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### A Bibliography on Bigger Thomas and Identity from 1940-1979

This bibliography consists of 85 entries centering on identity studies related to Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. I have chosen to limit the scope of the project to the years between 1940 and 1979 since these years focus on the response to Bigger's character when the novel was first published in 1940, during WWII, and then the later analyses of Bigger's persona when the novel was republished in 1966 after Wright's death in 1960 and during the most influential years of the Civil Rights Movement. The entries themselves are arranged in chronological order to show the initial reception to Bigger's character, the lull following the first edition reception from 1940-1966 in which only the most prominent critics and writers of the time offered commentary on Bigger's character, and then the rebirth of a new era of criticism in 1966 when the novel was republished. Kenneth Kinnamon published a bibliography in 1988 entitled *A Richard Wright Bibliography: Fifty Years of Criticism and Commentary, 1933-1982* which includes every work ever written by Wright and every piece of commentary or criticism ever written about those works. The bibliography I compiled differs greatly from Kinnamon's bibliography in that it focuses specifically on Bigger's identity. It is a narrowly focused look at his character construction and search for self.

The fact that the novel is a character-driven work and that Bigger is such an icon of black American fiction, means that nearly everything ever written about the novel mentions his persona in some way. In this bibliography, therefore, I have chosen to include only books and

articles from scholarly journals which specifically address Bigger's identity. I have excluded encyclopedic entries and most of the early reviews which mention Bigger's persona and character arc in some way, but tend to address his persona in conjunction with the plot, rather than specifically discussing his search for self. Instead, I included a representative sampling of three positive reviews by Sterling Brown, Ben Davis Jr. and Samuel Sillen, as well as three negative reviews by Rascoe Burton, David Cohn and Howard Mumford Jones which address Bigger's identity in some depth and which are the best representatives of the overall response to his character. I also included Wright's response to the negative reviews, titled "I Bite the Hand That Feeds Me," since his counterpoint provides interesting and relevant details about Bigger's character. The later critiques of the work, by prominent black authors such as James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, as well as prominent literary critics such as Irving Howe, Robert Bone and Edward Margolies, provide much deeper and richer commentary on the work than the initial reviews could provide and are therefore more useful and relevant for this particular bibliography. I included the introduction to the first edition by Dorothy Canfield Fisher since it addresses the significance of Bigger Thomas' identity at the time the book was published. I also incorporated Wright's seminal essay "How 'Bigger' Was Born" since it provides a unique look into Wright's background and writing process and how they influenced his construction of Bigger's internal character arc. I also included Wright's 1945 autobiography *Black Boy* since many of the critical writings about Bigger reference this work and compare Wright's upbringing to Bigger's story. *Black Boy* was republished alongside *Native Son* in 1966, showing the significance and ties between these two works. Finally, I included Frantz Fanon's "Concerning Violence" and William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs' "Acquiring Manhood" since both works, though they do not address Bigger directly, are considered cornerstone works about black identity and

aggression. They are also mentioned frequently in works written about Bigger and are often published alongside scholarly articles about Bigger in compilations. One last note for future researchers, though I did not include Wright's 1937 essay "Blueprint for Negro Writing" because it was published prior to *Native Son*, it is an important work to read in conjunction with any studies on Bigger since it spells out Wright's philosophies on black fiction writing and was literally a "blueprint" for his construction of Bigger and *Native Son*.

*Native Son* is Wright's second work of fiction. His first work was *Uncle Tom's Children: Four Novellas* (1938). His other works of fiction include: *Uncle Tom's Children: Five Long Stories* (1940), *The Outsider* (1953), *Savage Holiday* (1954) and *The Long Dream* (1958). Four additional novels were published posthumously, including: *Eight Men* (1961), *Lawd Today!* (1963), *American Hunger* (1977) and *Rite of Passage* (1994). Wright's non-fiction works include: *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941), *Black Boy: A Recollection of Childhood and Youth* (1945), *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954), *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956), *Pagan Spain* (1957) and *White Man, Listen!* (1957). Wright's autobiographical work *Black Boy*, is especially pertinent to this particular bibliography since Wright's background is consistently mentioned in conjunction with Bigger's story. Wright has written numerous other works of poetry and critical essays, including "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937) and "How 'Bigger Was Born,'" (1940) both of which contributed greatly to his construction of Bigger Thomas' character.

The articles themselves were compiled from the following sources.

