sociedade repleta de silêncios e inação quando confrontada com segregação e injustiça.

Com foco em Richard Wright e sua mais recente obra póstuma *The Man Who Lived Underground*, esta dissertação tenta perceber a conexão deste romance com a era na qual foi escrito.

**Palavras-Chave:** George Floyd; Langston Hughes; Literatura Afro-Americana; Richard Wright; Século Vinte e Um.



## INDEX

DIREITOS DE AUTOR E CONDIÇÕES DE UTILIZAÇÃO DO TRABALHO POR TERCEIROS .....	ii
Agradecimentos.....	iii
STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY .....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Resumo.....	vi
Index.....	vii
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Genesis .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1. Single heroes matched by existence.....	3
1.1.1. Religion as a dominant theme.....	3
1.1.2. Epics without glory in <i>Black Boy</i> and <i>Native Son</i> .....	5
1.1.3. <i>Invisible Man</i> and its similarities regarding <i>Black Boy</i> .....	6
1.2. Politics and Religion in the context of the struggle for liberation .....	7
1.2.1. Politics, Tokenism and Black Nationalism.....	8
1.2.2. Religion as a part of the fight for equality .....	9
1.2.3. "We've come to cash this check" .....	10
1.2.3.1. Richard Wright vs Martin Luther King .....	11
1.2.4. "We must know what politics play in our lives" .....	13
1.2.5.1. Richard Wright vs Langston Hughes .....	18
1.3. Music Industry in the fight against segregation .....	19
1.3.1. <i>This is America</i> .....	19
1.3.2. The power of Donald Glover and black artists in the music industry .....	21
<b>2. Who is Richard Wright? .....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1. Origins .....	23
2.2. Education and literary vocation .....	24

2.3. Influences .....	26
2.4. A more erudite side in Richard Wright .....	27
2.5. Writing with freedom and change .....	29
2.6. The leader of a generation? .....	31
<b>3. The Importance of Richard Wright.....</b>	<b>34</b>
3.1. Jim Crow.....	34
3.1.1. Jim Crow and Richard Wright.....	35
3.1.2. Fighting Jim Crow .....	37
3.1.3. Blessed laws, but ignored .....	38
3.2. Does the Constitution transmit what it intends to transmit? .....	40
3.2.1. Is there some common sense protecting us? .....	41
3.3. Jazz in Richard Wright's universe .....	43
3.4. Gospel as part of Black identity .....	44
<b>4. Psychology issues involving Fred Daniels and Richard Wright .....</b>	<b>45</b>
4.1. Fred Daniels vs. Richard Wright .....	45
4.1.1. The psychological structure of Fred Daniels .....	46
4.1.2. Living Underground .....	48
4.1.3. Outlandish, but familiar experience .....	49
4.1.4. Strange reflection of themselves.....	51
4.2. Finding the sensation itself.....	52
4.2.1. Being free and a martyr .....	54
4.2.2. Guilty plea?.....	55
4.2.3. Assuming the already imposed crime .....	56
4.2.4. Blinded by the light, frightened by a duality .....	59
4.2.5. The Promethean Nemesis.....	60
<b>5. Author vs Work.....</b>	<b>63</b>

5.1. Can Fred Daniels resemble Richard Wright? .....	63
5.2. Cradle Plan .....	64
5.3. Police position in the afro community.....	64
5.4. <i>Mythos</i> in Richard Wright, Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas .....	65
5.5. Relationship with politics.....	66
5.6. Considerations regarding the character and the author.....	67
<b>6. Fred Daniels as a probable American-like hero .....</b>	<b>71</b>
6.1. Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas as human as Spiderman and Daredevil .....	73
6.2. Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas as semi-Gods?.....	74
6.3. Wrightian Hero vs Ellisonian Hero .....	76
6.4. A visible man vs The invisible man .....	77
6.5. Integration vs Detachment .....	78
6.6. Why a Literature of Heroism? .....	80
<b>7. To Whom Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison do address themselves.....</b>	<b>82</b>
7.1. Is this related with the French and Classical idealizations? .....	87
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>91</b>

## Introduction

Racism is still a topic in our agendas and, unfortunately, it has never missed actuality. However, the theme of racism and discrimination based on color is not a theme born two or three days ago. In other words, such form of discrimination has been occurring for centuries and was originated by the initial forms of slavery arising from war and by a subsequent maritime expansion of European countries. For centuries and centuries, there has been no shortage of attempts to abolish slavery and there have been voices that have risen against the inhuman and cruel suffering that the European Man has imposed to Negroes and other races and ethnicities worldwide. In the Portuguese case, we had Father António Vieira who, endowed with a power of oratory, wrote sermons that are enshrined in the history of Portuguese Literature. His talent and his ideas were worth a hot chase from the Holy Inquisition. In the American case, one of the great voices is that of Abraham Lincoln, resulting in the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in the year 1865 and its subsequent complement provided by the Fifteenth Amendment in the year of 1870. Still, an America that seemed to give people hope about creating an egalitarian society eventually experience regression with Jim Crow's Laws in 1877, leading to a whole history of struggles that lasted for nearly a century. Big names like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad have marked this same history of struggles between the Afro community and the white community. Literature also has a special place in this quarrel through its canonical black authors who dedicate their lives to the libertarian cause. We are speaking of voices like James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Claude Mckay, Tony Morrison, Maya Angelou, etc.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* is a novel which remained unpublished for several decades, until the family of the author decided to finally publish it. The plot of this novel brings into discussion the concept of police brutality, making the Reader question if police officers do really have a valid point every time they stop a person in the street for questioning, every time they invade some pry into property.

An article from the *New York Times*<sup>1</sup> does tell us that this novel was written six years after a law had been passed by the Supreme Court to prevent policemen from forcing confessions in Mississippi, forty-seven years before the case of "Central Park Five" occurred.

---

<sup>1</sup> New York Times' article: Betts, R. D. (2021, April 20). Richard Wright's newly RESTORED novel is a tale for today. The New York Times. Retrieved September 20, 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/20/books/review/richard-wright-man-wholived-underground.html?smid=em-share>

We consider it is important to bring this book and this author into debate in this dissertation, not only because of the theme and all the historical events surrounding the story, but also because the country we live in. Portugal is well-known as a multicultural land, but there is a historical past of colonialism and racism. It is always important to discuss this.

## **1. Genesis**

### **1.1. Single heroes matched by existence**

Fred Daniels, Richard Wright and Bigger Thomas are three singular, differentiated heroes. Even so, they cross their narrative paths at certain points. It always seems to me that they live parallel lives which, at some given point, cross their paths with each other and end up establishing some existential match some seconds later.

From this trio of heroes, Fred is the most innocent and common one. He works as a caretaker carrying out all sorts of odd domestic tasks in a white family's house and is involved with Bible study at White Rock Baptist Church. He also sings in the choir and keeps a noteworthy friendship with the local reverend. Religion is not only a strong topic in *The Man Who Lived Underground*, but also a strong topic in the literature Richard Wright produced.

#### **1.1.1. Religion as a dominant theme**

It is impossible to speak of Richard Wright and *The Man Who Lived Underground* without touching the theme of spirituality. Richard Wright wanted religion to be a theme with relevant weight in history, Wright dealt with it in his essay *Memories of my Grandmother*. Moreover, Richard Wright and Fred Daniels can be compared, given Fred's personal life experiences and lack of information about his childhood and youth too.

In *Memories of my Grandmother*, the explanatory essay that comes after the story ends, our writer acknowledges his desire of creating a character who gradually feels overwhelmed by Christian faith. That desire comes from his need to do away with the traumatic years he spent living with his Adventist grandmother. In fact, as we keep diving deeply into the plot, we can witness Daniels growing angry about the chants he clearly hears from the underground, because of the fact that he is literally located under the church. As he gets more revolted, he tries to shout from where he is standing, so that people can open their eyes on the world surrounding them: a world ruled by cops filled with thirst for torture and murder.

In *Black Boy*, the autobiographical novel the author published three years after finishing *The Man*, we verify the constant confrontations between young Richard Wright and his granny. It represents a war between two inner worlds, between two perceptions. Young Richard Wright dreams of having a better life and even of starting a career as a writer. He dreams of getting his own life, of earning his own

life, of going northwards just like it was common for the young Negroes from Southern states. His dream is continuously fed by the accounts he reads in fiction magazines, quite apart from his grandma's perception. Those short stories picture the wonderful and fair life that people live in the land of the Yankees.

Indeed, his grandmother lives in a distinctive world. She is a fervent religious woman who is also absolutely peremptory regarding her moral values. The rebellious side of her grandson makes her feel angry; his love for books tortures her even more. She sees Literature as the devil's stratagem to mislead youth and, so, she does forfeit his grandson's liking for books as he brings them home, burning them out. She also insistently tries to make him go to the cult at weekends and places herself against the Wright's idea of working and running to the north side of the country. She gives up in the end, because she thinks that his soul is lost.

The strong presence of religion in both *Black Boy* and *The Man Who Lived Underground* has only critical purposes regarding its thematic essence. The author *Native Son* intends to put religion as one of the causes (if not the main one) of the summary destiny those southern Negroes are haunted by.

For Richard, religion exercises an effect of anaesthesia on black people, making them become apathetic and conformed to all the things happening to them and, consequently, preventing them from pursuing a better life. That vision of the author becomes more evident through Fred Daniels's growing anguish as he hears the spirituals echoing louder and louder in the underworld. That happiness shown by the believers as they carry on singing riles him, that same happiness we are familiar with when listening to gospel choirs singing tunes like *Stand By Me* and *Oh Happy Day*.

However, in the case of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, Fred Daniels is not presented to us as a rebellious protagonist and as an antispirituality character. Fred Daniels presents a more submissive nature and emerges as a religious person. The fact that he is a volunteer at his local church indicates that he obtains pleasure and joy from his beliefs. Daniels' aversion to religious practice comes only after his escape from the police and it arises from all the torture he receives from the Police and from the reality he gradually starts perceiving. Both for Richard Wright and for Fred Daniels, this gladness black people feel under the protection of the Lord stands as a horrible contrast to cruel fate awaiting them, that fate which comes personified in the figure of white police officers.

In the case of *Native Son*, Wright's first literary masterpiece, the religious theme does not have as much weight as in other works. Despite the presence of religious characters, Bigger's journey does not

suffer major attacks from spirituality. The theme just begins to gain a little weight when, in the end, Bigger realizes he will die on the electric chair and begins to think of the post-existential plane.

### **1.1.2. Epics without glory in *Black Boy* and *Native Son***

Written five years apart, those two novels are not triggered by the same device that triggers *The Man Who Lived Underground*. That is, the event that gives birth to both stories is not the same kind of event which gives birth to the 1942 work. The story that is being told to us in *The Man* pours from a single even: the moment Fred Daniels is considered as the Peabody family's murderer and is taken away by the cops, gets tortured and later consequently decides to run away and begins hiding in the sewers. Every moment of action is a consequence of that primary moment.

The plots of *Native Son* and *Black Boy* do not pour from an isolated cause at all. It is true that they depart from an originating principle, but that base is not fulfilled by a single "founding" event. We have a narration about both heroes' life paths that precede the conflict and climax, having therefore a more "conventional" development of the story, from the scenario and the presentation of the characters to the outcome that succeeds the climax.

Beyond that, the protagonists of both novels are not people with excellent and unquestionable natures. They are "sinning" people that constantly fall and persistently try to get up. That is, these works may be seen as epics which try to enhance the efforts made by men who are not perfect at all.

*Native Son* presents us the story of Bigger Thomas, a young boy who lives with his mother and siblings in the Negro section of Chicago. Bigger is a troublemaker who used to carry out robberies with his friend and has already got caught in one of these "adventures." His life gets changed when, after strong insistence from his mother, he decides to accept a job as a driver at Dalton family's house, a powerful family that become acknowledged in Chicago for the good deeds they did and the African American values they stood for. After accidentally murdering Mary, Mister Dalton's communist and unionist daughter, Bigger Thomas gets horrified by the idea of having wiped out the life of a white person and suffers with the thought that he will be punished.

In the second book of *Native Son*, the work is divided into three books: "Fear", "Flight" and "Fate," we watch Bigger Thomas fighting against the destiny he will be smashed by at the end, trying by all means to destroy Mary's corpse and confound the Daltons and the authorities while trying to run out of Chicago with his own girlfriend Bessie with the ransom he tries to extort.



In *Black Boy*, we get an autobiographical account where the “star” is the author. The story is told in first person, from his childhood marked by poverty and alcoholism to the confrontations he has with his granny and his desire to run away from the South. In the narrative, Wright tells us about how his passion for Literature emerged, becoming a means of evasion from the life of misery he had had, caused by his father’s ghosting and his mother’s aggressive and cruel disease. However, the protagonist is not a martyr who deserves any sort of praise for his deeds and consequent feelings. That young kid has some savage instincts which are typical of a killer, namely when he gets revolted about being unfairly accused and being physically punished. His own family deeply believes those animalesque instincts will make him spend his life in prison.

### **1.1.3. *Invisible Man* and its similarities regarding *Black Boy***

*Invisible Man* is a book written by the North American black novelist Ralph Ellison and published by the well-known publishing house “Random House” in 1952. That same work led Ellison to win the National Book Award in the following year. Although it was his first book, *Invisible Man* is seen as the author’s *magnum opus*. We can say that this work has similarities with *Black Boy*. Like the Wrightian novel, *Invisible Man* is told in first person and its hero is a young “southie” whose name is never, ever revealed. All we know is that, as it is stated by Ellison in the book’s prologue, he has flesh and bones like all the other men.

“I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (...) When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me.” (Ellison, 1952, p. 3)

This young man is described as a brilliant person who wants to be a teacher, having won a scholarship specifically created to help young Negroes go to college. However, a simple accident changed his life. He takes Norton, a white patron, for a ride through a Negro neighbourhood, just like Norton asked him to do. That ride goes wrong and the young boy gets reprehended by Bledsoe, his boss. The boy is sent to New York with some cover letters and references written by Bledsoe, but he does not know that, indeed, he had been expelled from university. Like the protagonist of *Black Boy*, we observe this boy facing hardships while staying at the Yankee hemisphere of the United States, having only the help of a lady who lets him live in her house rent-free. However, unlike Wright’s hero, this

fellow does not have the desire to run away from the South and dreams of teaching at the college he got expelled from. What saves this “man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids” in the North is the fact of being recruited by a Brotherhood which dedicates itself to the fight for equality. In a way, he ends up being used as a token while he is the speaker of the protest demonstrations. Nevertheless, we do have to stress that political activism and the concept of Social Responsibility are two topics which mark the story, similarly to what happens in *Native Son* regarding the Daltons’ deeds and Max Boris’s speeches which are filled with passion and utopia. Another aspect that matches Bigger with Ellison’s leading figure is the empathetic relationship both surprisingly have. Both lads are considered as traitors by their fellows, because of the friendly proximity they hold with white folks. In *Black Boy*, we may come to terms with the fact that Wright’s family is mixed, as a result of the abolition of slavery and the consequent inter-racial weddings. He himself starts questioning his mother about being a black boy and having a white grandmother, because he never noticed that detail before entering school.

## **1.2. Politics and Religion in the context of the struggle for liberation**

The United States society Richard Wright and other writers show us is very complex. In normal conditions, we already know (mainly through the media) that such a society has its own paradoxes and that nothing is as perfect as we tend to see in Hollywoodized versions. Nonetheless, when we talk about minorities and subcultures, the contradictions increase in evidence and the debates of ideas get hotter as cases like George Floyd’s rise up in a country declared by its anthem as “the land of the free and the home of the brave”. Richard Wright presents us a South side that maintains some remnants from the Confederation’s era. It is a fact that Negroes are not some white person’s propriety anymore but segregation still exists and pure equality is still a remote reality.

*Black Boy* gives us a picture, among many others, of a person who, for safety reasons, always slept with a shotgun beside him. He is pictured as an Afro-American war veteran who fought alongside the Union’s army. His murder in the tavern makes his family run away from the city, just to avoid consequences. Throughout the plot, we also see that Wright’s mom is forced to run away with a reverend who feeds her family, leaving her kids behind for reasons Wright never knew. Even the reverend is described as holding a revolver to use, if need be, for personal defence. Out of the many jobs Richard gets to earn some money to travel northwards, he frequently does not get along with his workmates, because they are majorly white and older. His bosses use to help him, but they do not seem really interested in ending the enveloping bad environment. Some other problem Richard faces originates from his own family. As previously said, his family is a mixture of whites and negroes. Still,

the white members tend to be strict in the education they try to teach to the kids. Richard is frequently a target of unfair accusations and those members try to punish him with violence. The young boy cannot accept that and usually responds in the same way.

### **1.2.1. Politics, Tokenism and Black Nationalism**

Politics and political activism are very present matters in Wright's work, in this way he is in tune with a host of writers with social and political interests at that time. Richard Wright was even a member of the Communist Party, although he did not remain there for a long time. Nevertheless, Marxism is still very present in his books. In *Native Son*, we see this ideology incarnated in the ideas Mary Dalton defends. Mary, a fervent socialist, tries, against her father's will, to take Bigger to the International's cause. It is true, however, that those Marxist ideas confound Thomas's mind, because he never heard or read about them. Still, she does not hold this mission alone. She is aided by Jan, her boyfriend who is a member of the Communist Party. This relationship is not well seen by the Daltons and Jan ends up at that time being submitted to surveillance by the authorities for his political actions.

On the night Mary is accidentally killed, she and Jan make a detour from College's road and take Bigger to the bars, where they spend some time drinking, eating and chatting. In those conversations, the flirting couple try endlessly to lecture their young driver about the class struggle and the Marxist revolution, trying by all means to draw him to the "red" cause by promising him that that this cause will liberate him from white supremacy. Bigger will use the pamphlets Jan offered him to accuse that Jan of making Mary disappear.

Later, in the third book of the work, "Fate", we see the controversy that Bigger's case generates at court. On one side, we have the accusation a a theme and, on the other side, Boris Max, Jan's red lawyer who defends Bigger. It is possible to observe the passion shown by Boris as Thomas's defender through the 10 page-long speech he pronounces.

Among some other things, Mary's lover's lawyer accuses Mr Dalton of untruthfulness in his charity deeds by stating that he did not make concrete actions to improve black people's lives since all he did was meant to attain social approval. This leads us to the concept of "tokenism".

In *Fire Next Time*<sup>2</sup>, James Baldwin tells us what he thinks about tokenism, namely the case of the 1954's Supreme Court's law that made illegal segregation in schools. He affirms that that was just an act of convenience made to avoid criticism and convulsions: "Had it been a matter of love or justice,

---

<sup>2</sup> Baldwin, James. (2006). *Fire Next Time* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). London: Penguin Books.

the 1954 decision would surely have occurred sooner; were it not for the realities of power in this difficult era, it might very well not have occurred yet.” (Baldwin, 2006, p.75).

In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison portrays a case of tokenism in which a young southerner is used by the Brotherhood as a token, just because they take him as an excellent orator and a potential grandstand. As we dig into the Ellisonian plot, we get the face of some black nationalist movement that performs against the Brotherhood. That movement is personified by Ras (known as “The Exhorter”) and he tries to convince the southie lad to head off the Brotherhood, saying that the group is using him. He even says he is betraying his community and the fight held for centuries.

This idea of betrayal also shows up in *Black Boy*, where the protagonist is criticized for having white friends and not seeing white people as the enemy. In *Native Son*, Bigger’s seen as a betrayer, because he seems to fear assaulting a shop owned by a white man.

Baldwin talks of betrayal in *Down at the Cross*, the essay that comes after the letter that initiates *Fire Next Time*. He speaks about the fact that there are some black people who ascended in society against all the odds. For the author born in Harlem in 1924, that ascension did not make them give more voice to the oppressed side, it made them get to the white side of the fight and see their black mates as die-hard people. We can see this point of view in Bledsoe, Ellison’ character who sees the young student as a boy who’s bound to fail.