CSUN English Multisearch:

- MLA International Bibliography

- JSTOR Language and Literature
- Project Muse
- Project and Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA)
- Humanities Full Text (Wilson)
- Literature Resource Center
- Literature Resource Center Periodical Index
- GenderWatch, Readers' Guide Full Text (Wilson)
- Readers' Guide Retrospective (Wilson)
- Oxford English Dictionary
- Oviatt Library Catalog.

CSUN Psychology Multisearch:

- PsycINFO (EBSCO)
- PsycARTICLES (EBSCO)
- Academic Search Elite (EBSCO)
- Biological Abstracts (ISI)
- CINAHL Plus with Full Text (EBSCO)
- Education Full Text (Wilson)
- ERIC (CSA), ERIC (EBSCO)
- GenderWatch, General OneFile (Gale)
- General Science Full Text (Wilson)
- Health Reference Center (Gale)
- IEEE Xplore
- JSTOR, PILOTS Database (CSA)

- Sociological Abstracts (CSA)
- SpringerLink
- Wiley Interscience
- Wilson OmniFile Full Text Mega
- WorldCat.

#### CSUN Sociology Multisearch

- Sociological Abstracts (CSA)
- Social Services Abstracts (CSA)
- SAGE Journals Online
- Social Sciences Full Text (Wilson)
- Project Muse
- PsycINFO (EBSCO)
- JSTOR Sociology
- ProQuest Newspapers
- GenderWatch
- Linguistics and Language Behavior (LLBA)
- America: History & Life (EBSCO)
- Historical Abstracts
- Academic Search Elite (EBSCO)
- Expanded Academic ASAP (Gale)
- Readers' Guide Retrospective (Wilson)
- American Periodicals Series Online (ProQuest)
- Chicano Database

- Communication & Mass Media (EBSCO)
- CQ Researcher and CQ Weekly
- New York Times Historical
- Los Angeles Times Historical
- Oviatt Library Catalog and Cal State Union Catalog.

Additional materials came from the CSUN Black Studies Center and from biographical books on Richard Wright as well as from compilations of essays either written about Bigger Thomas himself or about *Native Son* in general. Many essays written about Bigger's character are reprinted in multiple compilations, suggesting that many of the themes about his identity address important, timeless universal themes about black race identity.

The following are the best compilation resources for this particular topic:

- *Richard Wright's Native Son: A Critical Handbook*. Ed. Richard Abcarian. (1970)
- *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Native Son*. Ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (1972)
- *Richard Wright: The Critical Reception*. Ed. John M. Reilly. (1978)
- *Critical Essays on Richard Wright*. Ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani. (1982)
- *Bigger Thomas*. Ed. Harold Bloom. (1990)
- *The Critical Response to Richard Wright*. Ed. Robert J. Butler. (1995)

I was unable to obtain three works by Kathleen Gaffney, Keorapetse Kgositsile and Ron Samples which were printed in the first edition of a 1970 periodical titled *Roots*, because there are more than 100 other periodicals with the same title and neither I nor the Interlibrary Loan staff at CSUN was able to locate the correct journal. I included the articles anyway, however, because each look to address important topics on the subject of Bigger's identity.

The annotated bibliographies are intended to highlight the most prominent and influential works written about Bigger not only from a literary scholar viewpoint, but also from the viewpoints of authors, psychologists and sociologists. The works chosen are intended to provide a diverse, multi-dimensional view of Bigger's persona from every possible angle including sociological, political, psychological, existential and societal in order to show his wide-ranging influence on black fiction, on race relations in America and on cultural ideology. I included black author James Baldwin's "Many Thousands Gone," for example, because his famous scathing critique of Wright's work sets up a decade-long debate between the two authors about, among other things, character portrayals in black fiction. On the flip side, I included Charles V. Charles' "Optimism and Frustration in the American Negro" because it shows a 29-page clinical evaluation of Bigger's psyche from a psychologist's perspective. I also included Howe's seminal chapter from *A World More Attractive*, titled "Black Boys and Native Sons," since it, perhaps more than any other article, praises Wright's use of an angry and aggressive character to wake readers up to the consequences of oppression. I did not annotate articles from Bone and Margolies because their analyses address the most common issues related to Bigger's persona, namely his fear, anger, isolation and transformation, from a standard viewpoint and do not add a particularly unique voice to the discussion. However, their articles do provide a necessary foundation on the topic and therefore should be included in any research on this issue. I also included works by R.B.V. Larsen, James A. Emanuel, James Nagel, Robert Felgar and Charles W. Scruggs which address Bigger's persona through diverse perspectives on narrative style and imagery. Finally, I included works by M.E. Grenander, Jerold J. Savory, Jerry Wasserman and Robert Stanton which compare Bigger's persona to classic characters such as Rick Romano in Willard Motley's *Knock on Any Door*, Job in the *Book of Job*, the Invisible Man in Ralph

Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

These comparisons show both the universality of Bigger's identity struggles and the uniqueness of his particular portrayal.

Bigger's complicated character portrayal generated passionate responses from critics in 1940 when Wright's novel *Native Son* was first published. These fervent reactions show what an explosive impact Bigger had not only on the literary scene of the time, but also on the history of black writing and the way in which black characters were constructed. The continued debate over Bigger's identity, by prominent black authors such as Baldwin and Ellison, as well as renowned critics such as Margolies, Howe and Bone, illustrates the universality of his characterization and the complexity of his portrayal. The fact that the novel began to generate new interest after Wright's death in 1960 and that an increasing number of writers began to reexamine Bigger's character in a time of racial turmoil in the most influential years of the Civil Rights Movement shows that the issues surrounding Bigger's identity were still relevant even 20 years after the initial book was published. The fact that the novel was then republished in 1966 is further testament to this fact. This bibliography is intended to illustrate Bigger's staying power by showing the initial responses to his portrayal, the debate over his identity and the new era of criticism that emerged in the '60s and '70s. Only a character of great influence and power could generate the kind of heated debate that Bigger engendered. This is what makes a look at the history of criticism on his identity relevant enough to generate a bibliography in his name.



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### Annotated Bibliographies

Wright, Richard. "How Bigger Was Born." *Native Son*. 1940. New York: HarperCollins, 2005. 433-62. Print.

Written by Wright himself, this essay seeks to explain how Wright constructed the character of Bigger Thomas from an amalgamation of characteristics he saw portrayed by aggressive young black men he grew up with on the streets of Jackson, Mississippi. Wright first creates a character sketch of each of the five "types" of boys he had known, showing how each reacted to the poverty, oppression and the emasculating frustration of living as a black man in 1930s America. Each "Bigger" died young as a result of illicit activities and choices he made in the name of rebellion. Wright explains the underlying objective reasons for each character's revolt and how segregation, white oppression and poverty led many to violence. He explains how he took all of these informed notions about black people, black life, black prejudices and black nationalist perspectives, and wove them together into one cohesive character and plotline which embodied at least in some small way the perspectives of all the black men he had ever known. He says that purging a lifetime of thoughts, ideas and perspectives from his mind and seeing them come alive in the text was a deeply fulfilling experience akin to prayer.

Charles, Charles V. "Optimism and Frustration in the American Negro." *Psychoanalytic Review* 29.3 (1942): 270-299. Microfilm. *University Microfilms* 29 (1942): reel 6.

Charles gives an in-depth psychological analysis of every facet of Bigger's personality. He discusses Bigger's repression, narcissism, fantasies, fear, feeling of inferiority, bodily sensations, tension and emasculation and shows how these neuroses prevent him from adequate assimilation into society. Charles shows how Bigger's longing for socialization combined with repeated failures in this area causes regression, mood swings and anger and drives him to more and more desperate acts. He shows how Bigger's need to fulfill his unmet aspirations feeds an unhealthy overdevelopment of the ego, which results in an obsessive focus on the self and a diminished regard for other people. This demanding ego will stop at nothing to get Bigger's most innate desires met, even if this means resorting to abuse, violence, rape or murder. Finally, Charles contends that any man, regardless of race, who was exposed to the same setting, background, environment and circumstances as Bigger, would have a similar neurotic reaction. Therefore, Bigger's psychosis is not a race issue, but a human issue.

Glicksberg, Charles I. "Negro Fiction in America." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 65 (1946), 478-88.

Rpt. in *Richard Wright's Native Son: A Critical Handbook*. Ed. Richard Abcarian.

Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970. 102-11. Print.