### **1.2.2. Religion as a part of the fight for equality**

Despite having already spoken of religion at the beginning of this dissertation, we cannot leave behind that theme. Religion is undoubtedly a part of African American people’s lives and due to that at the present moment we have in our minds the image of gospel choirs chanting. In the essay *Down at a Cross*, Baldwin has religion as a topic. There is a reason why the title of one of his most renowned books is the *Fire Next Time*. It comes from a couplet which can be heard in *Mary Don’t You Weep*, a famous song coming from a Christian musical genre called “Spiritual”, a genre intimately linked to African American community and dealing with the experience of slavery.

“God gave Noah the rainbow sign  
No more water, fire next time”

However, the vision James Baldwin has on religion is quite positive and he validates that positivism in his essay's preliminary pages. He tells us of how Christianity saved his life in his teens, when he felt lost. He makes comparisons between the life he won with his connexion to spiritual beliefs and the life prostitutes and misfits live. He also presents to us the rise and empowerment of Islamism in black neighbourhoods by the creation of movements which proclaim the cause of black liberation from the oppression carried out by the white as the majority that is effectively ruling the country. In *Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin disserts on the emerging charismatic Muslim leaders like Elijah Muhammad, with whom he had a meeting, and Malcom X who drew attention to Islam from oppressed blacks who would join Islam and understand that Islam would set them free from the oppressive and colonialist Christianity which just offered them white prophets who served a white God. The concept of a "Black God" is present in the text.

"We have taken this journey and arrived at this place in God's name. This, then, is the best that God (the white God) can do. If that is so, then it is time to replace Him (..) God is black. All black men belong to Islam; they have been chosen. And Islam shall rule the world. The dream, the sentiment is old; only the colour is new." (Baldwin, 2006, p. 53)

The author of *Go Tell it on the Mountain* sees those movements with some displeasure. He got displeased with the nihilist / destructionist points defended by those groups about the world's mass destruction as the solution to end the harm that white folks inflict and which, in a peculiar way is similar to the concept of Final Judgement that the book Apocalypse mentions. Baldwin tries to rebut with a rhetorical question: "What will happen to all that beauty then?" (Baldwin, 2006, p. 88).

### **1.2.3. "We've come to cash this check"**

Delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech comes as the highlight of a march on Washington D.C. for the rights of the black population. Luther King, a Protestant cleric born in 1929 in Atlanta, was one of the greatest symbols of black contestation alongside the likes of Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad. He was the author of great rhetorical speeches that stirred up the white political elite. His acclaimed speech in Washington expresses with high assertiveness the displeasure of the black people with "Jim Crow Society" and the disillusionment of the same people in the face of the false promise of the Declaration of Independence.

“When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promising note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".” (King, 1963).

Along with this historical contextualization, the author of the expression "I have a dream" affirms the situation in which his comrades live.

“One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of prosperity material. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.” (King, 1963)

In view of this, Rev. Martin Luther King presents to us the main objective of the demonstration that took place. It aims to cash the "check" that the Constitution promised you and that would lead them to a better life, a fairer life.

“But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.” (King, 1963)

Martin Luther King speaks in the face of this to us later in the speech that he has a dream, a dream that is expressed in a poetic and exalted way: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character". This hope can be seen as the same hope that Louis Armstrong also tells us in his hit *What a Wonderful World*: "I hear babies cry, I watch them grow / They'll learn much more than I'll never know / And I think to myself "What a wonderful world!"

### **1.2.3.1. Richard Wright vs Martin Luther King**

As we already know, Richard Wright was an activist and his works were political manifestos against a white-oriented society. It is not hard to make a comparison between the author of *The Man*

*Who Lived Underground* and other figures in the black community's "war" for equality and equity. We have the case of Martin Luther King, such an emblematic figure we have talked about before. Born in 1929 in Atlanta, he was the son of two Christian people, just as Richard Wright was. Interestingly, like Fred Daniels, Martin Luther King's parents were also members of the Baptist Church. Luther King later became a reverend, beginning to preach, in a way Fred Daniels Sunday church activity reveals an equivalent standing towards the church.

Luther King is known for his oratory and was able to attract huge audiences with his speeches and sermons. In the case of Fred Daniels, we do not know the existence of this oratory capacity since he does not show himself to be skilled with the English language. As stated earlier, Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech is illustrative of a disillusionment that the black minority does feel in the face of the number of false promises made to them since founding times, in the face of several frustrated progressive policies. The Reverend's words do reflect on the other hand the same idea Richard Wright mirrors in Fred Daniels in his novel. The words mirror the constant dissatisfaction with the conformist feeling that everything is fine and that there is nothing else to change.

"There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality." (King, 1963)

However, Luther King's words are words uttered in a direct speech. The case of Fred Daniels – as we have already seen – is not the case of such a direct discourse, being a more indirect and sarcastic and ironic speech.

"(...) he wanted to leap through the narrow hole and across the dark of the basement and up the stairs and rescue the boy, telling him: yes, tell 'im you stole the radio, even if you didn't. Tell 'im you're guilty... Don't you know you're guilty?"<sup>3</sup> (Wright, 2021, p. 129)

Unfortunately, Martin Luther King and Fred Daniels are also similar figures at their endings, both end up being murdered. Both are murdered at the hands of the agents of segregation for being dangerous figures to the ruling power that the whites had in the society of their times.

---

<sup>3</sup> Page 129

#### 1.2.4. "We must know what politics play in our lives"

The impact that the "I have a dream" speech has had on modern history is indelible. Martin Luther King will always be part of the "mainstream" side of the fight against segregation. Perhaps, the fact that he was a Christian reverend may also have helped a little.

Nevertheless, if we look aside, we find Malcolm X, an Islamic version of Martin Luther King. Like King, Malcolm also had the gift of oratory and was able to make impactful speeches. His most famous speech is *The Ballot or the Bullet*,<sup>4</sup> made in 1964. Although the speech is a little more radical and clearly inclined to the Nation of Islam's values, Malcolm gives us some interesting ideas regarding the national segregation politics.

"And we must know what politics is supposed to produce. We must know what politics play in our lives. (...) We will always be misled, lead astray, or deceived, or maneuvered into supporting someone politically, who doesn't have the good of our community at heart." (X, 1964)

With this idea as the cornerstone, this speech made in the same year of the *Act of the Civil Rights* was passed also tells us of the interest of politicians in including the black community in their electoral agendas with their usual promises never to be fulfilled.

"This is the year when all of the white politicians are going to come into the Negro community. You never see them until election time. You can't find them until election time. They're going to come in with false promises. And as they make these false promises they're going to feed our frustrations, and this will only serve to make matters worse." (X, 1964)

Beyond that, Malcolm has shown in words how the political class can get the community to embark on the promises it makes. In addition, it also alerts us to the false idea ("tokenism") that only a person born in the South can deal with the problems of the South, when, in fact, a true President must deal with the problems of the whole country, regardless of his area of origin.

"The first thing the cracker does when he comes in power, he takes all the Negro leaders and invites them for coffee. To show that he's all right. And those Uncle Toms can't pass up the

---

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, R. (2020, July 3). *The ballot or the bullet speech transcript - malcolm X*. Rev. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/the-ballot-or-the-bullet-speech-transcript-malcolm-x>



coffee. They come away from the coffee table telling you and me that this man is all right." (X, 1964)

More clearly, we can read now:

"Because he's from the South and since he's from the South he can deal with the South. Look at the logic that they're using. (...) If Johnson is a good man because he's from Texas, and being from Texas will enable him to deal with the South, Eastland can deal with the South better than Johnson!" (X, 1964)

Like Luther King, Malcolm X brings us the idea that the community cannot take it anymore. It is all or nothing. That is, Malcolm uses the French Revolution motto *Liberté, Égalité et Fraternité*. Once again, we see a resistance leader resorting to the example of revolutionary basic times, this time resorting to the French Revolution. In this case, we also have an example of what "Black Nationalism" can represent in a non-anarchist society such as American society, examples that can also be seen in *Invisible Man*.

"This is why I say it's the ballot or the bullet. It's liberty or it's death. It's freedom for everybody or freedom for nobody. America today finds herself in a unique situation. Historically, revolutions are bloody, oh yes they are. They have never had a bloodless revolution. Or a non-violent revolution. That don't happen even in Hollywood. (...) Revolutions overturn systems. Revolutions destroy systems." (X, 1964)

In a manner of conclusion, the speaker born in Nebraska in 1925 uses a motto very similar to the old socialist idea spread by the Workers' International and the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels: the idea of unity. As we have always heard, "unity makes strength". Malcolm rejects the idea of separation, as he believes that is where the sheep of the herd are dominated by the "wolf". For him, the solution is to join forces in the struggle for liberation.

"(...) the only way we're going to solve it: we got to unite. We got to work together in unity and harmony. And black nationalism is the key. (...) the strategy of the white man has always been divide and conquer. He keeps us divided in order to conquer us. He tells you, I'm for separation and you for integration, and keep us fighting with each other." (X, 1964)

### 1.2.5. "Let America be the Darker Brother"

In syntony with the naturally dreamy speech given by Martin Luther King and the harsh speech given by Malcolm X, we can find other views among black intellectuals who feel equally dissatisfied with the "bad check" that the community received from the great promises of the Foundation and the times of abolitionists.

Among these visions, we have *Let America Be America Again*, a poem written in 1935 by Langston Hughes (one of the great poets of the Harlem Renaissance) and published in 1936 in *Esquire Magazine*. The poetic voice tells us about what America can and should be, always keeping the hope that equality can happen, the same hope that King expressed in his speech almost 30 years later.

"Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed

—Let it be that great strong land of love

Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme

That any man be crushed by one above.

(...)

O, let my land be a land where

Liberty's crowned with no false patriotic wreath,

But opportunity is real, and life is free,

Equality is in the air we breathe."

As the poet born in Missouri is enumerating the revolutionary qualities of "ancient" America, he counters those with verses such as "America never was America to me" and "There's never been equality for me, / Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free." However, Langston always ends up presenting us with his energetic and unwavering hope, such an American character ("I am the young man, full of strength and hope, / Tangled in that ancient endless chain / Of profit, power, gain, of grab the Land!"). It is the same hope and energy that we can see in *I, Too*, a poem originally published in 1926 in the volume *Weary Blues* and that serves and lends part of the title to this dissertation.

"Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table

When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed"

This poem describes the constant discontent of a citizen who gets deprived regarding his fundamental rights that the 4<sup>th</sup> of July's Declaration of Independence clearly proclaims to the point that were once defended by the French through Robespierre, Danton and Marat. That is why Langston is used in title of this present project

"I am the darker brother" is a profound sentence that reminds us of the idea that skin colour can never tear people apart. This sentence begins the second stanza of *I, Too*, a poem written by Langston Hughes. The poem which takes hope on the readers, beginning with the motto "I, too, sing America" and ending with the adage "I, too, am America". The readers are drawn to the words and made part again of an epic struggle with which anybody can feel identified with Likewise, the sentence reminds me of a quote from Ecclesiastes (3:20): "All go to one place; all come from dust, and all return to dust". In the North American case, it is possible to quote the Declaration of Independence of 1776.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."<sup>5</sup>

Though Langston's poetry might sound a little bit pessimistic sometimes, it sounds utopian as well. The poem *I, Too* shows that dream as difficult to dissolve and disappear. It shows the possible advent hope of a country dominated by a culture of equality, without resorting to tokenism.

---

<sup>5</sup> National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). *Declaration of independence: A transcription*. National Archives and Records Administration. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

“Tomorrow,  
I’ll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody’ll dare  
Say to me,  
“Eat in the kitchen,”  
Then.

Besides,  
They’ll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed”<sup>6</sup>

Langston Hughes’s words express what Richard Wright expresses in *Black Boy*, where he does not accept that his fellows encourage him to stop befriending white people. Langston’s words express the hope young Wright sees in a life lived in the North, the hopeful way Baldwin addresses himself to his nephew in *My Dungeon Shook*.

I could cite another author too. For example, the famous *Still I Rise*, written by Maya Angelou.

“You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I’ll rise.  
(...)  
Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I’ll rise.”  
(...)  
You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,

---

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, L. (n.d.). *I, too* by Langston Hughes. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too>

You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise."<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2.5.1. Richard Wright vs Langston Hughes

Richard Wright and Langston Hughes are two contemporaries and two unavoidable names of the 20th century's Afro-American literature and Black Arts in general. However, while Wright is a realist and sometimes dystopian writer, the poet of *Weary Blues* gets closer to the utopia and fantasy of a fairer world. We have the case of poems such as *I, Too* (a poem we have previously addressed) to illustrate this point.

Still, Langston also manages in poems such as *Let America Be America Again* to be also realistic and dissatisfied with what is going on nationwide in terms of segregation. We also have the same case in *I look at the World*.

"I look at the world  
From awakening eyes in a black face—  
And this is what I see:  
This fenced-off narrow space  
Assigned to me.  
  
I look then at the silly walls  
Through dark eyes in a dark face—  
And this is what I know:  
That all these walls oppression builds  
Will have to go!"<sup>8</sup>

In addition, we can also mention the poem *The Southern Mammy Sings*, another poem in which poet expresses the reality that surrounds him.

"Last week they lynched a colored boy.

---

<sup>7</sup> Angelou, M. (n.d.). *Still I rise by Maya Angelou*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise>

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, L. (n.d.). *I look at the world by Langston Hughes*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/52005/i-look-at-the-world>

They hung him to a tree.  
That colored boy ain't said a thing  
But us all should be free"<sup>9</sup>

In this stanza, we see the poetical subject saying that silence does not mean collusion and surrender. In other words, the blacks, despite their difficulties, must achieve the freedom to which they are entitled. In the last stanza, the poetic subject ends up pointing out the lack of humanity that prevails among white men.

"Not meanin' to be sassy  
And not meanin' to be smart -  
But sometimes I think that white folks  
Just ain't got no heart"

### **1.3. Music Industry in the fight against segregation**

In addition to all these forms of reaction among intellectuals to segregation and racism, we have in the present times forms of expression in relation to the effects that are still felt from the apparently dead "Jim Crow's Society". These forms of expression appear in literature, but do appear more often in Music, an industry long settled by black musicians.

#### **1.3.1. *This is America***

Donald Glover's, better known as Childish Gambino, song *This is America* became well known in 2018 for its controversial music video. The biggest concern of the more conservative viewers was an alleged incitement to violence. However, we can look at such a music video as a scenario like the setting of *The Man Who Lived Underground*. The protagonist played by Glover has a behavior in the story narrated very similar to Fred Daniels' in the book. The video begins with a seemingly typical setting of a black section of the city: a worn-out parking lot with few parked cars and a background noise from police sirens. A man appears playing guitar in his peace and tranquility, appearing, seconds later, with a bag over his head. The protagonist arrives in the meantime and, without any apparent reason, interrupts this peace, shooting the boy while uttering

---

<sup>9</sup> Langston Hughes, L. H. (n.d.). *Southern Mammy Sings by Langston Hughes*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=58&issue=2&page=15>

*This is America*. In a second setting, a gospel choir is shown singing their usually joyful songs. As in the first scenario, the protagonist interrupts the joy in the same way: a burst of machine gun fire and *This is America*.

Although Fred Daniels does not intervene violently in the book, I think his action is quite similar. Both Fred and Glover try to break with all that blindness and happy ideas that everything is fine and that life is beautiful, warning that the world around them is not like that. The shots Glover takes in the music video may represent abusive police interventions that often end in summary deaths.

The part where Glover "slaughters" the gospel choir can be compared to the part of *The Man Who Lived Underground* where Fred Daniels has the will to wake believers up to reality, trying to say that death awaits them if they do nothing for their segregated lives.

"His first impulse was to give vent to a loud laugh, but the laugh choked in his throat. Then he wanted to leap through the quarter-inch of crack (...) and gather all of them about him, telling them "Don't do this to yourselves". (Wright, 2021, p. 63)

In the final part of the song, Donald Glover's hero tells us of the same thing Martin Luther King and that Malcolm X, among other resistance leaders mentioned: the debt the nation owes to the community it continues to despise.

*"America, I just checked my following list  
And you mother\*\*\* owe me"*

### 1.3.2. The power of Donald Glover and black artists in the music industry

Donald Glover is one of the most acclaimed black musicians in the industry today. He was also known for the activist side of his song *This is America*. As it has already been said, the music video for the song is a music video with scenarios characteristic of a black man's life in the United States. We have also said that the path of the protagonist of the music video bears some resemblance to the course of Fred Daniels in *The Man Who Lived Underground*, especially with regard to the scenario in which the choir appears and the character played by Gambino shoots them and pronounces "This is America" as a warning to what is happening around the Afro community. Indeed, for decades now, black voices have dominated the music industry with their activist songs that are able to inspire thousands of young black people to pursue their dreams. This is not strange since some genres such as Blues, Soul and Rap have emerged as a way of expressing problems.

Black women - as it is quite noticeable in literature - have been the most dominant voices for decades among black artists. The most current singers tend to show more the body, an action that, for good and evil, proves to be necessary to try to erase the stereotype that a white body is more valid than a black body.

In the case of black singers, we have the highly acclaimed James Brown, with his song *Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud*, a song that exalts black identity.

"Some people say we got a lot of malice  
Some say it's a lotta nerve  
But I say we won't quit moving  
Until we get what we deserve (...)  
Say it loud (I'm Black and I'm proud)"

In the case of women, we have the case of Aretha Franklin, with songs such as "*You make me feel Like A Natural Woman*," a song that can be seen as having an indirect and subliminal speech and *I Dreamed a Dream*.

"I had a dream of days gone by  
When hopes were high and life worth living  
I dreamed that love would never die



And then I dreamed that God would be forgiving  
Then I was young and I was unafraid  
And dreams were made and used and tasted  
There was no ransom to be paid  
No song unsung, nothing was wasted"

Music is without a doubt one of the greatest means of expression for the black Americans on issues like discrimination and segregation. Some artists are more direct, others more poetic, but there is no doubt that they leave us a beautiful repertoire of musical works that can make us reflect on the hardships of the community and on the privilege of being a white person and not going through half the difficulties that black people go through in their everyday life.

## 2. Who is Richard Wright?

### 2.1. Origins

Contrarily to some of the acclaimed authors who came from this racial background community, Richard Wright is not a writer who has deserved much applause among the European reading public. At least, when compared with other well-known names like Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1908, Wright was born in a farm located in Mississippi, in the South-East of the United States. His mother taught in a school and his father was a sharecropper. His grandparents – as it was common among the Afro-American community were slaves.

Nonetheless, he went through a time where black arts had an impact on North American culture, with plenty of artists that are still famous in our days. Richard was also a part of a generation of valued writers and, when he settled in France, became a leading figure amidst the community of expatriate authors, mostly formed by white writers. He also took part in a generation where music had a great impact and where black singers and musicians were getting a place to express themselves. Richard Wright, in the face of this increase of artistic expression, tries to portray the quite inherent connection between black identity and music. This happens in *The Man Who Lived Underground* through the subculture of gospel and spirituals. We can see it in the psychological influence the sound of the choir singing their chants has in Fred Daniels during his journey. However, this is a topic to be discussed further.

Wright did not have an easy childhood at all. As we can check on *Black Boy*, he may have felt the same distress of the protagonist when Nathan Wright, his father, abandons the family, leaving them to their fate. By the time Nathan leaves, Richard had only lived half a decade. In this novel, we can also sense how personal the descriptions may refer to events narrated may have been to Richard Wright. We may think of the personal experience in which Ella - the mother - is humiliated in court while demanding from the judge that Nathan pays an allowance for his own kids' sustenance.