Glicksberg first gives a brief history of black American writing prior to 1940. He then shows how Wright's *Native Son* transformed that tradition with its daring, no-holds-barred portrayal of Bigger Thomas. Glicksberg asserts that Wright sets Bigger up as a representative of the black race and of the black male's angry response to white America's refusal to allow him to become a full member of society. But, while Glicksberg praises Wright's daring, multi-faceted portrayal of Bigger, he also questions whether Bigger's violent murderous response to this societal alienation is in fact

representative of the majority of the black population. He also questions whether this depiction of Bigger might encourage violence in the already volatile black psyche and, on the other side, whether Bigger's murders might be interpreted as a threat against white society. Glicksberg suggests that what might prevent Wright's portrayal of Bigger from seeming antagonistic is the fact that at the core, Bigger's rebellious, fearful and aggressive personality is universal and can be understood by members of all races. Finally, Glicksberg praises Wright for not holding back on his portrayal of Bigger's volatile identity even though he knew it would generate controversy from both the white and black communities. But then Glicksberg again questions whether Wright went too far in his portrayal of Bigger's anger and made him into a subhuman character type which no longer represented the black race in a realistic and relatable way.

Baldwin, James. "Many Thousands Gone." *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955. 24-45. Print.

Baldwin harshly critiques Richard Wright's *Native Son* and his construction of Bigger as a social representative of the black populace. Baldwin believes that Wright's depiction of Bigger as brutal, aggressive and murderous reinforces white readers' commonly held negative black stereotypes and perpetuates white readers' fear of black men. Baldwin also disagrees with Wright's choice to show Bigger as a man disassociated from other members of the black race. Baldwin believes black solidarity to be an inherent and vital component of black living in America and therefore believes it a mistake to create a character estranged from his people. Finally, Baldwin commends Wright for showing how oppressive social reality has impacted Bigger's psyche, but he asserts that Wright left out the most important component of that oppression: Acceptance and

adjustment to the reality of life. Baldwin believes Bigger's inability to accept his place in the albeit unsatisfactory space blacks occupy in 1930s America, makes him less of a representative of typical black males of the time and more of a monstrous anomaly. By the end of the novel, Baldwin contends, the hate between Bigger and the white populace is reinforced rather than transcended. The white jury wants Bigger to die as much as Bigger himself wants to be freed from his all-consuming hate.

Howe, Irving. "Black Boys and Native Sons." *A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics*. New York: Horizon Press, 1963. 100-10. Print.

Howe praises Wright's characterization of Bigger's aggressive personality saying that it wakes white and black readers up to their role in societal oppression -- the first for instigating the subjugation, the latter for allowing it. Howe commends Wright, too, for bringing out into the open the hostility buried deep in the black psyche that is rarely expressed with such unfiltered honesty. Howe says that this characterization forces whites to recognize and take responsibility for the consequences of centuries of oppression rather than turning a blind eye to it as a way of assuaging guilt. Howe asserts that Wright's frank characterization in the novel paved the way for future influential black fiction writers such as James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison. Howe speaks highly of the way in which Wright constructs a character that symbolizes the most damaging effects of oppression on the individual and then shows the potential consequences of those effects in action. Finally, Howe lauds the way in which Wright uses sensationalism to move Bigger's character beyond a realist representation toward grotesque but compelling symbolism.

Emanuel, James A. "Fever and Feeling. Notes on Imagery in *Native Son*." *Negro Digest* 18.2 (1968). 160-67. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Feb. 2010.

Emmanuel discusses the ways in which Richard Wright uses symbolic imagery to further enhance reader understanding of Bigger's identity. Emmanuel shows how the furnace reinforces the fiery guilt bubbling in Bigger's belly. He demonstrates how Bigger retreats to the center of a given space any time he feels constricted by the events happening around him. He explains how eyes are used by Wright as a symbol of guilt and as a figurative symbol of the spiritual blindness of Bigger and the other characters in the novel. He even shows how Wright uses the figurative image of a wall as a symbol of separation and detachment. Emmanuel asserts that these images and many others serve to deepen reader understanding of Bigger and of the black male persona in America. \

Gibson, Donald B. "Wright's Invisible Native Son." *American Quarterly* 21.4 (1969): 728-38. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 7 Feb. 2010.

Gibson contends that past critics of *Native Son* have focused too much on the social significance of Bigger Thomas and have therefore missed the most significant point of the novel -- Bigger's journey of self realization. Gibson asserts that critics' misplaced focus on the social aspect of Bigger's persona have caused them to place too much emphasis on Boris Max's speech at the end of the novel, to misread the novel's ending, to incorrectly label the novel a propaganda piece and ultimately to misunderstand Bigger as a person. Focusing on the final section of the novel, titled "Fate," Gibson shows how Wright uses existentialism to artfully construct Bigger's inner philosophical struggle and how Bigger finds ultimate freedom and salvation in his budding conscious awareness of self.