Led by despair and a strong necessity, Ella delivers temporarily his son to an orphanage, so she could amend her life financially. Later, she retires her kid from the institution. During childhood, the youngster has a very short experience with alcoholism. As he keeps growing up, the financial troubles get gradually worse. The main cause for this has to do with the health of Ella who, after suffering from two strokes, gets paralyzed and bedridden, rendering her unable to work. This extreme situation makes Richard and his younger sibling go through periods of starvation and absolute need, reaching a point

where they are separated and live with several different host families. Those recurrent problems will force the older brother and Ella to hold various jobs to help sustain his family's finances. Though those jobs were poorly paid, Richard was capable of earning enough money to, later, leave the South to the lands of the Yankees, the country which promised of a future of full wealth and prosperity.

## **2.2. Education and literary vocation**

Just as Richard Wright's childhood was not easy, his education was also difficult for him. From the time his father left and his family started having problems, his education seemed to be affected. When reading *Black Boy*, I also verify that he is a child who gets hit by illiteracy, because his mother couldn't afford putting him in school. This "illiteracy" brings him some kind of innocence before the world he lives in. Despite tremendous gaps in his process of learning, he demonstrated his ability to learn fast, beginning to obtain primary education with the help of a mailman who would spend time to teach him how to study calculus and read.

This surprising power of absorbing concepts lead fast him to earn the attention of his teachers. However, Wright is easily betrayed in crucial moments by the fear he feels when told to express himself orally before his classmates. This is triggered by his fear of being mocked by his fellow students, especially those who were white. Years later, like we get in the autobiographical novel 1945, the author of *The Outsider* reveals more talent and gets more attention from the teaching staff who sees potential in him, just what happens the Ellisonian protagonist of *Invisible Man*. He even manages to be selected to perform a speech in the graduation. Still, he is directed by his sense of nonconformity as he declines an already written script to use in the speech.

Being Richard a victim of a serious interruption of a normal education, it would be comprehensibly imaginable that he would never get in touch with literature but he, nevertheless, obtains pleasure from it in a purely autonomous way. That cardinal introduction to Literature is performed by Ella, not his mother now but a teacher who rents a room in his granny's house. Ella, due to her addiction to reading, produced a very curious and dreamy impression on Richard by her position in relation to the world, a thing that attracted the young black boy. Ella reads him some stories, making him like books. Such act is worth an expulsion from home by Richard's grandma, very much like Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Richard, from the reasons we have already mentioned has in Literature a "forbidden fruit". From that moment on, Richard embarks in a never-ending search for the universe of Literature and Fiction, spending his life reading the books from the library (against

the will of his grandmother) and reading the fiction magazines who tell stories about the cities of the North. His desire to become a writer has its birth through that uneasiness.

Music is also part of the author's intellectual early background. In *Memories of my Grandmother*<sup>10</sup>, the author himself establishes a connection between his granny's points of view and the essence of the Negro blues and jazz when it comes to the lack of necessity she has of finding some logic for her own beliefs, believing only in an invisible creature like God. We can perceive that in this excerpt:

"The Negro blues songs seem to me to approach most nearly in their inner structure and function the quality of my grandmother's living. This may seem odd inasmuch as my grandmother was ardently religious and the blues songs were blatantly secular and the singers of the blues would have certainly loathed my grandmother and my grandmother would have certainly detested them. But in most blues songs the verses have little or no relationship to one another—in the sense that there is practically no causal or logical progression—just as the items of my grandmother's environment were not related." (Wright, 2021, pp.174-175)

After this, the writer does tell us of the freedom under which a Blues/Jazz song is composed and of the absence of logic and familiarity between the items that constitute those songs. Those are two characteristics which do impress him.

"A black woman, singing the blues, will describe a rainy day, then, suddenly to the same tune and tempo, she will croon of a red pair of shoes; then, without any logical or causal connection, she will sing of how blue and lowdown she feels; the next verse may deal with a horrible murder, the next with a theft, the next with tender love, and so on. This tendency of freely juxtaposing totally unrelated images and symbols and then tying them into some overall concept, mood, feeling, is a trait of Negro thinking and feeling that has always fascinated me." (Wright, 2021, p. 176)

Then, he presents us his general impression of Jazz music in its wholeness as a musical genre. He points us out how impressive is the fact that such complex and delightful form of music is made by people who lacked musical training and education.

---

<sup>10</sup> Wright, Richard. (2021). *Memories of My Grandmother*. In Wright, Richard, *The Man Who Lived Underground* (pp. 161-211). New York: Library of America.

“Negro jazz music has been called time and again by many critics the greatest surrealist music ever heard in human history. (..) But, as many critics have pointed out, jazz music proceeds on the basis of a steady beat in the bass and then there is an endless series of improvised, tone-colored melodies carried on in terms of rhythm—sometimes as many as five— intense, moving to and fro between the keys, guided not by musical theory, but by the urge to express something deeply felt. Much of this music is created by men and women who do not even know how to read musical notes.” (Wright, 2021, p. 187)

### **2.3. Influences**

As a consequence, brought by his search for knowledge, it is plausible to state that the novelist of *Native Son*, as he pursues that arduous road of intellectual growth, acquires some artistic influences. We have already Surrealism as a form of art which impacted Wright, taking in account that the 20's artistic movement used to defend that art should detach itself from the use of reason and logic as elements that link concepts and ideas. The author even assumes in *Memories of my Grandmother* there is surrealism in Black musical culture: “The Negroes of Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas have never heard, perhaps, of surrealism; but that does not negate the strong surrealist structure and function of many of their folk utterances in song and music.” (Wright, 2021, pp. 185-186). However, he asserts that he is interested in Surrealism not as an end, but as a mean of communication: “Surrealism, as an end in itself, has no value that interests me. It is only when the device is used to communicate that it interests me.” (Wright, 2021, p. 197).

One of the writer's literary influences is presented in the aforementioned essay which comes after *The Man Who Lived Underground*. It is *What is Man?*, a book written by the admired Mark Twain. Richard Wright enjoys the impartial way Twain looks on the human being and the fact that he, despite being a white American writer, is capable of looking beyond the apparencies commonly held by the system.

“I've often wondered just what kind of childhood conditioning must Mark Twain have undergone to have made his mind run so often into such channels. Though a white American, a mocker of religion, he, too, perhaps, must have caught some inkling of the tendency so widespread in the vast Mississippi Valley that made men and women stand aside and gaze with wistful, baffled eyes upon the riddle of their existence.” (Wright, 2021, p. 180)

One influence that is also strong in the literary visions of the author comes from Gertrude Stein, especially from the novel *Three Lives*. In addition to having Melancta (a daughter of interracial parents) as one of the protagonists, what is most attractive for Richard in the work is the simplicity and veracity of the writing style of the female writer born in Pennsylvania in the year of 1874. Melancta represents the concept of common black woman and this concept is confirmed by the bunch of illiterate Afro-Americans to whom Richard reads some passages of the book.

“I took *Three Lives* and gathered together a group of illiterate, class-conscious Negro workers and told them to sit and listen. I read “Melancta” to them in a dim basement room on Chicago’s South Side and there were such wild howls of delight, such expressions of recognition, that I could barely finish. I was stopped many times by men who proceeded to improvise upon Melancta’s way of talking and thinking. They swore that they had met such girls, and I cannot mention what they thought was wrong with Melancta and how they said they would go about curing her. . . . My feelings were satisfied.” (Wright, 2021, p. 184)

One more aspect that makes Gertrude’s prose conquer the heartfelt admiration of the young writer is the employment of the English language as it is spoken on the streets by the Afro-American community. The reader himself feels that he accomplished his dream of hearing the sound of his native language.

“While turning the pages of “Melancta” I suddenly began to hear the English language for the first time in my life! And not only that, but I heard English as Negroes spoke it: simple, melodious, tolling, rolling, rough, infectious, subjective, laughing, cutting. . . . Words that I’d used every day but whose power I’d never suspected . . . Words which I’d known all of my life but which I’d never really heard . . . And not only the words, but the winding psychological patterns that lay back of them!” (Wright, 2021, p. 182)

#### **2.4. A more erudite side in Richard Wright**

Despite, generally, getting connotations of African American movements with more radical ways of expression like marches and riots, the writers allied to those same movements do also use a foundation of erudition and not only of direct speech, also resorting to a set of legendary and

mythological figures so they can compare those with the realities their characters experience. Richard Wright is not different from the rest and does the same with his heroes.

Still in *Memories of my Grandmother*, the same writer puts us before a bridge created between Fred Daniels -the protagonist of *The Man Who Lived Underground* - and the myth of Prometheus, a myth concerned with the primary creation of the Man and the animals. It starts with an article he read about a man who lived in California's underground, triggering a thought on Prometheus: "Next, while brooding over the idea of that white man in California who lived beneath those buildings in Hollywood, I thought of the Promethean theme, the theme of a man paying for a certain illicit knowledge that he had gotten." (Wright, 2021, p. 199). Richard Wright tells us that such idea sounded good to him: "I felt that it would be good to have my hero, when he went underground, discover some illicit knowledge." (Wright, 2021, p. 199).

Nonetheless, the author goes to another point where he desires not to stick to the Greek story, giving his concept a more ironical tone: "Later, while in the actual process of writing, I found that I could make the whole theme of stolen knowledge ironical by having Fred Daniels discover knowledge whose utmost value he would not exactly understand and on the basis of this contrive his death for some knowledge he possesses which is not of the highest value." (Wright, 2021, pp. 199-200).

Prometheus, just like we are taught at school in our early days, is sentenced to have his own liver eternally torn apart by an eagle which flies up the Caucasus every single day. Although he is not directly guilty for the crime he committed, as the main culprit should be Epimetheus, his own brother, he receives a sentence for robbing the "Fire of Knowledge," which we can perceive again as the Hellenic equivalent to the forbidden fruit of Christian mythology and giving it to Mankind.

Daniels, as the new Prometheus conceived by Wright and to Wright's own measure and ends, commits the heinous and the unpardonable crime of having that Fire of Knowledge which will, therefore, allow him to unconceal the unpunished moves and actions performed by the authorities towards his ethnic comrades. Like Prometheus, Wright pays for his crime with his body and his mental sanity if we may go that far. Still, based on the ironical intension in the construction of the Promethean protagonist, Richard Wright gives us a hero who is punished, but not for knowing serious facts. The author really states that Daniels is murdered by the policemen not for owning that "illegal" knowledge, but for the fact that the policemen themselves were fearful about the madness of the Wrightian hero: "Actually, Fred Daniels is not killed for the really dangerous knowledge he thinks he possesses, but for fear that he might betray secrets of the police department!" (Wright, 2021, p. 200).

From my honest and humble point of view, the mythological/erudite background in the protagonist's construction is not exclusively applicable to *The Man Who Lived Underground*. That is, it can also be applied to both *Black Boy* and *Native Son*. In some sense, Richard Wright-character and Bigger Thomas may strongly resemble Daedalus and Icarus. Both duos get caught in a labyrinth and both duos try to evade their own labyrinth. Like Daedalus, both Richard and Bigger try to build ways to fly away from the labyrinth full of problems.

However, and just in the same way as Icarus, the protagonist of *Native Son* is betrayed by his nonconformity, blended with his own innocence, as well as his ceaseless will to do more and more. This is something which is shared by Fred Daniels too. In addition to all of this, we may also add as important information what we have in *Afterword*<sup>11</sup> of this book written by Malcolm Wright - Richard's grandson. For Malcolm Wright, *The Man Who Lived Underground* constitutes a reversal of *The Allegory of the Cave*, in Plato's *The Republic*.

"Fred Daniels, fleeing the false accusations of a brutally indifferent, racist society, was knocked from his mundane orbit into a journey to the beyond. Daniels's chronicle is Plato's allegory in reverse. He escapes into the city sewers, where the broader horizons awaiting him are to be found inside a cave, rather than out." (Wright, 2021, p. 215)

## **2.5. Writing with freedom and change**

Richard Wright suffers from the same nonconformity common to the heroes of in *The Man Who Lived Underground*, *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. In each one of these plots, it is possible to watch the protagonists being constantly assaulted by the feeling that things are not happening correctly and that things have to be modified. For example, as we go along the autobiographical novel that is presented to us in a "bildungsroman" way Richard, as a key player in the narrative, does not receive very well the idea that his Afro-American fellows transmit to him about accepting the world as it is and accepting their fates by bowing before the white people. In other words, he seems to indirectly reject the Leibnizian idea that Pangloss delivers Candid in Voltaire's namesake work about living in the best of the possible worlds and having in mind that everything was created for the best of the purposes.

This negationist vision regarding the determinism thrown by Pangloss is not only present in the secondary characters of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, *Black Boy* and *Native Son*. Also the main

---

<sup>11</sup> Wright, Malcolm. (2021). *Afterword*. In Wright, Richard, *The Man Who Lived Underground* (pp. 213-219). New York: Library of America.



character of *Invisible Man* demonstrates that steadfast rejection of the idea of adaptation to an already well-planned and structured world, namely when he confronts Doctor Bledsoe: "I'll tell him," I screamed. "I'll tell everybody. I'll fight you. I swear it, I'll fight!" (Ellison, 2001, p. 138).

In a certain way, Doctor Bledsoe ends up being a representative of the people who stand conformed with the idea that things have to run the way they are running.

"What has happened to you young Negroes? I thought you had caught on to how things are done down here. But you don't even know the difference between the way things are and the way they're supposed to be. (...) Negroes don't control this school or much of anything else – haven't you learned even that?" (Ellison, 2001, pp. 138-139)

In the case of *Native Son*, the personification of nonconformity does not overwhelm the main character that much. In this case, Richard Wright chooses to personify that lack of conformity in Mary Dalton and, later, in Jan, her communist boyfriend in this narrative, Bigger already represents the concept of a Negro who is conformed about his society, whereas Jan and Mary - the whites in charge - reveal themselves as activists for black liberation. Bigger, regarding this topic is full of innocence. He is only awakened to the reality of his skin when he accidentally murders Mary.

This demand for fundamental rights like freedom and justice makes Richard Wright not only embark on a merely literary and artistic road, but also on a political road. In the time Richard lived in Chicago (curiously, a place where jazz and blues had a huge expression), Marxism and the consequent Communism were earning more and more supporters, namely between the artistic and intellectual classes. Wright was not an exception, he joined the Communist Party and became an active member, an experience that was quite responsible for the birth of *Native Son*. In the preface written by the British writer Caryl Phillips for Vintage's edition,<sup>12</sup> Phillips of the love-hate relationship Richard Wright with the Marxist currents.

"Once in Chicago, Richard Wright became active in the Communist Party who were, at that time, one of the few groups of people who seemed to have the interests of African-Americans at heart. It was while Wright was under their 'influence' that he wrote *Native Son*, although he subsequently fell out with his 'comrades' and came to regard Communism as being largely antithetical to the African-American cause." (Phillips, 2000, p. xi)

---

<sup>12</sup> Phillips, Caryl. (2000). *Introduction*. In Wright, Richard, *Native Son* (pp. IX-XVIII). London: Vintage.

Caryl Phillips points us out the fact that Richard joined the Red ranks in a time where the North-American variants of Marxism was increasingly focusing on the ethnical minorities, differing from the European variants which, in their turn, focused on the proletarian masses, the primary target of Marx and Engels's theories.

It is to be noted this divergence of the "American" Communism as shown in a fiery speech Jan and Mary have to tell Bigger Thomas that the Communist Party is the only party that is really fighting for him and his liberation. However, Caryl Phillips also tells us of a certain kind of disillusion regarding the Red intervention in the African-American cause. At this point, Wright – in the same way as other ex-Marxist authors like Orwell – is forced to search for another way.

"Much of Wright's subsequent personal and professional life involved his experimentation with various alternative philosophical frameworks within which he could think and act in order that he might address the problems of non-white peoples, not only in the United States, but in a Pan-African and ultimately global context." (Phillips, 2000, pp. xi-xii)

In addition to this Caryl's passage, we can obtain an interesting passage in *How Bigger was Born*, the Richard Wright's essay which comes after Caryl Phillips's preface and before the story *Native Son*. Richard Wright talks about the political potentiality of Bigger Thomas as a product of a society of extremisms.

"I felt that Bigger, an American product, a native son of this land, carried within him the potentialities of either Communism or Fascism. I don't mean to say that the Negro boy I depicted in *Native Son* is either a Communist or a Fascist. He is not either. But he is a product of a dislocated society; he is a dispossessed and disinherited man; he is all of this, and he lives amid the greatest possible plenty on earth and he is looking and feeling for a way out." (Wright, 2000, p. 15)

## **2.6. The leader of a generation?**

Richard Wright was not the only Afro-American outstanding writer in his era. There were some other renowned authors in the scene with great merit like, the above mentioned, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison. Apart from this, we have to consider that Wright himself was part of an era with world-

class authors like Ernest Hemingway, John dos Passos, Albert Camus, Bertrand Russel, Thomas Elliot, etc.

Moreover, Richard Wright's connection with Europe cannot be overlooked. Wright and his wife visited France in 1946 and the couple ended up settling down in the land of the Revolution, starting to get in touch with some of those great intellectuals in Paris soon became an acclaimed figure, interesting since he never achieved the success in the United States. Caryl Phillips tells us about that in the preface.

"For the remaining thirteen years of his life, Richard Wright based himself in Paris where he continued to write both fiction and non-fiction. He became the leading figure in the African-American expatriate community in Paris in the fifties, a community which at various times included Quincy Jones, James Baldwin, Beauford Delaney, Josephine Baker, Chester Himes, and many others. He befriended Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Andre Malraux, and Andre Gide, and for a while he was the darling of the French literary establishment." (Phillips, 2000, pp. xii-xiii)

Despite that praise, not everything was good. The creator of Fred Daniels received some bad reviews. The toughest of those negative reviews came from James Baldwin, who regarded *Native Son* as a more political object and a less literary one.

"According to Baldwin, the novel was conceived of not by dwelling upon character and letting a concern with character drive and determine the plot. To Baldwin's mind it is a novel with an agenda that the author has somewhat clumsily imposed upon his characters, and by extension his readers, from the lofty vantage point of his ideological ivory tower." (Phillips, 2000, p. xiii)

If we take these words into account, we may understand that the idea the author of *Fire Next Time* and *Go Tell It On The Mountain* can be justified in some sense. In every book written by Wright, his style for plots is always rather basic and harsh. All the same, we have to admit that although the narratives may have classical references behind, the author always shows a very direct writing, with real-life characters based on real-life facts. Generally, we have to consider that there is no place for fantasies.

That harsh style can clearly be seen in some passages. *The Man Who Lived Underground*<sup>13</sup> gives us some raw scenes, like the passage where Fred Daniels is living in the sewers and fired a gun for the first time, feeling terrified by the act of using a gun. In some other passages, the way Richard Wright describes things may be associated to an attempt to picture reality in a very realistic way, if we may use the term, “rawing”, like the one in which Fred watches people being tortured.

“He was coiled, tense; he wanted to leap through the narrow hole and across the dark of the basement and up the stairs and rescue the boy, telling him: Yeah, tell 'im you stole the radio, even if you didn't. Tell 'im you're guilty. . . . Don't you know you're guilty? And then he wanted to turn to Johnson and say: Sure, you're guilty, too. Why do you want to beat this innocent boy? He could not stand it anymore” (Wright, 2021, p. 129)

In addition, in *Native Son*, this harshening of the storytelling offers the reader a certain black pride and dignity that is typical of the Harlem Renaissance's era. The way Bigger accepts his fate when confronted with the virtually certain death sentence may be understood as an example of that pride and sense of dignity. Unlike Boris Max, who defends Bigger with passion and rhetorically powerful political speeches, Bigger is not interested in a plea of innocence and knows that, like a man, he has to accomplish his destiny. This reminds me time and time again of what the protagonist of *Invisible Man* says in the prologue about being a man like others: “I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me”.

---

<sup>13</sup> Wright, Richard. (2021). *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1st ed.). New York: Library of America

### 3. The Importance of Richard Wright

The prose written by Richard Wright is an important portrayal of the times he was living in. Like authors such as Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and several other Harlem and Post-Harlem authors, the heroes and plots we can find in Wright's most remarkable novels are a treatment of historical events which, somehow, reflect the perceptions of the Mississippi author. Today we can feel the impact of those events in North American society, namely in the ex-Confederate states.