Nagel, James. "Images of 'Vision' in *Native Son*." *University Review* 36 (1969). 109-15. Rpt. in *Critical Essays on Richard Wright*. Ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1982. 151-58. Print.

Nagel contends that Wright uses vision as a metaphor for conscious awareness in *Native Son*. Nagel asserts that in the novel white society generalizes black men like Bigger as a type rather than seeing them as unique individuals. By the same token, black people like Bigger only see whites through the eyes of the media. Nagel suggests that Wright constructs these generalizations to show that they can lead to racial stereotyping and a lack of understanding between races. Also, Nagel says, Wright uses these generalities to show how they can prevent a black person such as Bigger from seeing his true self. Nagel shows how Bigger starts out the novel as a blind individual who not only does not know himself as a person but who also intentionally isolates himself from others as a means of protecting his inner self from being seen. The turning point in Bigger's vision of himself and the world, Nagel argues, comes when Bigger accidentally murders Mary. Nagel says Bigger's murder shows the consequences of Bigger's blindness. At the same time, it allows Bigger to assert himself in society for the first time, thereby helping him to see his true self. Though he is arrested, Nagel claims that Bigger and those around him begin to gain a new perception of the world as a result of his crime. Nagel contends, too, that Wright's multifaceted use of the vision metaphor throughout the novel serves to further the theme that one of the worst forms of societal oppression of any race is the denial of individual awareness.

Stanton, Robert. "Outrageous Fiction: *Crime and Punishment*, *The Assistant*, and *Native Son*." *Pacific Coast Philology* 4 (1969): 52-58. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Feb. 2010.

Stanton contends that Malamud's *The Assistant* and Wright's *Native Son* expand upon some of Dostoyevsky's most important underlying themes. In the section comparing *Crime and Punishment* and *Native Son*, Stanton focuses on the morality of Raskolnikov and Bigger. Stanton starts the discussion with the contention that in order to be moral, a person must first acknowledge himself as a person, something neither character does initially because of their abject poverty. Stanton asserts that for those with money, morality means choosing a positive way of acting which brings rewards such as societal and self respect. But, in the poverty-stricken worlds of Raskolnikov and Bigger, morality cannot bring them self respect because they cannot choose to act the way they want. Or, as in the case of Bigger, when he does do what he wants, his family and friends accuse him of being selfish. Stanton asserts that this is the primary conflict that both characters share: The choice between acting virtuous and acting to further one's own interests. In the end, both choose self over duty. They both choose to assert their sense of self by committing murder. The irony for both characters, Stanton asserts, is that in order to claim their identities, both feel they are forced to carry out immoral acts. Stanton asserts that this leads to an even more interesting irony: By committing these acts, both become more moral and gain a sense of belonging. Stanton contends that for both their acts show them how they have wronged a fellow member of civilization and how they themselves, despite their poverty, are in fact a part of the brotherhood of humanity.

James, Charles L. "Bigger Thomas in the Seventies: A Twentieth-Century Search for Relevance." *English Record* 22.1 (1971): 6-14. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Feb. 2010.

James contends that Bigger's actions in *Native Son* are driven by his deep desire to find meaning in his life. James argues that the white world has made him feel insignificant and emasculated. Therefore, James claims, Bigger tries to make up for his feelings of inadequacy either by detaching from the world as a way of rejecting it, or by asserting his manhood through acts of aggression. James contends that the source of Bigger's angst lies in the conflict between wanting to perform an act of significance and feeling as though his acts have no meaning in the white world. James argues that Bigger's recognition of this conflict shows his unique sensibility to the restrictive nature of white societal law. James claims that Bigger views his job at the Dalton home to be the ultimate act of submission. Therefore, he rebels against it in the only way he knows how: with violence and murder. Unfortunately, James stresses, though Bigger views his murder of Mary as the act of significance he has been seeking, no one else acknowledges it as such. Therefore, in prison, James contends, Bigger searches for some other form of meaning to give his life significance before he is sentenced to die for his crimes. James argues that he finds it in his relationship with Mary's boyfriend Jan, who appeals to Bigger's innate humanity by reaching out from a place of equality.

Kearns, Edward. "The 'Fate' Section of *Native Son*." *Contemporary Literature* 12.2 (1971): 146-55. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 10 Feb. 2010.