One of those peculiar things of the southern states has to do with segregation of colored people under a set of legislations known as the Jim Crow Laws.

#### 3.1. Jim Crow

The satirization made by the comic character of the playwright Thomas Rice is responsible for a segregationist society whose effects are still felt in our days. These effects began with the laws applied in 1877, more than 10 years after the end of the American Civil War (1865) and almost 100 years after *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* began to be drafted (1780).

The lyrics of this dancing song *Jump, Jim Crow*, when read, may seem a bit meaningless, as it does not seem at all to follow a logical narrative line. However, we can see some parts that may present us with a demeaning of the black man.

"I whip the lion of the west, I eat the alligator;  
I put more water in my mouth, then boil ten loads of potatoes.

The way they bake the hoe cake, Virginia never tire.  
They put the dough upon the foot, and stick them in the fire."

As the lyrics are demeaning to black people, the original lyrics are sung with the African American pronunciation, a pronunciation that we can see described in words such as "*git*" ("get"), "*gals*" ("girls"), "*oder*" ("other"), etc. This pronunciation can be one of several possible effects to use when making fun of the black population.

If we compare it to "*The Man Who Lived Underground*", we see similarities in this diminishing of the black man through shameless laughter. In the time Fred Daniels spent handcuffed and

accompanied by the cops, we can see that, every time this tragic hero tries to talk and explain himself, the cops laugh at him, thinking Daniels is a hilarious young liar man.

### **3.1.1. Jim Crow and Richard Wright**

Jim Crow is present in *Black Boy*. The author of the 1945's novel paints us a society where Jim Crow's Laws were in effect (and the effects were felt strong). The laws themselves led to the creation special zones in the city for Negroes. In the restaurants, there were spaces only used by them. The same happened with bathrooms, schools and the Army. We, the Europeans, can immediately associate Jim Crow Society with South Africa's Apartheid Society. In the book, we see verify the effects of Jim Crow.

Chicago, one of the main centres of black culture since the beginning of the Great Migration, is revealed to us as a city divided into two sections: the Negro zone and the White zone. As such, we had plenty of restaurants, cinemas, theatres and other buildings almost exclusively for just one ethnical group. The houses built in the Afro-American section had worse conditions than those of the White section.

An example of the reality of segregation we can find in the book is the fear Bigger has of heading alongside Mary and Jan into the bar where he himself often has drinks. Quite often, Bigger is even afraid of being regarded as a betrayer, besides his fear of being reprimanded by his boss. We also check this psychological torture in *Invisible Man*, in the part where the protagonist takes Mr Norton, the male version (although better behaved) of Mary Dalton, in a ride through the Negro side of the town: "I sat down again, worrying about Dr. Bledsoe as the fat man told Mr. Norton of his attending college" (Ellison, 2001, p. 90).

At the end of *Native Son*, the presence of Jim Crow is likely to be felt in the almost summary judgement at Court. Bigger receives a death penalty without obtaining a proper defense in the first place. The only factor that does not link plainly this end to Jim Crow is the fact that the sentence was not a lynching although the electric chair was also a very common end for Negroes at the time.

Like I have already pointed out, Richard Wright, as a writer born in the South, belongs to one of the various generations of young southerners who got seduced by the ascensionist promises made by the northern states of the country, the so called "American Dream" that we frequently get in the movies we watch in the European cinemas.

The author of *Uncle Tom's Children* himself does speak to us in *Black Boy* about the big dreams he used to keep every time he read the terrific and hyperbolic tales published in the fiction magazines which were distributed in his area of residence. Richard, just like his fellow countrymen, migrates northwards during the Great Migration, ending up in Chicago. In the novel published by Ellison, the protagonist also gets out of the South during the same time, but ending up in New York. Both characters do seek for a chance to remake their lives and get a brighter future. In their journeys, both met older negroes who told them that the North was a great illusion. Even so, both kept chasing their dreams.

Emily Bernard, University of Vermont's professor, tells us in *The New Negro Movement and the Politics of Art*<sup>14</sup> about the antagonism between what southerners thought Northern way of life was and what the Northern way of life really was.

"Life in the North was more complicated than it looked from down South. Rural black laborers discovered too late that they had been lured to the North in order to break the strikes organized by white (largely immigrant) workers attempting to unionize. And black people who had fled the escalating violence in the South saw the North erupt in brutality, as well. The summer of 1919 was known as the "Red Summer," and riots broke out in Washington and Chicago, as well as Charleston, South Carolina, Longview, Texas, and elsewhere." (Bernard, 2011, p. 269)

However, like what the same author points out and what we already did see in the protagonists of *Black Boy* and *Invisible Man*, the coloured population did not cease from going to the north and pursuing the American Dream.

"But even these dismal episodes and circumstances could not keep black Americans from migrating north where the dream of self-determination seemed that much more within reach." (Bernard, 2011, p. 269)

The literature produced by Wright was also important in relation to the portrayal of a society dominated by "tokenism" where the pro-Negroes philanthropies were built in every corner and used by white millionaires to clean their image. The most marking case was Mr Dalton's, the Chicago Real

---

<sup>14</sup> Bernard, Emily. (2011). *The New Negro Movement and the politics of art*. In Maryemma Graham & Jerry W. Ward, JR (Eds), *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* (pp. 268-287). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Estate's wealthy man who commanded an organization destined to give second chances to young Negroes and give them advanced education. Still, the actions performed by him were just the bare minimum and the poverty scenario in the Black side of Chicago was still a reality. Boris Max uses that fact in Bigger's judgement as a weak point to attack. Boris tries to prove that Mr Dalton is not a real Samaritan and that Bigger is the real victim, overwhelmed by the bias.

In *Invisible Man*, we also see the philanthropic intervention in the beginning of the work, where the protagonist is awarded with a scholarship to study at the University. Further on, we obtain the effervescent environment between movements and philanthropies in Harlem, where the young Negro is one of the main players.

### **3.1.2. Fighting Jim Crow**

Published at the same time it was not written, *The Man who Lived Underground* vividly brings in to us a decade that can be considered to be a "high" point in segregation terms in American history. It was a time when lynchings and other forms of attack and suppression on the black minority often took place.

One these well-known cases was the case of Jesse Thornton, which occurred in 1940 just two years before *The Man Who Lived Underground* was finished and shelved by Richard Wright. Jesse Thornton was alleged to have refused to address a police officer by "Sir", addressing him instead for the Christian. As a result, the 26-year-old man was shot dead in a street in Alabama and his body is thrown into a river. This reminds us of a section in *Black Boy*, where the protagonist addresses by their Christian names a group of white people who give him a ride and eventually beat him for having committed such an act of unacceptable irreverence.

Perhaps the most infamous case of American justice in relation to the Afro-American community is the case of George Stinney, the youngest American to be sentenced to the death when he was just 14 years old. This youngster born in South Carolina in 1929 was accused of killing and burying two white girls who had disappeared near his home. After a Fred Daniels-style trial, the Police manage to force a confession where George admitted to having tried to rape one of the girls, killing both of them when the second girl tried to defend her friend.

Faced with this guilty plea, a panel made only of white jurors condemned the teenager to death by electric chair. The young lad Evidence later proved that the young man was too weak to kill the children with an iron bar, considering that he was underweight. Interestingly, when already seated in the



electric chair, the thinness of the condemned boy caused the helmet to fall to the ground with the first electric discharge, needing three discharges to kill the kid then. To this day, the conviction of George Stinney is one of the cases that tarnish national justice. George Stinney is one of the martyrs of the African American fight against judicial discrimination.

After 70 years, his sentence was overturned in 2014 after a judge called Carmen Muller found the conviction to be a mistake and that the Court made a summary judgment based on a confession forcibly obtained by the police. These cases are two of the many cases of attacks and summary trials that have been taking place in the history of the United States since the founding year of 1776.

### **3.1.3. Blessed laws, but ignored**

Richard Wright's works and characters and summary justice cases are the result of a society "driven" at that time to the sound of *Jump, Jim Crow* and which, even today, lives unconsciously haunted by the ghost of Jim Crow.

However, we have also probably seen that the laws enacted in 1877 are not a continuation of a previous law, building up a contrast regarding the legal infrastructure for racial minorities. If we look at the Constitution of the United States as laid down by the Founding Fathers, the legislation prior to the Jim Crow's Laws went in a direction contrary to the course taken later in 1877. It is the case of the 13th constitutional amendment enacted on 6 December 1865, which outlaws slavery and "involuntary servitude".

"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction"<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this amendment, we have the subsequent 15th constitutional amendment enacted on 3 February 1870, which extends the right to vote to racial minorities, prohibiting the denial of voting to people born with a different skin tone.

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by

---

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Constitution - Thirteenth Amendment / Resources - Congress. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-13/>

the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude<sup>16</sup>

In the light of these two constitutional laws, approved before the Jim Crow's ones, we can also add the previously mentioned 8th constitutional amendment published on 15 December 1791, which prohibits all excessive forms of punishment. This amendment has a more universal quality and does not seem to make exceptions based on sex, race, religion, sexual orientation or political belief.

"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted"<sup>17</sup>

Despite this legal body that sought to prevent discrimination and enslavement of people based on their birth color, the "land of the free" ended up going the opposite way. It is worth noting some facts over the years. One of those facts is the birth of the KKK, one of the most ruthless racist organizations in universal history.

The Ku Klux Klan was born in 1865, the same year the constitutional law that comes to abolish slavery came out. It was born in Tennessee as a Confederate Army's veterans' club, at a time when violence against the black community got severe with various displays of terror in schools and on the streets during Andrew Johnson's progressive governing.

Since its foundational year, the Klu Klux Klan has promoted through its three sections or Klan attacks on communities, as well as developed various ideological strands within the group itself where African Americans were seen as targets. They are identified by conceptions or key objectives: the concept of "White Supremacy" promoted by the first Klan; the concepts of "White Nationalism" and "Nativism" promoted by the Second Klan; and the concepts of "Anti-Communism" and "Anti-Miscegenation" promoted by the Third Klan.

Despite being the most progressive area of the country, the North-side still had problems that did not help to further Black Emancipation that much. Some northern states used to force, for example, blacks to buy their own homes in order to vote. There was also some Apartheid-style discrimination which made it possible to keep away black people from entering different sorts of buildings and commercial areas.

---

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Constitution - Fifteenth Amendment / Resources - Congress. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-15/>

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Constitution - Eighth Amendment / Resources - Congress. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-8/>

We also have examples of politicians from the states who were struggling with the progressive tide and aligning themselves with the southern ideas. One of those cases was the case of Allen Thurman, an Ohio's politician who narrowly lost his presidential election after a campaign in which he promised to withdraw black voting rights. Despite the defeat, he continued to fight the community after being voted as a senator.

### **3.2. Does the Constitution transmit what it intends to transmit?**

Regardless of the type of regime we see, a Constitution aims to create the legal basis to guide a nation through a set of norms and values. In the midst of several possible Constitutions, the Constitution of the United States is no exception to the rule.

Based on the Declaration signed in 1776 in the state of Pennsylvania, the same Constitution begins by leaving a declaration of intent right in the preamble, leaving settled what it wants to ensure with its laws.

**"We the People** of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America"

It is from this preamble that all the indications that regulate the old New England to this day do arise. However, there is a question that emerges in the face of this declaration of intent: does the Constitution comply with what it promises to the people in general? The answer is: yes, it does to some extent.

Starting from a primary point of view, the Constitution of 1787 fulfills its promises in the immediate transmission of a set of values that, even though they are builders of an American identity, are still universal values, transversal to all the Human Civilization. These values are so universal that, centuries later, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 also establishes justice, equality, prosperity and freedom of thought/religion/expression as inalienable rights.

In a deeper analysis, the American Constitution can comply with its constitutional amendments. Currently, despite the difficulties that racial minorities suffer in their social integration, there have been many improvements since the progressive civil acts of 1964 and 1965.

At first glance, we can see that the 15th Amendment – which prohibits slavery – has brought an absolute or almost absolute victory to the black community and other ethnic communities. It is unusual to have pure slavery in the United States, as well as in the West itself. Adding to this, we can also see a victory for women and racial minorities through the 15th Amendment (which prohibits denial of voting based on the color and past of slavery) and the 19th Amendment (which prohibits denial of vote based on sex).

Although there are still many retrograde voices trying to reverse the path of equality and equity, we still manage to see women voting nowadays, as well as blacks and Asians do (like other ethnicities). Despite some influences from some political/religious and oligarchic forces, we can also verify that the 1st Amendment still manages to firmly ensure freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of practice of religious belief. This amendment also firmly ensures the participation of the people in the act of legislation through petitions addressed to Parliament.

As sad as it may even be, the 2nd Constitutional Amendment – which allows the free possession of weapons – is also fulfilled, given that, despite the innumerable incidents and attacks over the course of several decades, the use of weapons is still liberalized in several conservative states that insist on not regulating their use.

On the question of Justice, the issue has a mixed character. On the one hand, the Constitution fulfills the promise of a fair nation in the sense that, despite significant gaps, American justice is still one of the swiftest justice's systems in the world and is the systems where there are more successful trials. However, the Constitution does not fully comply with the promise of a Justice free of excessive sentences and punishments in the 8th Amendment, because, in the 21st century, we still see that one of the main sentences imposed is still the death penalty, especially death by electric chair. As much as we try to change the scenario, the death penalty is still far from being banned on US soil.

### **3.2.1. Is there some common sense protecting us?**

Although the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are the engines of the American nation and builders of its inherent identity, they are not the only documents that advocate justice and freedom. In the face of this, we also have the case of *Common Sense*<sup>18</sup>, a revolutionary pamphlet written by Thomas Paine in 1776 that defended the independence of the New England's Colonies that

---

<sup>18</sup> Paine, Thomas. (1986). *Common Sense* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). London: Penguin Classics.

were under British rule. After a short introduction, Paine begins the manifesto with a rather interesting distinction between what a society is and what is a government.

"Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; The former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages [social] intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher" (Paine, 1986, p. 1)

In this initial distinction, the author demonstrates a positivist view on the existence of a society as an incentive to our desires, demonstrating at the same time a more pessimistic view of the concept of Government. Still, the author considers that the existence of a Government is necessary, although it can be something terrible when it comes to its worst form.

"Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one: for when we suffer, or are exposed to the same miseries by a government, which we might expect in a country without government, our calamity is heightened by reflecting that we furnish the means by which we suffer" (Paine, 1986, p. 1)

This idea that the existence of a government presupposing a mandatory restriction of the Man's vices as a primary and absolute guarantee of collective happiness is interesting, given that the purpose of the laws is to prevent the Man from committing acts that prove harmful to the "health" of His society.

However, when it comes to minorities, does the government protect us from that Man's vices through the law? Despite the advances made over the decades in legislative and executive terms, the Government still does not fully and assertively protect society from the old human vices. In addition to successive governments being quite contrasting in their ideas, the law, even if constitutional or universal, turns out to never be the same for everyone. As a result, Justice is never the same for everyone since it does not share the same types of bandits. Obvious examples of this antagonism are the Southern states that, because they are dominated by the Republican Party, end up having laws contrary to the laws we see in the states that are under the influence of the Democratic Party.

The notion of Good and Evil that Republican territories share among themselves is not the same notion of Good and Evil that is shared by the Democratic territories. Unlimited access to a vast arsenal of firearms is seen by Democrats as terrorism, while Republicans look at it as perfectly normal (always with the 2nd Amendment's argument). Interracial marriage and immigration are already a terrifying concept for Republicans, as, for them, those phenomena are "contaminating" the "American Blood" (when, in fact, American blood ceases to exist if we look at the fact that the heroes who signed the Declaration of Independence were not pure Americans). Other issues such as the LGBTI community are also frightening for Republican factions, as they argue that this community is destroying the traditional American family. At the same time, we have cases like that of Senator Glen Thompson who, three days after voting against gay marriage, appears in his gay son's marriage; and cases of adulterous Republican senators like John Ensign.

That is, the easiest way for the government to effectively protect its people from Man's evil vices is to unify the concepts of Good and Evil into a sole concept, disallowing half the country to have laws contrary to the other half of the country. Thus, we can never consider that there is a suppression of the Man's vices for the sake of collective well-being.

### **3.3. Jazz in Richard Wright's universe**

Another important topic that the essayist of *Memories of My Grandmother* brings to us is the jazz era. He lives and writes in a time where Black music has its magnificent expression in jazz. Artists like Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong do have a huge presence in the Negro imaginary and do become the engine of the gathering of several black communities in the nightclubs and in the main cities of the United States during the Harlem Renaissance.

That jazz school brings to the light some ancient spirituals from Gospel tradition and also gives us some black artists who used their space to protest against violence and segregation. We have a good example in *Strange Fruit*, a song wonderfully sung by Billie Holliday that talks about a lynching.

"Southern trees bear a strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees  
Pastoral scene of the gallant South  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth  
Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh

Then the sudden smell of burning flesh”

There were other names in the scene making beautiful things. For example, we can hear the amazing collaborations between Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, with emphasis on *Cheek to Cheek*, a song who can embody the hope Negroes seem to never lose.

“Heaven, I'm in heaven  
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak  
And I seem to find the happiness I seek  
When we're out together, dancing cheek to cheek  
Yes, heaven, I'm in heaven  
And the cares that hung around me through the week  
Seems to vanish like a gambler's lucky streak  
When we're out together, dancing cheek to cheek”

### **3.4. Gospel as part of Black identity**

Still in Louis Armstrong's musical universe, we have an amazing duet with the famous actor Danny Kaye, where they sing together *When the Saints Go Marching In*, an old gospel song. In my opinion, this duet may represent a victory (even if it is a small one) of the Harlem, because of the fact that we have a black singer chanting with a white singer one of the most famous songs from Negro universe.

One more beautiful piece is the piece that Emily Bernard tells us about in the essay. It is *Here Comes My Daddy Now*, song performed by Bill “Bojangles” Robinson in the heart of Harlem which marks the return of the “Harlem Hellfighters”, a Black Regiment who fought nonstop for 191 days in the First World War and, consequently, became the only unit receiving the “Croix de Guerre”. In sum, Richard Wright is a very noteworthy author in his time. His canonical novels give us a portrait of many events that are important for us to comprehend what happened in his life.

## 4. Psychology issues involving Fred Daniels and Richard Wright

### 4.1. Fred Daniels vs. Richard Wright

As I have already mentioned, *The Man who Lived Underground* was a work that was completed around 1942, chronologically between two major novels *Native Son* and *Black Boy*. This novel was kept in a drawer, having been only published in 2021, a year after George Floyd's murder case came into light.

Born in 1973 in North Carolina, George was a rapper and a basketball athlete. He was a family man who had lost a job during the 2020 pandemic. On May 25<sup>th</sup> of that year, Floyd after being accused of paying a pack of tobacco with a fake bill, was strangled to death by a police officer, without being able to defend himself properly. This summary death brought a series of demonstrations against the abuse of power by the police. The work that this dissertation addresses has a parallel basis to this media case well known to the international press.

*The Man who Lived Underground* brings us Fred Daniels as his tragic hero. The plot of the story, like the plot of Floyd's case, takes place in a short span of time. Both protagonists went smoothly about with their lives until the moment everything changed forever in their own lives. Both were parents, although in Fred's case, the child in question was still unborn.

Yet, Fred Daniels certainly was a different person than George Floyd. George, in addition to being an athlete, can be portrayed as an educated person, given that he had even recorded a song where he called for an end to the violence carried out by armed people. Floyd was therefore an activist. Fred Daniels was not an activist until his key moment. He only became one later, because of the abuse he himself suffered and the abuse he saw in others. The protagonist of the 1942 novel is presented to readers as an innocent person in terms of personality. He is a religious individual who regularly practices his religion and who has an honest job as a cleaning person in the home of a white family.