Kearns contends that critics have largely misunderstood Book Three of *Native Son*. He seeks to illuminate the meaning of this section by focusing on Bigger's journey



of identity and the final section's culmination of his character arc. Kearns asserts that Bigger's struggle to find a true identity stems from the conflict he experiences between his abstract existence and the reality of his situation. Kearns argues that Bigger prefers the world of illusions he creates in his mind and which society perpetuates through the use of abstract slogans, political campaigns and media stereotyping, to the painful reality of his situation. The danger, Kearns asserts, is that if Bigger accepts the fantasies that the white world offers him, then he himself becomes an illusion, a stereotype. Kearns explains that Bigger's unreal view of life then leads him to kill Mary because he does not see her as a real person, but simply as a part of his world of illusions. Ironically, Kearns says, Mary's murder gives Bigger a truer sense of self than he's ever experienced. Kearns argues that Bigger's identity is then further solidified in the final section of the novel when Bigger talks with Mary's boyfriend Jan. Kearns asserts that it is Jan, and not Bigger's lawyer Max as other critics have suggested, who helps Bigger develop his true identity. Kearns argues that this is because Jan talks with Bigger on the level of reality whereas Max speaks with him in abstract philosophical terms, or on the level of illusion.

Larsen, R. B. V. "The Four Voices of Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Negro American Literature Forum* 6.4 (1972): 105-109. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 5 Mar. 2010.

Larsen argues that Wright's unusual multi-voice narrative style reveals a well-rounded view of Bigger's identity. Larsen contends that Wright's intimate third-person narrator acts like an interpreter of Bigger's persona, expressing thoughts and emotions to the reader that Bigger cannot convey himself. Larsen asserts that this all-knowing voice contrasts sharply with Bigger's own inarticulate outer voice which is expressed in angry, staccato outbursts. Larsen explains that Wright also uses the media and prominent

political figures in the novel to reveal the voice of society. Finally, Larsen argues that Wright uses the character of Boris Max, Bigger's lawyer, to act as the articulate historian and sociologist who can convey to the reader the social significance of Bigger's existence.

Amis, Lola Jones. "Richard Wright's *Native Son*: Notes." *Negro American Literature Forum* 8.3 (1974): 240-43. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 10 Feb. 2010.

Amis contends that Bigger's struggle to find a definitive identity stems from his inability to assert himself in either the white world of Illusion or the black world of Reality. Amis argues that the closer Bigger ventures toward the white world of Illusion, the more he feels compelled to enact the stereotypical identity whites expect from him. As a result, Amis contends, he begins to believe the negative character traits associated with this socially constructed identity and therefore gets farther and farther from his true self. The resulting sense of inadequacy, Amis argues, drives him to commit murder as a way to gain status and a sense of self worth in society. In the act of murder, she says, Bigger eradicates his former undeveloped persona and erects a new one. But, Amis contends, Bigger cannot find a place to enact this new identity because to return to either the white world or the black world would mean to deny his new sense of self. Therefore, he embraces the only sense of self still available to him: flight. But, Amis contends, as the police chase him, encircle him and corner him, his race through the black belt becomes a metaphor for his mind and his life and the way in which he constantly feels caged in and trapped in a persona that is not truly his.

Brivic, Sheldon. "Conflict of Values: Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 7.3 (1974): 231-45. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 13 Mar. 2010.

Brivic contends that critics who have condemned *Native Son* in the past for its dualistic ideology have failed to recognize that Wright's ambivalence in fact strengthens the novel's impact by making its themes more complex. Brivic asserts that Wright uses Bigger's conflicted mind as a conduit through which to understand and debate deeper issues. Brivic contends that one challenge Bigger faces consistently in Book One is his struggle to control his explosive emotional responses with rational thought. This, Brivic contends, sets up a more complex look at his character. This debate then leads to a second dilemma, Brivic explains, over whether Bigger's murder of Mary was in fact a rational response to circumstances or an intentional emotional act of rebellion. Once again, Brivic argues, the debate provides the reader with a more complex lens through which to view the murder. Finally, Brivic argues, in Book Three, Bigger begins to rethink his fascist political views in favor of a more socialist view of humanity. Brivic argues that Wright sets up this dilemma once again to show Bigger's conflicted mind.

Felgar, Robert. "The Kingdom of the Beast": the Landscape of *Native Son*." *College Language Association Journal* 17.3 (1974): 333-37. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 13 Mar. 2010.