Daniels is then a segregated person like all other black people. He was an American and, like his fellow citizens, also liked to work and pay his taxes. We can see all these descriptions Richard Wright gives us by reading the first page of the story<sup>19</sup>.

"Tired and happy, he liked the feeling of being paid of a Saturday night; during seven sweltering days he had given his bodily strength in exchange for dollars

---

<sup>19</sup> Wright, Richard. (2021). *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). New York: Library of America



with which to buy bread and pay rent for the coming week. He would spend tomorrow at church, when he returned to work Monday morning, he would feel renewed." (Wright, 2021, p. 5)

As far as we can see, he is a person dedicated to family and God and lives for his wife. He is a good and typical American. He would probably become a caring son for the still unborn child.. While he was tortured at the police station, he always thought of his wife. The cops, as they were torturing, understood Fred's enormous willingness to see his wife and used that will to get his signature in a forged guilty plea.

This love for his woman also led the same cops to take the young boy in handcuffs home so he could see his wife before going to jail. To some extent, the desperate way Fred Daniels tries to say goodbye to his wife without worrying her might remind us of the way Billie Holiday sings the lyrics to her version of the song *I'll Be Seeing You*.

"I'll be seeing you  
In every lovely summer's day  
In everything that's light and gay  
I'll always think of you that way  
  
I'll find you in the morning sun  
And when the night is new  
I'll be looking at the moon  
But I'll be seeing you"

#### **4.1.1. The psychological structure of Fred Daniels**

As I had the opportunity to mention earlier, Fred Daniels is not an activist by nature. That is, he is not one of the typical black radicals who manifest themselves in a fierce way and carry voluminous posters with words of order against racism. Fred Daniels is a person totally opposed to this spectrum of action.

Taking the previous paragraph as a reference, we can portray Fred Daniels as a quiet and generous person, a friend of your friend. As a catechist at White Rock Baptist Church, the constant practice of his Christian faith may have some influence on his way of being, given that

Christianity always tries to direct his believers on the path of Good, diverting them from the path of Evil.

Daniels then acts like a normal person who appears to live his life quietly as a human being. Within this description, he emerges as a perfect target for an abusive police officer: a person who will easily panic and who will get in the way of everything. That is, torturing Daniels proves to be an easy task for the police, as they quickly manage to forge a confession. At the end of the day, that's what happens to the protagonist of Richard Wright's 1942 novel. Fred walks down the street in a seemingly "perfect" life and, in a matter of seconds, is abruptly approached by a set of agents looking for a murderer who killed the Peabody family in the Wooten neighborhood, the family Fred works for. As the killer also has black skin, Wright's protagonist is instantly mistaken for the killer and, as expected, he panics. As we have learned as children with our parents, a person, when he is afflicted with something, always gives the impression that he has done something wrong. That is the sort of deduction made by the police.

Amid the huge panic he eventually feels, Fred Daniels, in an understandable act of despair, tries by all means to explain the officers that they are arresting the wrong person. In the face of successive negative responses from the authorities, Fred still tries to explain that he is a good person who only followed his normal life: "You can ask Mrs. Wooten back there. She just paid me off and I was On my way home (...) I'm a member of the White Rock Baptist Church. If you don't believe me, call up Reverend Davis (...) Mister, call Reverend Davis... I teach Sunday School for 'im. I sing in the choir and I organized the Glee club." (Wright, 2021, p. 8).

To Daniels' deep despair, the police officers did not believe in his innocence and took him to the station. As soon as he arrives at the police station, he spends the night there, where he is mercilessly tortured. The only way out of that ordeal for Daniels was to confess to a crime he never committed and sign a confession statement, which the cops wanted very much because they strongly believed he was the killer.

Despite the efforts of the police to obtain the confession, Fred Daniels manages to withstand the violence of the interrogation and does not confess. As a result, the cops unload even more into his body, as they do not look at the means to achieve their ends.

"A fist exploded between his eyes and he went backwards,  
Toppling with the chair; his head struck the wall, banging

twice from the force of the blow. Semidarkness seized him (...)  
The world veered from left to right. Then he was a little  
boy stealing a ride on the tail end of a speeding truck" (Wright, 2021, p. 24)

As we have also learned pointed out, the tortured man is a family man who is about to be a father and who loves his wife very much. The cops take advantage of his feelings and he, after all, unintentionally signs the confession on the condition that he can return to his wife.

However, victim of the extreme insistence of the police, Daniels is not free and becomes a prisoner. The only thing he can do with all this is to go and see wife one last time before going to jail. By irony of fate, he ends up not going to jail. In the few minutes she can be with his wife Rachel, she, with the tension created by all that mystery of the moment, ends up going into labor. This forces the police to take the woman to the hospital so that the child could be born more quietly.

In the hospital, Fred Daniels, as a result of the distraction of one of the agents, manages to escape, eventually getting into the sewers that were near the hospital. There begins what Malcolm Wright calls in *Afterword* "Plato's allegory in reverse". (Wright, 2021, p. 215).

#### **4.1.2. Living Underground**

Wright's tragic hero, in an irreversible act of despair, decides to flee, entering the sewers. For him, it was the only way to preserve his freedom and not to disgust his wife by being put behind bars. However, his entry into this underground world represents only the beginning of a journey of knowledge of the reality of the world around him, of the hard life that his community lived. His first contact with the underground was impactful in terms of perception.

"He saw the steel cover moving slowly and then it clanged into place.  
(...) The whispering rush of the water now droned louder, creating  
an illusion of another world with other values and other laws" (Wright, 2021, p. 53)

This underground entrance has, as we can see a big impact on Daniels' initial perception of things. As the passage mentioned above tells us, the feeling Fred Daniels has at that first moment is that he entered a different world where white laws have no validity at all. To a certain extent, this hero's

journey may recall Dante's journey in *The Divine Comedy*, where he is in the light of three kingdoms that prove to be very different and quite incomprehensible in the eyes of the kingdom of human beings.

If we want to go further with comparisons, we have another epic poem. It is Homer's *The Odyssey*, where Ulysses, during his 10-year wanderings on the high seas, goes to the kingdom of Hell, where he has contact with a world quite opposed to the world he knew in his life and what he read. The spiritual worlds that Dante and Ulysses know in their travels are, like the underground world of Daniels, worlds where white laws have no power or logic whatsoever. Still about Fred's entry into a "better" world than the world dominated by human hypocrisy (also on theory of "Allegory backwards"), Malcolm Wright tells us about this young black man waiting for him a world that will broaden his horizons.

"Daniels's chronicle is Plato's allegory in reverse. He escapes into the city sewers, where the broader horizons awaiting him are to be found inside a basement, rather than out." (Wright, 2021, p. 215)

However, this discovery of horizons will evade Daniels from madness, paying dearly for such audacity, in the style of Prometheus. But that's something we should leave to be addressed later.

On this journey underground, Wright's hero goes through different scenarios experienced by his community, from spirituality to the torture of human beings, from the construction of a family's life to the time of death of a black citizen in the middle of America.

#### **4.1.3. Outlandish, but familiar experience**

Fred Daniels' first hours in the underground's life were hours of adaptation to something completely new that the character himself never thought he would get to know. We can even say that the Fred Daniels' constant feeling at his preliminary hour was a feeling of fear and strangeness regarding what he saw. Still, the desire to discover and explore what was new and different dominated Daniels' soul and led him to continue his journey through the city's sewers. As we can see right in the first chapter of the second part of the story Wright tells us, Fred has in mind that his stay there was temporary.

"A returning sense of the life he had once lived aboveground restrained him, making him feel that this whole experience was outlandish. Why crawl into that

hole? (...) I won't stay long in it. I'll crawl in and see what's there and come out..." (Wright, 2021, p. 59)

As it was stated in the title of the topic, the experiences that Fred is acquiring appear to be strange, opening his awareness to many things. However, some experiences may also be familiar to the protagonist of this novel of the fourth decade of the twentieth century. His first familiar experience is the religious and spiritual one, an experience that, as we have already had the opportunity to ascertain, is a common experience of the community Richard Wright is a part of and is a strong theme in Wrightian thought. It all begins when Fred Daniels, in his preamble daydream, begins to hear spiritual chants echoing in the darkness of the underworld: "Jesus take me to your blessed home above / and wrap me in the bosom of thy love..." (Wright, 2021, p. 62). Initially, Fred doesn't realize those echoes do come from a church, but he eventually notices that when approaching and peeking. When he sees a group made of his comrades singing such songs of praise, his reaction pours in a mixed way: laughter, followed by displeasure. Such mixed sensation gives him some wish to open their eyes to the reality surrounding them.

"His first impulse was to give vent to a loud laugh, but the laugh choked in his throat. Then he wanted to leap through the quarter-inch of crack (...) and gather all of them about him, telling them "Don't do this to yourselves!" (Wright, 2021, p. 63)

Nonetheless, this so Promethean will to reveal and show them the truth does also bring him some guilt-like feeling. Fred feels that, by desiring to perform such a rebellious act, he is sinning and somehow going against the Divine will. As a result, our hero that is given us by Richard Wright adopts a more apostolic point of view: the point of view where he thinks his comrades do have the duty to remain silent and innocent before this "whitened" world, accepting the inevitable martyrdom as a mean of human soul's purification.

"A sense of the life he had left aboveground crushed him with a sense of guilt. Would not God strike him dead for having such thoughts (...) He felt that these people should stand silent, unrepentant, with simple manly pride, and yield no quarter in whimpering. He wanted them to take over

a heroic attitude even though he himself had run away from his tormentors" (Wright, 2021, p. 63)

This "Christian" guilt is not the only sense of guilt we can get in the mind of the protagonist Richard Wright offers us. After Daniels walks away from the chants and continues his pilgrimage through the underworld, the same character remembers Rachel, the pregnant wife who is left behind by him by the time he runs away from the cops. He tries not to think about her, but he also begins to see the body of a black baby lying on the water. As soon as he approaches the child, he realizes that the new-born child is dead. A moment later, this corpse eventually disappears. We can see this phenomenon as a kind of remorse that the young man feels for leaving his wife and son behind to save his own flesh. We can Richard Wright making this remorse evolve into a form of hallucination when the protagonist tries to save the mother and her child from drowning in the dirty waters. Daniels feels very bad for trying it in vain.

"This thing was his enemy; it condemned him as effectively as had those policemen. It made him feel guilty." (Wright, 2021, p. 66)

#### **4.1.4. Strange reflection of themselves**

In this not so peaceful adventure, Fred Daniels manages to have new experiences that can be in some sense a reflection of his people and even an announcement of the tragic end of the plot. The same happens when, unexpectedly, the young adventurer goes to an undertaker's, finding a dead black man's corpse and a huge pile of coffins.

Apparently, this experience does not seem to be so impactful as it may suggest. Fred Daniels' main concern is to take all the possible instruments with him to the underworld, becoming more equipped for upcoming situations, very much like a navy soldier ready to sail the seven seas.

One situation which impresses him the most is when he goes to a movie theater (if we think about the plot of *Native Son*, the presence of a cinema becomes curious and not new at meantime). What does impress our young fugitive is the fact that people do watch movies about the harsh reality surrounding them, but, in truth, they do not act consequently in real life in order to reverse the course of things: "These people were laughing at their lives, at the animated shadows of themselves. Why did

they not rise up and go out into the sunlight and do some deed that would make them live?" (Wright, 2021, p. 75).

Another experience that seems to fascinate Daniels' mind is the case of the man who works with the oven. What fascinates him is that the old folk is never switching on the light, thus working in complete darkness. Our Negro martyr does eventually comprehend that it comes already to be the force of habit. He also seems to perceive it as a possible and provable gift.

"Oh! He understood: The old man had shoveled coal into this furnace for so many years that he had no need for light; he had lived within the narrow grooves of habit so long that he had learned to see in his dark world without the aid of eyes, like those sightless worms that inch along underground by a sense of touch" (Wright, 2021, p. 77)

#### **4.2. Finding the sensation itself**

In this 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the story , we see from the fourth chapter our failed hero at odds with the morals and the ethics which society imposes, stripping himself in a certain way from its previous prejudices about what is morally right/ethical and what is morally wrong/unethical.

The first situation where Richard Wright inserts this issue of morality is the passage in which Fred Daniels infiltrates the Real Estate. On an initial observation, it takes him a while to realize that what he sees is a safe.

"Through a half-inch opening of window he saw a doorknob about three feet from him. No, it was not a doorknob; It was a tiny, circular disc of stainless steel with many fine markings upon it." (Wright, 2021, p. 81)

On the same page, we may observe Daniels being surprised at the huge amount of money coming out of the vault he has been watching from his unachievable haven. The same money comes out in various ways, contributing to the young man's astonishment.

"(..) a huge metal door swung slowly toward him and he was looking into a safe full of green

wads of paper money, rows of coins wrapped in brown paper, and jars and boxes of various sizes.

His heart quickened. Good Lord.... The white hand went in and out of the safe, taking wads of bills and cylinders of coins." (Wright, 2021, p. 81)

This so understandable astonishment of Fred Daniels in connection with the amount of money he sees makes him try to unravel the vault's code. With this code, Fred intends to steal the amount that is stored inside.

Making use of some mental effort, the Rachel's husband manages to unravel the security code of the vault through the movements that the white man's hand performs. However, to the displeasure (and some anger) of the young member of White Rock's Baptist Church, another person heads in and marks the code of the safe, hiding some notes in his pocket: "He grew indignant, as if he owned the money. Though he had planned to steal the money, he despised and pitied the man. His stealing the money and the man's stealing the money were entirely two different things." (Wright, 2021, p. 88).

The anger that this act provokes in Fred Daniels has to do with the nature of the robbery and, above all, the purpose of such theft. For the young man, the person in question is stealing only to satisfy his own worldly pleasures and vices. Daniels' goal as a thief is, on the other hand, to steal for the sake of it, just to feel what is like to steal something. Besides, Fred himself imagines what will happen after he accomplishes the robbery.

"He wanted to steal the money merely for the sensation involved, and he had no intention of ever spending a penny of it (...) He imagined the entire office staff upset; the police would question everyone for a crime they had not committed, just as they had once questioned him." (Wright, 2021, p. 88)

However, as soon as he executes robbery, Fred Daniels discovers something that causes him to lose any sense of blame for the crime he has committed: the institution he is robbing is the "Hillman and Swanson - Real Estate and Insurance", a real-estate firm whose name is linked to the daily life of the black community and whose immoral actions do are very meaningful for Fred Daniels. Fred does not feel guilty about stealing, because the institution itself has been exploiting his peers in leases for many years. For him, all he is doing is "recovering" some of that money stolen from his comrades. All he wants to do have a look at that money and feel its presence.



"Yes; he remembered the firm; it collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in rent from poor colored folks; now he was taking just a little of it, not to spend, but just to keep around and look at" (Wright, 2021, p. 90)

#### **4.2.1. Being free and a martyr**

This act of justice that Fred Daniels performs in Robin Hood's style caused Daniels himself to create within himself a sense of victory over the world that tried to crush him earlier. The young martyr of Richard Wright laughs at everything that happened on that tragic day when he was forced to flee to the underground. He feels free for the first time in his life and feels an enormous desire to show his freedom to the city that despised him as a human being born with a non-normative color.

"He had triumphed over the world aboveground. He was free!  
He remembered how he had hugged the few dollars wanted to run from the underground and yell his discovery to the world" (Wright, 2021, p. 95)

However, the remnants of what his life was like before that day continue to plague Fred Daniels. This is what happens in the sixth chapter, when the young man restarts to hear the sounds coming from the other side of the church he once attended. The chants fill him with a sadness and melancholy capable of holding him hostage in the past.

To some extent, we can interpret the new echo of the songs as a sign of a possible Divine punishment in the face of the attainment of this freedom. In a way, we can get this as a warning to Daniels that he is still a common mortal person and that this sense of "vengeance" toward the world may come to betray him. However, the targeted hero of Richard Wright seems to accept this warning, assuming himself as a martyr and, even perhaps, a prophet) who represents an entire bunch of mortal people who sacrifice themselves towards a life of torment. Fred Daniels feels that all that journey through the underworld is part of a mission.

"In some unutterable fashion he was all people and they were he; By the identity of their emotions they were one, and he was one with them. And this was the oneness that linked man to man, in life or death. (...) He must assert himself; he was propelled to do something, to devise means of action by and through which he could

convince those who lived aboveground of the death-like quality of their lives." (Wright, 2021, p. 106)

All these alternations between states of euphoria and states of melancholy create a huge fatigue in Daniels, making him sleep soundly. However, this fatigue does not prevent the hero from continuing to play with the moralism of the White Man towards the Black Man. As such, Fred Daniels begins with the greatest moral experience that human beings can have in the third life: firing a gun. A lot of people refuse to fire the gun for reasons of conscience. That is not the case with Fred, who takes the gun he has near him and just shoots him, with no further thought. This experience has an immediate impact on the consciousness of the character who, shaken, drops the weapon.

"He tightened his finger on the trigger; there was a deafening report and it seemed that the entire underground had fallen upon his eardrums and in the same instant there flashed an orange-blue spurt of flame that died quickly but lingered on as a vivid afterimage.

He smelt the acrid odor of burnt powder filling his lungs. Abruptly he dropped the gun" (Wright, 2021, p. 110)

The following experience Fred has, has to do with another game the character himself creates. In this game, Fred pretends to be a rich man who lives in the human world. In this game, he wears the jewels he stole during his journey through the underworld and smokes a cigarette, recreating "typical" poses of a rich man. At the end of this short game he plays, Daniels is assaulted by the idea that perhaps the world created by men is right. Within this logic, everything that happens in the world is part of the "plan". That is, he feels that he may be unframed with the logic of the world.

"Maybe anything's right, he mumbled. Yes, if the world as men had made it was right, then anything else was right, too. Any action a man took to satisfy himself—theft or murder or torture—was right" (Wright, 2021, p. 111)

#### **4.2.2. Guilty plea?**

As we have often mentioned before, religion is undoubtedly one of the central themes, eventually it is dealt with in vivid discussions on morality and other humanistic concepts. Richard Wright wanted these topics to have a strong presence in history. We can feel the presence of the spiritual realm in the

ninth chapter in the second part of the plot. After returning from the fruit shop to the underground, Daniels hears the sound of religious chants on the other side of the wall, sounds that the chants become progressively more repetitive, with several voices gradually appearing. Stanzas like "Glad, glad, glad oh, so glad / I got Jesus in my soul..." (Wright, 2021, p. 119) begin to echo in the underworld. The intensity with which the voices sing the verses provoke feelings of fury in Fred Daniels. The fugitive of Richard Wright feels that those believers are taking the blame for a crime they have never committed without even understanding it.

"The song lashed him to impotent fury. Those people were pleading guilty, wallowing sensually in their despair. He gritted his teeth. How could one ever get used to this thing? (...) he knew that they thought that they were guilty of something they had not done and they had to die" (Wright, 2021, p. 120)

On the same page, the protagonist begins to question himself quite philosophically about the origin of this "culture" of self-guilt among black people. He wonders about the ease with which this innate feeling manifests itself amidst the Afro-descendant imaginary. Fred Daniels wonders about why that feeling of guilty is so inevitable to feel, as if it was some sort of karma taking revenge for a crime committed in a forgotten past.

"Why was this sense of guilt so seemingly innate, so easy to come by, to think, to feel, so verily physical? (...) it seemed that one was trying to remember a gigantic shock that had left an impression upon one's body which one could not forget, but which had been almost forgotten by the conscious mind, creating in one a state of external anxiety". (Wright, 2021, p.120)

#### **4.2.3. Assuming the already imposed crime**

Thus we come to the end of the second part of the story, where Fred Daniels' stay in the sewers of the city reaches its final stretch. This final section is marked by a set of situations where the protagonist observes the brutality of the police acts, realizing that the torture he suffered at the police station was not an isolated case.

The curious thing about these situations is that these very same situations show us that the policemen are also bloodthirsty and merciless in the equally summary treatment they give to white

men. This could reverse the scenario that was up to this point only considered Afro-Americans. Can give us a contrary idea that we may also have policemen who do not consider color and race as they want to intervene in a brutal way.

This may, obviously, expand the scenario of hypocrisy in an American society towards other groups. We are dealing with a topic concerned not just with the idea of race which is, as we are pointing out, transcended. This runs counter a society which assumes to be fair, but which violates the eighth amendment of the Constitution: "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor fines excessive imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted"<sup>20</sup>.

The first case of torture that Fred Daniels observes is the case of the man who was stealing money from the real-estate vault, the same man who provoked outrage in Daniels. At that moment, the hero of Richard Wright feels guilty for causing that situation to the man, when the real thief was himself.

"He felt sorry for the man who was being accused as he had once been accused of a crime he had not committed. Maybe he should tear all of the money off the walls and dump it in the basement and send them a note telling them where to look for it?" (Wright, 2021, p. 122)

However, Fred decides not to redeem himself for the disorder of the case, because he believes that the man, despite not having cleared the vault (as it was being stated), ended up stealing some of the money from that vault by the time he opened the safe. The case ends up having a tragic outcome, since the accused, as soon as Lawson turns his back, takes a gun and commits suicide in an act of deep sorrow and despair.

Faced with all this, Daniels goes on with his life, leaving aside the guilt he initially felt for the situation caused.

"He heaved a sigh and got down from the rain pipe and crawled back into the basement.

The dead man was already completely gone from his mind and he was bent toward other goals" (Wright, 2021, p. 123)

---

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Constitution - Eighth Amendment / Resources - Congress. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-8/>

Then, Fred Daniels deals with a second case, still related to the theft of the real estate. This is the case of the night security guard who is tortured in a more aggressive manner than in the first case. This case can be compared to Fred's case in terms of cruelty. Richard Wright's description of torture is rich in the description of the violence that keeps him suffering at Murphy's hands.

"Sitting in a chair, naked to his waist, was the night watchman over whose sleeping body he had stood at some time in the recent past. (...) The white flesh of the watchman's body was mottled with crimson welts. (...) sat with his hands upon his knees, his head sagging forward, his face swollen and dirty, his eyes half closed; it seemed that at any moment his body would slump to the floor." (Wright, 2021, pp. 125)

The torture impresses Daniels and gives him the desire to tell the police how innocent the man is.

"(...) he wanted to scream to Murphy that the man was innocent, that the man did not know anything, that no one knew anything, that no man could explain his innocent guilt. (...) Watching the man who was being accused, staring at Murphy who marched to and fro, he felt hot tears running down his cheeks. He had seen enough; there was nothing he could do" (Wright, 2021, pp. 126-127)

Amid the tortures he has witnessed, we can check Fred Daniels having one more hallucination provoked by the remorse of leaving wife and son behind in the name of his own freedom and honor. He feels like he has been observing a succession of bodies since he has been living underground. More to the point we read a passage in which the Wooten family's servant visualizes the body of a dead woman. He imagines her alive listening to her son asking for bread to eat. He feels sad to see that corpse: "He felt sorry for the woman; he knew that she had died expecting to reap a rich harvest of eternal happiness and there was for her now only this coldness and endless time." (Wright, 2021, p. 127).

The third interrogation at the hands of the police that Fred Daniels witnesses is the interrogation of a young man who is accused of stealing a radio. Each time the young man denies having committed the robbery, Johnson beats him with determination. In the face of this, Richard Wright shows us a more sarcastic Fred Daniels who is "conformed" to the idea that black people are guilty by inference. There is a psychological alteration where Daniels "accepts" the value of his color and seems to make fun of

the police as if like he and blacks in general were sentenced to speak for another person's action. We get an idea that, if this is going to happen, we have to play that game.

"(...) he wanted to leap through the narrow hole and across the dark of the basement and up the stairs and rescue the boy, telling him: yes, tell 'im you stole the radio, even if you didn't. Tell 'im you're guilty... Don't you know you're guilty?" (Wright, 2021, p. 129)

This idea of acceptance of an inherent guilt present in the sarcasm of Fred Daniels is the starting point for his fall in the plot. That is, it is with this acceptance that Fred Daniels returns to the world of the men, because he thinks he has seen everything he had to see in the underground.

#### **4.2.4. Blinded by the light, frightened by a duality**

Motivated by the police's inhuman acts he watched, Fred takes the first step that marks his return to the world where he was born and lived, after three days isolated as a hermit.

As Richard Wright shows us, the first direct contact Fred has with daylight causes him a huge shock, triggering him to panic and hide back in the sewers.

"Fear scalded him and he dropped back into the sewer's pallid current and stood paralyzed in The shadows. A heavy car rumbled past overhead, warning him to remain in this world of dark light, jarring the steel manhole cover back into place with an imperious clang" (Wright, 2021, p. 133)

The panic that Daniels feels in his first real contact with the world after his isolation does not come from a fear for what might happen to him. In fact, what frightens the young man has to do with the acts he may commit as soon as he mingles with men. He seems to feel that, despite having watched the outside world, he is not prepared to return to a man-like life under the Mankind's laws, returning to lose the freedom he has gained.

"it was not a fear of the policemen or the autos or the people, but a hot panic at the actions he felt he would perform if he went out into that sunshine. He stood between that terrifying world of life-in-death above him and this dark world that was death-in-life

Here in the underground" (Wright, 2021, p. 133)

Despite this initial struggle, he feels quite in the "portal" between the two worlds, he decides to move on to the world of the mortals, leaving his world of "immortality" and his position of semi-God. Contrary to what we may initially think, nothing happened to him as soon as he re-enters the world where he was born. In fact, the world follows its normal course and people do not even pay attention to him and they even think that he is a sewer technician.

In the face of people's indifference, Reverend Davis' friend thinks about his next move. In an act of madness, he decides that the next step is to appear at the police station to confront the cops who arrested him: "He would go to the station, clear up everything, make a statement. (...) He was the statement, and since it was all so clear to him, surely he would, in one way or another, make it clear to others". (Wright, 2021, p. 135). On his way to the police station, Fred Daniels observes the world around him. As he picks up a newspaper to have a look at the news, he is surprised that the newspaper does not say anything about his evasion and does not have an ad asking for information on his whereabouts, as he had seen in the fruit shop where he had stolen some fruit while he was in the underworld. Indeed, he feels disregarded. As soon as he gets to the station, madness takes over Fred Daniels' spirit. He forgets the names of the agents who tortured him. The discourse he presents is a discourse devoid of coherence and cohesion.

#### **4.2.5. The Promethean Nemesis**

As the title shows above, it is at this point that the tragic protagonist of Richard Wright will suffer a kind of Divine sentence for daring to want to reveal to the world the illicit knowledge he obtained in the three days he distanced himself from the daily life. As a seemingly divine punishment, he is unable to communicate effectively with the police officers outside the police station. They think he is a lunatic who ran away from a madhouse, although the things he tries to say surprise them.

"You're nuts, ain't you, boy?" one policeman asked, placing a friendly arm about his shoulders. He smiled at them all. "Maybe he's a Fifth Columnist!" to policeman shouted. There was laughter and, despite his anxiety, he joined in." (Wright, 2021, p. 138)

Despite the resistance of the cops regarding taking him seriously, Daniels keeps trying to demonstrate his knowledge. As such, he tries to tell what happened that day they took him to the police

station, reconstructing the entire succession of events. While he was doing that, the cops were trying to figure out what he was saying. However, they ask where it all started. As Daniels claims, it all happened outside the Peabody family's home, the cops then realize who the responsible cops were. Consequently, they led him to Lawson, Murphy and Johnson. As soon as the three cops come to Daniels, they are surprised by his return and try to figure out where he was hiding for the whole time. He tries to explain by all means that he came from the underworld, that he no longer wants to run away and that he openly takes the blame he does not actually have.

"He had to rescue himself from this bog; he had to force the reality of himself upon them. "I'll sign some more papers," he told them, leaning forward and speaking with all the fervor he could muster. "I'm guilty . . ." (Wright, 2021, p. 141)

As we can see here, Daniels is doing the same thing those religious believers seemed to do to themselves: take the blame and curve before the segregating force of "Jim Crow." In other words, he becomes what he initially wanted to combat. To the reader's surprise, the cops no longer want to arrest Daniels, acting fairly for the first time in the Richard Wright's work. They themselves assume they were wrong to arrest and torture him.

"Listen here, boy," Murphy said uneasily, "let me tell you something for your own goddamn good, see? We don't want you. You are free, free as air. Go home to your wife and son and forget about it. (...) It was all a mistake, see? We caught the guy who killed Mr. and Mrs. Peabody." (Wright, 2021, p. 141)

In order to convince young Daniels that he was a free man, Lawson tears up the confession that had once forced him to sign. However, the young "lunatic" insists on the idea that he is guilty, continuing to talk about what he saw underground. Richard Wright shows us a protagonist determined to confess prove his sin.

"I'm guilty, mister! I saw it all," he told them with nervous excitement. He rose from the chair, shaking with hysteria. "And I saw the man when he blew his brains out because you accused him of stealing that money . . . But he didn't steal it. I took it . . . And I saw you slapping the



night watchman trying to make 'im tell about them diamonds and rings and watches . . ."  
(Wright, 2021, p. 146)

However, Murphy and Johnson do not believe in what Daniels says and try to convince Lawson about this: "Don't get excited. He read about it in the papers. This ain't the first loony to confess to something he didn't do." (Wright, 2021, p. 146). Lawson does not exactly believe in Fred Daniels' madness. He knows that what the young man says did not come from the pages of the papers.

After much insistence from Fred, the police officers do agree to go with him to the underground shelter where Fred was hiding during the three days of isolation. In the face of Fred's narration, the cops get surprised with everything they see and become more afraid about what the young man seems to know. Fred's uncontrollable willingness to show off his actions proved to be counterproductive and fatal. Faced with the frightening reality, Lawson, afraid that Fred would put the officers under scrutiny before society, shoots and kills him. His colleagues are stunned by his unexpected action.

"What you shoot 'im for, Lawson?" "I had to."

"Why?" "You've got to shoot his kind. They would wreck things." (Wright, 2021, p. 159)

## 5. Author vs Work

### 5.1. Can Fred Daniels resemble Richard Wright?

Fred Daniels is a universal character inside the universe of Afro-American Literature and the Afro-American universe itself. Fred Daniels presents all the things which constitute the history of a minority of people who, even today, struggling to bury the bonds of slavery which, although abolished in 1865 by Constitutional law, were maintained by Jim Crow's America and are still haunting the Negro community in today's society.

Fred Daniels represents the difficulties of a minority which is currently still under attack and ambush for simply being born with a different skin color. Fred represents and is represented through other skins and souls. George Floyd - the case we talked about earlier - can be seen as one of those representatives.

In what sense is Fred Daniels a universal character in the African American collective imagination? I believe he is because he represents a normal down-to-earth character and he is the result of an equally down-to-earth and non-scholarly writing style. Fred, indeed, always appears to us as a simple and honest person, a common citizen, a person with no eccentricities. He goes on with his life as normal person until the day he is intercepted by the city's police force right in the middle of the street.

George Floyd is one of Fred Daniels' possible "heirs" in the sense of being a real-life character who follows his everyday life with the ideal of simplicity until he is intercepted by the police and ends up being murdered at their hands. It is really remarkable the way Richard Wright gives life to a character that is so simple and so real. Richard Wright probably wanted the character to be this way, also because simplicity and raw realism are also traits which are very present in the works *Black Boy* and *Native Son*.

It is also a fact that, due to his own poverty, Richard Wright, like multitudes of black civilians and black writers, did not have a regular instruction and that this is indeed reflected in the vocabulary he uses and in the written discourse applied in the stories.

Still, Richard also ends up being a writer during an era where Literary Modernism is still a current in vogue. This Modernism would lead him to capture the world around him, always using the inherent subjectivism that the modernist point of view preaches.

The political/activist side of *The Man Who Lived Underground* as well as the one we may certainly observe in *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, may have some influence coming from some modernist works published in the 1940s like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The New World Order* or, even, *1984*. In fact, the politicization of his works can be seen as the best way Richard Wright has to express himself, as well as many other black authors. However, can we say Fred Daniels is similar to its author Richard Wright? Can we even say they are the same person?

Can Richard Wright and Fred Daniels fit into the classic idea that the protagonist reflects the author himself as a living endowed with existence and a bunch of experiences?

## **5.2. Cradle Plan**

Richard, as it can be concluded, had a difficult childhood, similarly to other children of his time. This poverty forced him, years later, to work, alternating between jobs to be able to support himself and pursue his dreams.

In the case of Fred Daniels, we do not exactly know what sort of life Fred Daniels had before that triggering moment. We do not know Fred's origins and his growing pains. On the other hand, if we had this information, it would probably not be relevant and necessary to the story intended to be told in *The Man Who Lived Underground*, given that the narration of events is based on a moment in the character's life which changes the whole course of his life.

All we know is that Fred is a young man who has a wife and who is going to be a father. We know that he is a religious man who works as a domestic servant in the house of a wealthy white family. Given this, what we can compare between the two is the fact that both Wright and Daniels are hardworking people committed to building a life and inserting themselves into society as normal people that they are, even if that road is a struggling life. In addition, we have a scenario in *The Man* where black people usually work in the home of wealthy white families, a scenario that happened a lot at the time Richard lived, since these families employed Negroes as a way to maintain a clean reputation and not be labeled as racists.

## **5.3. Police position in the afro community**

The issue of public safety is the main theme of *The Man*. From the work's perspective, we promptly get the idea that the police officers are the main segregation's agents amidst the ethnic

minorities. However, in the lives of Richard Wright and Fred Daniels, those police officers seem to have different roles.

In the case of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, we already know that the policemen have a very strong presence, marked by the brutality of their own actions. As stated in the previous paragraph, police officers are the main and strongest vehicle of segregation and enforcement of the Jim Crow's Laws.

In the case of *Native Son*, the case does not change much of a picture. The cops are still very segregating and arrogant in the way they act. In order to discover the whereabouts of Bigger Thomas in Chicago, they block the city and apply the Martial Law in the area of the city that is only inhabited by the black community (not extending to the white zone), entering the homes of black families at any time and anyway (often violently).

However, in the case of author Richard Wright himself, the presence that the police make feel is different. In *Black Boy*, the police are more absent, often giving the feeling that they do not want to know about the violence and racism that exists in the area where young Wright lives with his family. Still, the cops, when they show up, seem to be kinder people and more devoid of evil. We have the case in the story where Richard flees the institution where his mother temporarily interned him, wandering from street to street in the dark. In the middle of his daydreams, the boy is found by a police officer who, in the face of it, is concerned and tries to take him back safely to the institution from which he fled. Faced with this, we can also get the idea that the police, despite being "heralds" of an America trapped in a slave past, can also be kind people whose job it is to really serve the people and help the same people to have a quiet, safe and happy life in an admittedly free and ascendant country.

#### **5.4. *Mythos* in Richard Wright, Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas**

As we saw in the previous analysis we made of *Memories of My Grandmother*, Richard Wright tells us of a connection between Fred Daniels and Prometheus, a mythical figure who became known for having stolen the Fire of Knowledge, until then restricted to the enjoyment of living beings.

Although Richard does not exactly make this mythological association because of obtaining illegal knowledge, Fred Daniels still has in his hands some knowledge he was not supposed to obtain. In fact, according to a society ruled by the White folks, a black man is supposed to live in deep innocence in the face of what happens around him (something that actually happened to Fred).

What makes this more mythological is the uncontrollable desire that young Daniels has to show the world these truths and unmask all the socially accepted lies. In other words, Daniels is into giving the "fire of knowledge" to the black human being in the same way Prometheus is into giving the real Fire of Knowledge to the Caucasian men and women.

In some sense, madness is really a Prometheus-like punishment that Richard Wright points out in the essay: the danger that represents the spread of this knowledge, rather than the mere attainment of knowledge itself.

In the case of Richard Wright, as we have already been saying in this dissertation, the mythological figure that better represents the author is Daedalus, artisan and father of the famous Icarus. *Black Boy* gives us a connection between the author and the Hellenic character. Daedalus tries to run away with his son from the labyrinth that is imprisoning them.

Likewise, Richard Wright tries to get out of the labyrinth that imprisoning him in the South: poverty, segregation, fundamentalism. The pair of wax wings that Daedalus uses as a getaway vehicle can be compared to what literature stands for Wright: freedom.

The figure of Icarus also closely resembles the figure of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*. Just as Icarus has an unmeasured ambition, Bigger also demonstrates a great ambition, even when he has not the fault for an accidental death. We see this when, in conversation with Bessie, he says he's going to ask the Dalton family for a ransom in the name of the kidnapper, so they can both flee the city with the money and start a new life, full of wealth and free of sorrow. Just as Icarus falls when pursuing his own goal, Bigger also falls from his own sky where he tried to play with whites, in an attitude of revenge towards the segregation they made their community live in. Icarus may also have a certain connection with Fred Daniels in the sense that the protagonist aspires to put himself above men and to reach a level of full freedom by revealing the truth hidden by the police.

## **5.5. Relationship with politics**

As we talked about before, politics is a field that is hugely present in the life of Richard Wright. His most canonical works have the political trait as a fundamental trait in the development of the plot and the characters' actions.

Richard Wright, as we all know, was an adherent of the Marxist cause, having integrated the ranks of the Communist Party. Like him, many Afrodescendant authors and citizens carried the ideals

of the International in their chests, as Marxist currents were the only currents that seemed to care about racial issues, promising them liberation and a stability.

Regarding the political situation during his lifetime, we can see that Richard himself was born during the administration of Theodore Roosevelt, head of the Republican Party who was also known to have reformed the New York Police Deputy during his time as the Chairman of the commission of that institution.

At the time of his death, the country where he was born was ruled by Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican Party's general who commanded American troops at the entrance of the United States into World War II. It is curious the fact that his country was being ruled by a party which usually ignores the African American cause.

Wright's connection to Marx and Engels' ideals greatly influenced his writing. The greatest influence does show up in *Native Son*, which brings us a journey where Bigger Thomas contacts with the ideas of the Reds amid his ignorance of politics in general. In general, the ideals preached by the Communist Party's Manifest end up reflecting more broadly on the characters Jan Erlone and Mary Dalton, the communists and unionists at service in the story. The active way in which the preach socialist propaganda is a great mark of Wright's ideals in the work, especially in the fiery discourses regarding black liberation and the humility they both have when they go drinking a few drinks in an establishment which is mostly frequented by the blacks. The author's link to the Marxist movement can also be seen through the lawyer Boris Max, especially in his rather poetic speeches and in his merciless attacks on capitalism disguised as Mister Dalton. Fred Daniels, unlike the Jackson-born author, does not express political views. Like Bigger Thomas, Fred Daniels is also innocent and doesn't seem to notice anything about politics.

*The Man Who Lived Underground*, although it can be seen as a kind of a political manifesto, does not give us directly political views of the protagonist with regard to parties and parliaments and politicians. Throughout history, Daniels' target is just the police and the blindness of black people and the tranquility of white people about what goes on in the comprehensive environment.

## **5.6. Considerations regarding the character and the author**

As we may already keep in mind, Richard Wright is an author who, even though he died more than 60 years ago, still remains with us in the current days. The author brings us quite pertinent questions, some of them having historical origins.

In works such as *Native Son*, we are brought a portrait of a society that divides a city into two different parts, isolating minorities and progressively hindering their social integration in 1940s America and the rise of their members in society at large.

With works of the same caliber as *Black Boy*, we receive a reliable first-person portrait of the true meaning of being born with black skin in the United States and the difficulties that a man with different skin color has in his life.

We also have a close picture of the great instability that was experienced at that time in the southern United States, where justice was nonexistent for the black community. Whites carried the mentality of Confederate times, reflecting on their actions on blacks, especially in what concerns to murders and lynchings.