Felgar analyzes Wright's use of beast imagery to represent race identity in *Native Son*. Felgar illustrates how Wright compares Bigger's oppressed plight to that of a trapped rat. He indicates how Wright uses the Dalton's all-seeing white cat to represent the oppressive white presence and gaze. He shows how Bigger himself is repeatedly referred to as an ape by white reporters and by State's Attorney Buckley, in an effort to dehumanize him. He further explains how Wright refers to the city as a jungle to reinforce the image of the black man as prey and the white man as hunter. Finally, Felgar

asserts that Wright uses these beast-like images to reinforce the idea that the black man is like a caged animal whose only recourse is savage violence.

Bolton, H. Philip. "The Role of Paranoia in Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *Kansas Quarterly* 7.3 (1975): 111-24. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 6 Mar. 2010.

Bolton contends that in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Bigger's paranoid distortions of reality, irrational fear of persecution and delusions of grandeur shape his perception of the world around him and cause him to act and react in highly volatile ways. This, ultimately, Bolton asserts, is what causes his tragic downfall. Bolton contends that paranoia is often caused by an earlier trauma which results in irrational fear of similar circumstances later in life. Though this trauma is not expressly stated in the novel, Bolton asserts that Wright's own traumatic past most likely influenced his portrayal of Bigger's paranoiac ways. Bolton contends that paranoia is also caused by culturally induced racist ideology such as the myth of the black rapist. This parable, he says, is what ultimately leads Bigger to commit murder in the novel. Bolton explains that Bigger's paranoid fear of being found in Mary's bedroom late at night, driven by the knowledge that whites will automatically associate him with the myth of the black rapist, compels him to kill her to avoid persecution. Bolton argues that this societal stereotype, as well as a history of white persecution of blacks, creates in black men like Bigger a paranoia which affects their perceptions and interactions with the white race. Finally, Bolton argues that Bigger appeals to readers because he enacts paranoid fears and anger that the reader feels but cannot express because of societal taboo.

Savory, Jerold J. "Bigger Thomas and the Book of Job: The Epigraph to *Native Son*." *Negro American Literature Forum* 9.2 (1975): 55-56. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 7 Feb. 2010.

Richard Wright opens his novel *Native Son* with an epigraph from *The Book of Job*. Savory shows the significance of the epigraph by illustrating the striking similarities between Job and Bigger. Savory shows how both men rebel against a higher power – Job against God, Bigger against society. Savory argues that both men rebel knowing they will suffer as a result of their defiance because to give in would mean to give up their personal integrity. For Job, it would mean worshipping an unjust God. For Bigger, it would mean accepting white oppression. Savory contends that both are spurred to rebel because they are angered by an unjust world. Job cannot believe in a God that would allow his children to suffer. Bigger cannot believe in a society that would allow racial injustice. Savory further asserts that both men find personal freedom and a sense of identity in their rebellion in part because they reject the false security that tempts others to conform. Finally, Savory contends, while both are condemned for their actions, one by God, one by the courts, both stand strong in their convictions, refusing to allow others to control them.

Redden, Dorothy S. "Richard Wright and *Native Son*: Not Guilty." *Black American Literature Forum* 10.4 (1976): 111-16. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 7 Feb. 2010.

Redden claims that Wright seeks to eliminate the concept of guilt from race relations in *Native Son*, choosing instead to focus on concrete causes of action rather than on their moral implications. Redden asserts that Max's courtroom speech at the end of the novel, for example, is meant to be a factual analysis of the historical influences which caused Bigger's actions rather than an indictment of guilt or lack thereof. Assigning guilt

to actions, Redden contends, may be more destructive than morally helpful since it causes such feelings as self contempt, retaliation or powerlessness. Redden argues that Wright does not believe in full freedom of thought nor absolute environmental determinism. Instead, he believes human action falls somewhere in between. Redden claims Wright believes that men like Bigger are largely influenced by their environment but that crime is still an act of free choice. In addition, Redden says, Wright's rejection of the concept of guilt does not mean that he does not believe in consequences for criminal exploits, it simply means he does not judge the criminal for his actions. Instead, Redden asserts, Wright seeks to eliminate the concept of guilt from the equation since it inevitably creates anger on the side of the accused and righteousness on the side of the accuser. Looking at the root cause and influence which shaped a person's actions removes the judgmental moralistic attitudes which divide races and instead holds each side accountable for their own actions.

Wasserman, Jerry. "Embracing the Negative: *Native Son* and *Invisible Man*." *Studies in American Fiction* 4 (1976): 93-104. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Feb. 2010.