*Black Boy* can also be seen as a book full of feminism applied to the case of black women, since the work shows us the hardships that Richard Wright's mother goes through as a single mother after being abandoned by her husband to whom justice gave reason instead of providing support to her as a mother who had to raise two children by herself.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* offers us an insight into the issue of police abuse under the Afrodescendant community and other minorities, an issue that, for many years to come, never loses its timeliness. As a martyr, Fred Daniels represents the black man who is attacked and wronged, often in summary form. This work shows us a brutal and limitless performance of a police force that proves to be uncompromising and corrupt, not looking at the means to achieve its ends. The work portrays in the background a police officer whose agents do everything possible and impossible to have their prizes and to get a good reputation for having solved certain cases. The work becomes actual when we compared Fred Daniels, a character from 1942, with real and recent cases that still populate the Media's collective memory. We have the most mediatic case of George Floyd, the case responsible for rekindling the media's attention on racism and xenophobia.

Recently, on August 31 this year, we had a case posted on Instagram about the case of Donovan Lewis, a 20-year-old black man who was shot in his own bed by the police, with no opportunity to defend himself.

The news says that the police were called by a complaint of domestic violence (and with arrest order), but what we can verify in the video released is that the police acted in summary, without giving the man a chance to defend himself.<sup>21</sup>

If we combine *The Man Who Lived Underground* with *Native Son*, we get a picture of the "tokenism" present in North American society, where rich white people do showy solidarity actions just to show newspapers that they are allies. However, we see that they perform really false actions which happen only in extreme situations. It is the case of George Floyd.

American comedian and activist Jon Stewart does speak to us on this issue of "tokenism" in an episode of his show *The Problem With Jon Stewart*. It is a segment in which he addresses racism and the excess of politicians who are surprised by situations and campaign against racism, although doing actually nothing.

"White people are pretending that this problem is new.  
and we're just hearing about it now, because we love  
to discover stuff that's already existed. It's kind of our thing.  
"America, where did you come from?" "First!"<sup>22</sup>

As a protagonist, Fred Daniels is very interesting in his own existence as a character. It's quite interesting the whole journey of self-knowledge and discovery that the Richard Wright's tragic hero goes through in the plot, through the adventures he has in the three days he spends underground.

Even so, the innocence-filled personality that Fred Daniels maintains in the actions he performs in light of his discoveries is curious. Despite having a noble desire to remove his community from the segregation that binds her, Fred forgets that it is quite difficult to do so immediately, facing the cops with the evidence he has at the moment when he is more vulnerable than he thinks.

In general, *The Man Who Lived Underground* is a work that, because of being published at a very recent time, can change people's perceptions about the difficulties of the African American community in a world that, despite the legislative and cultural advances we have already had, persists in being racist and divisive. Fred Daniels is a simple character who goes through a simplified storyline with no big twists and turns. *Black Boy* can be seen as a good complement to *The Man Who Lived*

---

<sup>21</sup> *Black paper on Instagram*. Instagram. (n.d.). Retrieved October 18, 2022, from [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiANfmPjadW/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiANfmPjadW/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

<sup>22</sup> YouTube. (2022, March 25). *The problem with white people | the problem with Jon Stewart | Apple TV+*. YouTube. Retrieved October 18, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu27WJ0Axcw>



*Underground*, because it gives us a more complete perspective on segregation from the point of view of those born within a time when the country lived periods of recurrent violence within minorities.

## 6. Fred Daniels as a probable American-like hero

If we consider the general rules of fictional writing that professors do teach us at school, Fred Daniels, as the protagonist of a story told to us by Richard Wright, ends up fitting into the generalist profile of an “Hero”. In addition, if we also have a look at the tragic ending given to him in the plot, Daniels can also be seen as a martyr, an idea which increases his possible association with the image of a hero.

However, what is, in fact, a hero? The Etymology – a Linguistics’ field which dedicates itself to the study of the words’ origins – does give us *heros*, a Latin word that conducts us to the idea of a creature which overcomes some conflict of incalculable depth through the exceptionality of its own actions.

This Latin term derives from the Greek *íroas* and initially emerges as an exclusively literary concept connected to fiction and dramaturgy. Regarding the vocable “martyr”, the etymological viewpoint leads us to the Latin *martyr*, a term which also derives from the Hellenism *mártyras*. This Antiquity’s term has as its literal meaning the word “witness” and can refer us to the idea that a martyr, to be considered as such, has to witness something that he himself should not testify in the first place. Moreover, the term also defines a martyr as being someone who refuses to accept something being imposed on him. Because of having a more religious nature, this substantive may also be associated with the mythological concept of *nemesis*, where the hero is punished for making an unacceptable and unforgivable mistake. In a way, the act of obtaining an undesirable knowledge is a concept that Richard Wright gets from the Greek and applies in Fred Daniels’ journey in his story.

Such undesirable action pushes the protagonist into a scenario of punishment for not wanting to accept what is imposed and socially accepted as being the natural order of things. Those quite ancestral concepts of *Íroas* and *Mártyras* bring us into a concept which, despite owning older roots, is still very actual concept in what concerns to Western culture: the “American Hero”.

Since the early times, successive American governments have tried to instill through a very strong family culture patriotism in the population, cultivating the notion of what it is like to be an American Hero. If we stare at the foundational roots, we get the image of the Founding Fathers as the first and greatest national heroes.

If we stare in a more closely manner, the Declaration of Independence signed by the Thirteen Colonies in Philadelphia is itself regarded as a deeply heroic document which remarkably marks the formal insurrection against a powerful empire like the British one.

Subversive acts prior to 1776 such as the "Boston Tea Party" (1773) and the Battles of Lexington and Concord (1775) do also mark the shaping of an American identity based on heroism and martyrdom.

Still, what is exactly an "American hero"? We may perceive the American Hero as a native American who, for some reason, carries out a set of actions that ensure American existence through a cinema-like fight for the greater good rather than the individual himself.

Such act of heroism and bravery also supposes a sacrifice that the same hero must perform for the happiness of the majority, a characteristic very present in the portrayal of a martyr. It is possible to compare the American hero to the "Superman" idealized by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: a man who rises from mediocrity through his own effort and personal sacrifice, taking Mankind to a level where the Common Good is safeguarded.

In the American case, the Supermen in question get reflected in the presence of the soldiers, which, regardless of gender and race, are viewed as the perfect and the saving species that ensure national security by defending the people at any cost. This reflection of Nietzsche's concept also extends to police officers and firefighters, a thing that gained greater emphasis after the 9/11 bombings.

Nevertheless, if we talk about American heroes in racial terms, the case changes its tone. When we think of superheroes, we usually think of the Marvel and DC's superheroes who frequently appear in comics and movies. The deeper issue of this is that the New England's superhero's universe is dominated by white characters who are powerful childhood's references to our children. Those are the cases of heroes like Superman, Batman and Captain America, vultures whose physical strength, intelligence and athletic ability are constantly exalted.

When we try to go to the Negro side, we no longer have the same amount of references that white people do have in the superhero universe. The most recent reference we have is the case of Black Panther, a black hero impersonated by deceased actor Chadwick Boseman.

The character is exalted for being an agile hero, with high reflexes and with very keen senses. The character is also known for having hunting skill, being considered as an excellent shooter and a great strategist Overall, the hero ends up being compared to a feline character. The abilities of this

hero, although acceptable to a generic hero, are indeed capable of inducing us to the stereotypes picturing Black people as a community with roots in Africa, a continent known in cinema as having savannas, jungles and felines and men who move in a slyly way through the sea.

However, as the topic changes to sports, the concept of heroes is more balanced for both sides, especially in fighting sports. In sports like Pro-Wrestling, we have many white heroes in the youth's collective memory like Hulk Hogan, John Cena, The Undertaker, etc.

In martial arts in general, characters such as Van-Damme, Steven Seagall, Jason Statham and Sylvester Stallone are also quite dominant figures. However, if we go to other sports like Boxing, Afro-Americans do appear as more dominant athletes, with legendary figures like Muhammad-Ali and Mike Tyson. In Athletics, Negroes are also celebrated as almost unbeatable runners.

### **6.1. Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas as human as Spiderman and Daredevil**

Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas can be considered heroes/martyrs if we think of the basic idea that a hero has to overcome challenging obstacles in order to be able to consider himself as such and that a martyr has to sacrifice his own happiness and well-being to safeguard the so called greater good.

Fred Daniels even manages to get over a series of challenges that take him to a level of heroism. The first overcoming in the story comes when Daniels successfully manages to escape the police, taking advantage of a distraction from the officers when they are in the hospital helping his wife Rachel.

The common spectator might think at first glance that the protagonist's escape may be a selfish act, but, in fact, Daniels escapes only because that is the only chance he gets to avoid a very cruel primary destination, probably the electric chair, because we are talking about the 40's, that would eliminate him in a summary way.

The wanderings that the hero does present to us in his life underground for 3 days are the main victory, given that it takes a great capacity for survival. Fred Daniels survives to bad smells, floods of non-drinkable water and successive contacts with the outside to supply himself of basic staples. He also survives to the several typical hallucinations he suffers from as a hero who as an unresolved past.

His return to the "main" world also traces an overcoming of the shock he gets when moving from a neutral world where we can observe man in his most caricatured pose to a world in which we mingle with man and "fight" them on an equal ground.

This return also brings us the ultimate sacrifice of the hero in which he is murdered while trying to reject what is imposed, sacrificing himself for his black comrades.

Bigger Thomas, our protagonist of *Native Son*, does not fit that much in the heroic profile. Yet so, we can insert him in the profile of the *martyr*, having in mind the constant escape attempts that the character has, refusing a punishment for a crime of which he is not directly to blame.

Interestingly enough, the fact that the character is called "Bigger" can also remind us of the idea that he can be bigger than his own life. Such point may make sense, given the state of mind with which Thomas closes the story, a state of mind where he feels it is not worth sailing against the tide: "I'm all right, Mr. Max. You ain't to blame for what's happening to me.... I know you did all you could (...) I just r-r-reckon I h-had it coming...." (Wright, 2000, p. 446).

A hugely pertinent issue to address in the midst of all this is the fact that some White superheroes of Western collective memory do possess the human and everyday essence that Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas share with each other. We have the case of Spiderman, one of the most acclaimed heroes in the Marvel's universe. Peter Parker appears to us pictured as a humble Science student. He is regarded as being a very intelligent individual and being one of the brightest students in his class. However, the character suffers a "trigger moment" where a simple sting of a spider gives him superpowers and makes him become a hero who fights evil. Another episode that makes him establish himself as a hero is the murder of his uncle Ben, a vision that torments Peter Parker for the rest of his life.

Another curious case is the case of Daredevil, a superhero who loses his sight during his childhood and has as one of his great powers the sensory perception that makes him feel the imminence of a blow. The episode that makes him become a hero is the childhood episode in which his father, a prized boxing fighter, is beaten to death in front of his son.

Those heroes, like Fred and Bigger, are people who follow their normal lives until the day when there is in fact a fateful action that makes them change their path and follow a path connected with justice. Like Nietzsche's Superman, they rise up from between the mortals, sacrificing their lives and happiness for the greater good.

## **6.2. Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas as semi-Gods?**

Faced with this idea of heroism and martyrdom present in Richard Wright's characters, and assuming the idea of "Bigger" meaning Bigger Thomas' immortality too, we can and should also dwell

on the concept of "Demigod", a concept that seems to be well based on the profiles of Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas.

From the Greek *hêmítheos* , a demigod is primarily defined as a child born of a relationship between a God and a mortal person. As we approach this definition, we instantly get several demigods in Greek mythology: Heracles (son of Zeus), Perseu (son of Zeus), Achilles (son of Tétis), Dionysus (son of Zeus and later God of Wine), etc.

However, the status of Demigod is also attributed to figures who, like Nietzsche's Superman, rise from the mortal world through unparalleled and unsurpassed deeds. Heracles, better known in the mainstream as Hercules, is one of the cases of demigods who deserved the position for their deeds. It is even a double case, given that he was also born from a relationship between a God and a mortal woman.

In a way, Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas seem to be good models of Demigods, more for their efforts and deeds than for the ungrateful cradle where they were born. If we compare both with Heracles, we realize that they are not the product of the reveries of Zeus, a God who, despite being the ultimate God of Olympus, turns out to not be a good example in terms of conjugal conduct.

As such, Bigger and Daniels do not have to endure the anger and onslaught of Hera (wife of Zeus and Goddess of Marriage and Motherhood), since they are sons of two mortal people. ' However, there is a bunch of "Heras" that both have to faint in their lives and that Richard Wright himself had to faint throughout his life (something we can witness in the first person in *Black Boy*).

Fred Daniels becomes Demigod through the way he feints the world of men, through the discoveries he obtains on his Underground's journey. As he heads into the basic point of human existence and understands man from within, Fred Daniels feels at some point that he is invincible himself and that he is above human beings, losing a little bit of the humility that would be characteristic of a Superman idealized by Nietzsche.

The fact that Fred Daniels is in the Underground (the place where all human life ends) can refer us to what the Holy Bible tells us in the seventh verse of Ecclesiastes' chapter twelve.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:  
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

Bigger Thomas also achieves the same status as Hercules in a forced manner and through discovery. Still, Bigger's discovery has nothing to do with truths that are generally unreachable to the American people.

In fact, Bigger Thomas walks a more innocent path in Richard Wright's Literature rather than Fred Daniels. Bigger Thomas only discovers that he can put himself above the Man as soon as he finds himself forced to burn Mary Dalton's body. He starts thinking to himself that the easiest way to escape is to send a false ransom demand to the Dalton family, deceiving them and running away with the money they will pay innocently.

As the plan is mentally constructed, Bigger Thomas, like Fred Daniels, is also enthusiastic about the idea of being able to control the same White men that once controlled Bigger and his community. Like Fred, Bigger also loses the necessary humility in the face of a sudden sense of power that emerges overnight.

As with Achilles, another legendary Demigod known to be an invincible warrior, Fred Daniels and Bigger Thomas also end up being defeated by their own "heels": pride, innocence, recklessness. These are typical problems that Demigods go through, distancing themselves from the status of Gods.

Another interesting thing – also picking up on the biblical question already referred to in the case of Fred Daniels – is the question of Bigger Thomas cremating Mary Dalton's body to try to escape. This may also refer us to the Ecclesiastes' idea (also expressed in Genesis 3:19) that, although we create a certain status in the third life, we end up being equal to others in the face of death.

### **6.3. Wrightian Hero vs Ellisonian Hero**

It is hard to talk about Fred Daniels as a real-life hero without mentioning the hero Ralph Ellison created in *Invisible Man*. It is a fact that Wright and Ellison knew each other. The invisible hero also went through problems similar to Richard Wright's problems in *Black Boy*.

*Invisible Man* brings issues such as social integration, black nationalism, social responsibility, economic/ascensionist liberalism. In a primary comparison between this book and the duo *The Man who Lived Underground* and *Native Son*, the topic related to Liberalism is confronted with the Marxist philosophy.

Marxism, as we probably already know, philosophically supposes a collectivization of the means of production and the nationalization of strategic sectors, subordinating all the production of profits to the happiness of the people. Unlike Liberalism, the Individual ends up succumbing to the Collective. From this philosophy derive several alternative philosophies. Socialism (a more moderate variant than pure Communism) is the most famous variant.

Liberalism, on the other hand, defends as a political current individual freedom, based on the positivist principle of the Enlightenment that any man can ascend in life through his work and dedication. A liberalism state opposes itself to a Marxist state in the sense of being just a referee, not intervening actively in the economic activities and means of production. From this point on, we get Economic Liberalism as the most dominant variant of Liberalism in the United States. At the heart of the Economic Liberalism, the center of all activity is the Capital and not the Individual.

However, there is also another variant and very present in Ralph Ellison's work: Social Liberalism. This variant appears closer to the Leftist philosophies, sharing the idea of Social Responsibility (a term very much in vogue today) and recognizing the obstacles that prevent a person from ascending inside a purely capitalist society. This variant does not dominate so much in the United States, appearing more in the Central Europe's nations.

#### **6.4. A visible man vs The invisible man**

The heroes of both authors have different paths in their stories and the introduction of heroes in each of the stories gives us different information about their origins.

As we already learned earlier, we do not have information concerning Fred Daniels' past. All we know is that he is already a grown-up man who is established in his life and that his journey in the novel begins with a key moment that changes his whole life.

As for the case of the invisible man, we already have a bigger psychological and identity base for the Ralphian character, similar to what Richard Wright does in *Black Boy*. The invisible man comes to us as a young black man who, just like the others, tries to build his life by following his dreams.

He is also introduced as an intelligent and talented young man, just like the character of *Black Boy*. He also goes through a lot of obstacles in his life and precarious jobs in his quest for success. However, while Wright thinks of fleeing the South, the Ellison's character intends to return to the South.



The fact that Ralph's character has no name (at least the same is never declared in the work) is probably linked to the title *Invisible Man*. Such title can give us the idea that the character himself does not aspire at all to stand out from mortals, just wanting to be a normal person.

### **6.5. Integration vs Detachment**

Starting from the idea of the previous paragraph, we can bring into discussion two fundamental concepts that oppose the character of Ralph Ellison to the characters of Richard Wright: the integration and detachment of some members of the black community.

Bigger Thomas and Fred Daniels are not exactly anti-social characters, although they tend to be quiet people who want to live their normal life. However, they end up partly unaccepting the idea of society.

Fred Daniels is the most insubordinate of the duo. In the face of his discoveries about the false harmony of his society, Daniels wants by all means to do justice and change the order of things. Daniels, like Bigger, suffers the influence of Leftist ideologies when it comes to ending the oppression of the strong over the weak, although it does not reach the level of the Anarchist ideology in relation to the destruction of hierarchies.

Bigger, on the other hand, does not appear as much as a character claiming for Human Rights. The same has no political interests and even expresses some modesty in relation to Marxism. Bigger's distancing from the Liberal society is more elusive than ideological. This need for evasion arises in a forced manner through the accidental murder of Mary Dalton.

The novel *Invisible Man* brings in a more salient way the duality "Integration vs Distancing" in the Afro-American community.

Ellison's hero initially appears as a subversive character in relation to the dominance of the whites in society. The same hero collides in an academic environment with Doctor Bledsoe, a character who, although being black, believed that the situation in which blacks lived was caused by of the blacks themselves by not wanting to adapt and integrate.

However, in his daydreams between New York and Harlem, the hero eventually joins a White-commanded Brotherhood as he sees this group as a way to integrate and survive in an environment as harsh as the New York's.

This connection to the Brotherhood seems to give Bledsoe some reason, as the hero gets constantly accused by extremist groups linked to Black Nationalism for betraying his community by joining the whites as a main speaker.

This conflict between groups linked to Social Liberalism (and the doctrine of Social Responsibility) and groups linked to Black Nationalism (usually supported by Islamic factions in America) marks a certain clash between what both sides want for the affirmation of Blackness.

On one hand, we have a group that, although probably looking like a wolf disguised as a sheep, intends to integrate black people into Northern society and end segregation and quarrel between races. On the other hand, we have a quarreling movement that is wary of the kindness of Whites, believing that the true place of blacks is far from the sight of Whites. In a way, this view is understandable, since it is motivated by a trauma generated by years of slavery and attacks and lynchings. However, it turns out to be a behavior that is holding the barriers between the black race and the white race.

One of the milestones of this wave of Black Nationalism is the creation of what they understand to be (and what James Baldwin captures in his narrative essay *Down at a Cross*) a "Black God": a righteous God who does not discriminate, who frees his own believers. This God, built to the measure of Islam, opposes the typical white God: Catholic, vengeful and colonizer.

These two antagonistic Gods end up putting us before the glaring idea (usually supported by Atheism) that both the majority and minorities do create a God to their measure as an attempt to reflect their desires in that same God. This is also the view that Fred Daniels has in the chapter VII of the second part of *The Man Who Lived Underground*.

"That was it! Maybe men had invented gods to feel what they could not feel, and they found comfort in the pity of their gods for them... ! For men were overwhelmed with shame and guilt when they looked down upon the irremediable frailty of their lives" (Wright, 2021, p. 113)

This idea of Fred Daniels is, as I said, a very popular idea between atheists and skeptics. It may have some truth to some extent, given the number of venerated religions and Gods that exist in the world. Each generated God and religion have their peculiarities and are always disruptive to other spiritual philosophies.

This idea can be found in the current panorama of pop culture and *geek* culture. This is the case of *The Philosopher's Stone*, the first film of the famous *Harry Potter* saga where, at one point, Dumbledore puts Harry in a huge mirror. When young Harry asks him the function of the mirror, he explains that the mirror shows him his deepest desires.

In a way, the idea of a mirror being able to show us what we are within can be interesting, given that we are often busy with our ambitions and often forget what our true identity is.

## **6.6. Why a Literature of Heroism?**

Richard Wright's writing, as we already know, is simplistic and bluntly, lacking linguistic tricks. Anyone who reads a book written by the author of *The Outsider* may realize in principle that the author's writing does not produce artistic/literary effect. It is a writing stripped of ornaments, contrary to Literature that is often transmitted to us since an early age.

Like the classics of Mark Twain (his countryman), Richard Wright's fictional texts constitute a Literature made of circumstances, always fueled by a high capacity for observation. What happens on a corner does not escape the author's gaze. The author almost assumes a detective role that builds the narrative line of the circumstances of the crime.

The protagonists of Richard Wright are also human characters, free of mysticism and divinity. Everything that happens to them can happen to a normal person. Fred Daniels is a religious who is unlucky enough to be arrested for a crime he didn't commit. It is possible to see cases in real-life of people who have been detained unfairly.

Bigger Thomas is also a person who, despite his criminal record, was trying to build an independent life out of trouble. If we go to the case of *The Outsider*, Cross Damon is also a person who tries to leave his violent past behind to build a new life in Harlem. It is common for people in real life with a criminal past to try to build a cleaner existence.

However, as soon as we pay attention to the identity of the protagonists of *Native Son* and *The Man Who Lived Underground*, we see that it leans towards heroism and martyrdom (as we can already assume before).

In other words, they always commit acts that can be considered heroic for black people. Some of those acts can turn the protagonists into symbols of Negro resistance against racism and segregation.

However, why do we have heroism and martyrdom in Richard Wright's protagonists? What is the purpose behind this heroic narrative full of realistic circumstances? Gene Andrew Jarrett, a researcher and professor in the Department of English at Princeton University gives us an idea in his essay *Sincere Art and Honest Science*<sup>23</sup>.

"Wright belonged to a long line of American writers who incorporated sociological analysis or rhetoric in their literary writings. As a critic, he likewise embraced a viewpoint that appreciated literature's sociological potential" (Jarret, 2019, p. 89)

Richard Wright was in fact fascinated by Sociology and tried to surround himself with intellectuals of this field of thought. Richard tries to get all the knowledge he earns in the midst of these thinkers to be channeled into the creation of his characters.

Allied to the sociological look, we also have the political look. *The Man Who Lived Underground* and *Native Son* even sound like political manifestos against a dominant man's society lying over the dominated man.

With his political eye, Richard Wright creates characters that are subversive to the machine of Economic Liberalism where Humanism does not matter at all and where fortune only matters. Through the sociological perspective, the author creates characters that tell us the *flâneur* narrative of a society that suffers the consequences of being controlled by a larger narrative in the figure of Liberalism.

This literary figure of the martyred Hero in Richard Wright's Literature turns out to be also a common figure, albeit with some nuances. The hero does not always receive death as a form of martyrdom.

The martyrdom that the Hero does receive can come in the form of trials, as is the case of *Black Boy* or works coming from outside Richard Wright's universe. This is the case of works such as *Letter to my Daughter*, by Maya Angelou.

---

<sup>23</sup> Jarrett, Gene Andrew. *Sincere Art and Honest Science: Richard Wright and the Chicago School of Sociology*. In Carpio, Glenda R. (Ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Wright* (pp. 87-102). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## 7. To Whom Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison do address themselves

As has previously been mentioned, *The Man Who Lived Underground* sounds like a kind of political manifesto, as does *Native Son*. Ralph Ellison also presents us politics as a weighty element in his well-acclaimed novel *Invisible Man*.

However, if we start from the premise that these three novels constitute manifestos, one question can be able to quickly emerge: to whom are those manifestos addressed? Who are the first receivers of the words written by these two authors? Are they the popular masses, just like in a sermon preached on Sunday School? Or are really they those "sharks", the ones who searches for food to feed their constant hunger and gluttony?

In fact, we are allowed to consider that the audience attentively hearing these manifestos is a mixed audience. That is, that "cattle" are the civil masses at certain times; at other times, the audience is only composed by the powerful people who have the ability to actually do something for the Negroes (despite often hiding themselves behind choreographed actions to have get a good image).

In the case of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, we are capable of checking that the criticism that is directly and indirectly wove by Richard Wright is not only sent to the powerful people, but also to the civils which, despite being victims of several horrible acts, do not seem to be doing much to reverse their own situation.

In fact, in *Memories of my Grandmother*, the author himself mirrors this inertia in his grandmother's paradoxical actions over him. Those non-coherent actions do symbolize the insignificant actions that people usually do evade their reality.

"Now for the enumeration; I shall discuss a paradoxical one first. My grandmother was an enemy of all books save those based upon or derived from the Bible. (...) In contrast to this, my grandmother would pray that I acquire knowledge to get on in the world, in order that I might succeed in supporting myself, and she took great pride in all good reports she heard of my progress in school" (Wright, 2021, p. 171)

This passage, as we have already had the opportunity to talk about before, shows us an aversion of Richard's grandmother to all the Literature and non-Literature that is not based on the liturgy and the

Holy Scripture. This aversion inevitably made her adopt the very typical posture of the Spanish Inquisition: burning all those “dangerous” books capable of diverting innocent minds.

However, she seemed to get pride out of her own grandson's cognitive abilities who, despite his hardships, is still managing to obtain great grades. We can also verify this in Wright’s autobiographical novel *Black Boy*.

On the previous page of the same essay, Richard Wright shows us such curious insight into his grandmother’s personality.

"My grandmother was a rebel, as thorough a rebel as ever lived on this earth; she was at war, ceaselessly, militantly at war with every particle of reality she saw. In her way and according to her light, she strove to transform the world; she fought the world, she attacked it..." (Wright, 2021, p. 170)

On religious issues, Richard Wright always addresses his criticism to his own people. Richard puts in Fred Daniels' viewpoints the hugely popular idea that the people hide behind the belief in order to avoid a confrontation with reality, often losing an identity of their own.

In this line of reasoning, all those believers seem to live in a typical setting of Malcolm Bradbury's dystopian work *Fahrenheit 451*, where the civil characters do pretend that everything is perfectly fine, refusing to wonder about what surrounds them. They always perform that act in the name of never-ending happiness.

"When he had sung and prayed with his brothers and sisters in church, he had always felt what they felt; but here in the underground, distantly sundered from them, he saw a defenseless nakedness in their lives that made him disown them" (Wright, 2021, p. 63)

Still, Fred Daniels ends up falling into the same inertia as his comrades', given that, in the face of all that set of small inertias he is experiencing and disapproving, he never takes an effective action to reverse those people’s mindset.

All of this may be yet another criticism pointed at the civilians through that Tolstoy's celebrated idea that we cannot change the world without changing our inner selves in the first place.

Unlike Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison seems to take advantage of that undesirable silence (or silent action), rather than taking it of noise. For that author, the way we should walk on must not go

through some direct confrontation with the higher power. For him, such irreverence of confronting the powerful is totally useless. That is what we found him saying on his novel's prologue.

"You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, wings, it's seldom successful"<sup>24</sup> (Ellison, 2001, pp. 3-4)

On the same prologue Ellison points out a critique and a set of ideas of what there may be more meaningful actions through making less noise.

"Most of the time (although I do not choose as I once did to deny the violence of my days by ignoring it) I am not so overtly violent. I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones" (Ellison, 2001, p. 5)

"Sometimes it is best not to awaken them; There are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers. I learned in time though that it is possible to carry on a fight against them without their realizing it" (Ellison, 2001, p. 5)

We can see here a massive difference between Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison's literary reasoning in the construction of their protagonists' viewpoint in relation to their community's action. The writer born in Mississippi sends his criticism to his people for the passivity that their actions do present.

On the other hand, the writer born in Oklahoma does criticize some of the people for being confrontational - and sometimes violent - in their protests. The author follows a little the line of reasoning present in the perspective James Baldwin has in his remarkable work *Fire Next Time*<sup>25</sup> in what concerns to the extremism used by the black nationalist movements.

"When I was very young, and was dealing with my buddies in those wine- and urine-stained hallways, something in me wondered, What will happen to all that beauty? For black people, though I am aware that some of us, black and white, do not know it yet, are very beautiful" (Baldwin, 2006, p. 88)

---

<sup>24</sup> Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man* (1st ed.). London: Penguin Books.

<sup>25</sup> Baldwin, James. (2006). *Fire Next Time* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). London: Penguin Books.

Still, Baldwin also does criticize on the following page the intransigence and the ignorance of the White as elements that ultimately hinder an attempt of negotiating rights and duties between both sides.

"I could also see that the intransigence and ignorance of the white world might make that vengeance inevitable (...) historical vengeance, a cosmic vengeance, based on the law that we recognize when we say, "Whatever goes up must come down" (Baldwin, 2006, p. 89)

As we make our return to Wright's criticism about not being able to change the world without changing our inner world firstly, we also find this little conformist act in the Ralph Ellison's main character who, when approached by the leader of the Brotherhood, tries to move away from what the young man insistently tries to propose him (a little out of fear too), unrecognizing some sort of talent in himself.

"So what? I'm neither a criminal nor a politician, brother.  
So you picked the wrong man" (Ellison, 2001, p. 283)

Based on what the young protagonist says above, we have a basic idea that only a politician can move crowds in favor of changing the game; or, according to him, only a person with a criminal past can express himself before a crowd regarding all the injustices of society.

In other words, a person with a clean record like him will never have a remarkable enough life experience that lets him be angry to speak out against the wrongness of his society.

We get probably faced with another discourse on the conformism of the people's members who are considered in this case.

Still, when asked by Jack about what made him perform the speech in public, the young man claimed to be annoyed by what he was happening before his eyes.

"Because I was upset over seeing those old folks put out in the street,  
that's why. I don't care what you call it, I was angry" (Ellison, 2001, p. 281)



Nevertheless, it follows an exchange of lines between Jack and the Invisible Man that also be perceived as a criticism directed at Negroes and the White elite. It can be considered a criticism of an elite that does not understand what forms the Afro descendant identity as the construction of an affectionate bond between its members.

It can also be considered as being a criticism directed at black citizens, because of them not being enough humanists to such an extent where they consider a white man to be as human as a negro (which is certainly understandable).

"Why do you fellows always talk in terms of race!" he snapped, his eyes blazing. "What other terms do you know?" I said, puzzled. "You think I would have been around there if they had been white?" (Ellison, 2001, p. 282)

As for the Elite and the Powerful, Richard Wright also presents us through Fred Daniels a statement directed at the deterministic way those cops act towards Negroes. This is the case of the scene where Johnson tortures the young boy who is accused of stealing a radio.

"(...) he wanted to leap through the narrow hole and across the dark of the basement and up the stairs and rescue the boy, telling him: yes, tell 'im you stole the radio, even if you didn't. Tell 'im you're guilty... Don't you know you're guilty" (Wright, 2021, p. 129)

In *Native Son*, Richard Wright uses Max's voice (a privileged white man) to address the people in a more positivist tone, again criticizing the Powerful and segregated education they gave to blacks.

"Bigger, you're going to die. And if you die, die free. You're trying to believe in yourself. And every time you try to find a way to live, your own mind stands in the way. You know why that is? It's because others have said you were bad and they made you live in bad conditions" (Wright, 2000, p. 452)

In *Black Boy*<sup>6</sup>, we can find a thought that can be directed to the common reader and, at meantime, to the white reader coming from a dominant background (especially to the white reader). In

---

<sup>6</sup> Wright, Richard. (2000). *Black Boy* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). London: Vintage.

this same thought, Richard Wright shares the same rejection that Luther King and Malcolm later do express in relation to what is said to be the place of a Negro in life.

"Well, the White South had never known me ... The white South said that I had a "place" in life.. Well, I had never felt my "place" (...) my deepest instincts had always made me reject the "place" to which the white South had assigned me" (Wright, 2000, p. 261)

### **7.1. Is this related with the French and Classical idealizations?**

All that critical and libertine discourse directed at the people may be directly related to a certain kind of idealization in the Afro imaginary regarding the modern and ancestral European culture, especially French culture.

If we look at the history of American Literature of the twentieth century, we see that there was a whole generation of writers who, led by major figures such as Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway, settled in Paris and created over there literary works that have remained eternized to this day.

Black writers were no exception and figures such as James Baldwin and Richard Wright became acclaimed in French literary salons.

This kind of worship that black authors used to nourish for France has to do with the humanist reception they received in Paris, where racism was not a great problem like it was in the United States.

If we analyze the cultural roots of France, we see that it is the cradle of the French Revolution, a historical event which inspired the American Revolution with the universal concepts *Liberté*, *Egalité* and *Fraternité*.

It is also from this revolution that the concept of Enlightenment is born later, the so-called philosophical current which states that anyone can ascend socially through his own effort. It is also in France that, through the Enlightenment, arises the concept of "Liberalism", a concept so dear to the political philosophy of the United States.

The Statue of Liberty, a touristic symbol of the United States, was initially a French monument in memory of the French Revolution. It is therefore a symbol brought by the United States from French culture.

It is to be believed that the fascination nourished by the black writers (and the American writers in general) for Paris and Europe in general can be linked to the fact that Europeans apply a more socialist and humanitarian policy in their nations.

Liberalism assumes in these countries the status of Social Liberalism, where the barriers that prevent the individual from its natural ascension are recognized. Justice in Europe also has a very distinct notion of good and evil from American concepts and trials are fairer, giving the defendant the opportunity to defend himself in a dignified manner.

## Conclusion

Richard Wright is a writer not to be overlooked. And so does *The Man Who Lived Underground*, like any book that may bring or add something new to the debate on police brutality. This novel gives us a protagonist who is a common man whose previous life we will never know. It is very important to have a real-life character when it comes to create a story which establishes abuse of power as the main theme.

When compared with *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, it is worth noting that *The Man Who Lived Underground* is the work that delivers the police officers as the principal opponent to the hero developed by Richard Wright. The other two famous books written by the author born in Mississippi do bring them as secondary figures who normally help the primary opponents put the hero in troubles or materialize his tragic fate.

Fred Daniels is a tragic hero who shows us his journey of resilience where he is constantly discovering new truths about the city he lives in. The time he spends hiding in the underground leads him to the starting point of human existence, giving him some good spots where he can observe all the daily activity of the people. This distant position took by Daniels reveals to be fundamental for us to get an image of how simple human beings are, regardless of the skin color they got at birth. We also get from this position an idea of how fragile authority can be, because “all men are created equal”. In addition, the posthumous novel develops a whole line of psychological transformation of the protagonist during the journey in the underground.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* originally emerges during a remarkable time regarding persecutions and attacks on Negroes, a time where cases like the case of George Stinney took place. Richard Wright writes this and the other two *magna opera* during a time where significant “white” books are published. Richard Wright becomes later an African American figure among the expatriate writers in France, a generation of famous white writers who were already opponents to an imperialist America. Richard Wright also lives in a time marked by the expansion of Communism in the world, attracting the heart of artists and civils who are not satisfied with the political situation.

*The Man Who Lived Underground* is important for all this. It is a remarkable story which has all this background and has the great ability to remain actual. The story, like *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, brings has all these topics underlying the main topic of segregation and brutality, with the help of *Memories of my Grandmother* and *Afterword*. *The Man Who Lived Underground* is a story which, after

eight decades, is published right on time, during a “racial reckoning” triggered by the murder of George Floyd. It is another reason for the book to not be overlooked. It is a story that, despite not being published by the time he was finished, it has the virtue of being timeless and comparable to any occurrence in our days. The book can be used in any debate about police brutality, together with the rest of the *oeuvre* of Richard Wright and the *oeuvre* of another authors.

## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Bibliography**

#### **Books:**

- Wright, Richard. (2021). *The Man Who Lived Underground* (1st ed.). New York: Library of America.
- Wright, Richard. (2000). *Black Boy* (1st ed.). London: Vintage.
- Wright, Richard. (2000). *Native Son* (1st ed.). London: Vintage.
- Ellison, Ralph. (2001). *Invisible Man* (1st ed.). London: Penguin Books.
- Baldwin, James. (2006). *Fire Next Time* (1st ed.). London: Penguin Books.

#### **Websites:**

- National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). *Declaration of independence: A transcription*. National Archives and Records Administration. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- *U.S. Constitution - Eighth Amendment | Resources - Congress*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-8/>
- *U.S. Constitution - Thirteenth Amendment | Resources - Congress*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-13/>
- *U.S. Constitution - Fifteenth Amendment | Resources - Congress*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-15/>
- *U.S. Constitution - Nineteenth Amendment | Resources - Congress*. U.S. Constitution – Nineteenth Amendment . (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-19/>
- *Martin Luther King I have a dream speech - american rhetoric*. American Rhetoric. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

- Taylor, R. (2020, July 3). *The ballot or the bullet speech transcript - malcolm X*. Rev. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/the-ballot-or-the-bullet-speech-transcript-malcolm-x>

- Hughes, L. (n.d.). *I, too by Langston Hughes*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too>

- Hughes, L. (n.d.). *Let America be America again by Langston Hughes*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147907/let-america-be-america-again>

- Angelou, M. (n.d.). *Still I rise by Maya Angelou*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise>

- Hughes, L. (n.d.). *I look at the world by Langston Hughes*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/52005/i-look-at-the-world>

- Langston Hughes, L. H. (n.d.). *Southern Mammy Sings by Langston Hughes*. Poetry Foundation. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=58&issue=2&page=15>

- New York Times' article: Betts, R. D. (2021, April 20). Richard Wright's newly RESTORED novel is a tale for today. The New York Times. Retrieved September 20, 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/20/books/review/richard-wright-man-wholived-underground.html?smid=em-share>

## **Videos**

- YouTube. (2011). *Martin Luther King - I Have A Dream Speech*. YouTube. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnklfYs>.

- YouTube. (2017). *Malcolm X - "The Ballot or the Bullet"*. YouTube. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zLQLUpNGsc>.

## Secondary Bibliography

### Books

- Bloom, Harold. (Editor). (2009). *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Richard Wright* (New Edition). New York: Infobase Publishing.
- Graham, Maryemma. (Editor). (2004). *Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel* (1st ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Graham, Maryemma. & JR, Jerry W. Ward. (Editors). (2011). *The Cambridge History of African American Literature* (1st ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carpio, Glenda R. (Editor). (2019). *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Wright* (1st ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. (1992). *The Modern American Novel* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Opus.
- McDonald, Gail. (2007). *American Literature and Culture, 1900-1960* (1st ed.). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Richard, Ruland. & Bradbury, Malcolm. (1991). *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: a history of American Literature* (1st ed.). New York: Viking Penguin.

### Videos

- YouTube. (2012). *James Baldwin Debates William F. Buckley*. YouTube. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFeoS41xe7w>.
- YouTube. (2022). *Native Son (1951)*. YouTube. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMB-UC4a6SQ>.
- YouTube. (2022, March 25). *The problem with white people | the problem with Jon Stewart | Apple TV+*. YouTube. Retrieved October 18, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu27WJOAxcw>

### Websites

- *Blvck paper on Instagram*. Instagram. (n.d.). Retrieved October 18, 2022, from [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiANfmPjadW/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiANfmPjadW/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)