Wasserman asserts that black men like Bigger in *Native Son* and the *Invisible Man* in Ralph Ellison's novel of the same name, often begin their search for identity by embracing the white stereotype placed upon them. This conscious act of accepting the socially constructed persona, Wasserman argues, gives them a certain amount of freedom and a jumping off point from which they can begin to construct their own, more true sense of self. Wasserman contends that Bigger starts out with no sense of identity, then begins to acknowledge a more true sense of self after Mary's murder, but temporarily hides the new self under the mask of the white stereotype, in order to avoid detection. It

is only after his arrest, his subsequent imprisonment and his talks with Jan and Max, Wasserman argues, that Bigger begins to fully embrace his real identity. The Invisible Man, by the same token, embodies multiple false identities placed on him by the white population, before finally discarding them in favor of a more true identity – that of the Invisible Man. Once he has accepted this persona, however, he works to transcend it, seeking to shed his invisibility and assume a more visible and active identity.

Grenander, M. E. "Criminal Responsibility in *Native Son* and *Knock on Any Door*." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 49.2 (1977): 221-33. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 21 Feb. 2010.

Grenander argues that past criticism of *Native Son* and *Knock on Any Door* tended to focus on the novels' exploration of social and environmental determinism, or the degree to which society and living conditions are responsible for the actions of the protagonists. Grenander chooses instead to show that, while both novels do show how society and the environment influence the protagonists' lives and perceptions, in the end both authors show that this does not free the protagonists from taking personal responsibility for their crimes and paying the consequences for their actions. Grenander starts her argument with a history and critique of social and environmental determinism saying that these movements too often give criminals an excuse to deny responsibility for their deeds. Many people grow up in environments and social situations similar to Bigger Thomas and Nick Romano, Grenander argues, but only a few become criminals. Grenander shows that in fictional novels like *Native Son* and *Knock on any Door*, the portrayal of the personal character arc prevents a full transfer of responsibility to society

or the environment. Grenander explains that the culminating experience for both protagonists is the realization and acceptance of their role in their crimes.

Scruggs, Charles W. "The Importance of the City in *Native Son*." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 9.3 (1978): 37-47. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 27 Feb. 2010.

Scruggs analyzes the dual symbolic nature of the city and its impact on the individual. On the one hand, he says, it represents hope and progress. On the other hand, it represents aggression and the evil side of man. He illustrates how Wright sets up the city as a place of community and then shows how Bigger is excluded from that kinship because of the color of his skin. He shows how the city's promise of bigger and brighter things taunts the black man with its hope but then refuses him when he attempts to engage in that dream. He indicates how the setting of the novel, the poor conditions of the city slums, creates in black residents like Bigger a constant state of fear and consequent aggression. Finally, Scruggs shows how Wright uses the views of State's Attorney Buckley and Bigger's lawyer Boris Max at Bigger's trial to present different views of the city and its representative character. Scruggs says Buckley calls on the jurors to convict Bigger in order to protect the city from evil; Max says it is the very collective hatred of the city which creates boys like Bigger Thomas in the first place and drives them to commit violent acts.



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The most comprehensive bibliography ever compiled for an American writer, this book contains 13,117 annotated items pertaining to Richard Wright. It includes almost all published mentions of the author or his work in every language in which those mentions appear. Sources listed include books, articles, reviews, notes, news items, publishers' catalogs, promotional materials, book jackets, dissertations and theses, encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, handbooks and study guides, library reports, best seller charts, the Index Translationum, playbills and advertisements, editorials, and more.

Kenneth Kinnamon published a bibliography in 1988 entitled *A Richard Wright Bibliography: Fifty Years of Criticism and Commentary, 1933-1982* which includes every work ever written by Wright and every piece of commentary or criticism ever written about those works. The bibliography I compiled differs greatly from Kinnamon's bibliography in that it focuses specifically on Wright's identity. It is a narrowly focused look at his character construction and search for self. The fact that the novel is a character-driven work and that Wright is such an icon of black American fiction, means that nearly every aspect of his life and work is intertwined.

The bibliography of George Orwell includes journalism, essays, novels and non-fiction books written by the British writer Eric Blair (1903-1950), either under his own name or, more usually, under his pen name George Orwell. Orwell was a prolific writer on topics related to contemporary English society and literary criticism, who have been declared "perhaps the 20th century's best chronicler of English culture." His non-fiction cultural and political criticism constitutes the majority of his work, but