

DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF APARTHEID AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN RICHARD WRIGHT'S *BLACK BOY*

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Abstract:

Black Boy chronicles Wright's own journey of self-discovery, as he grapples with the complexities of his Black identity. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* is a powerful exploration of racism and identity crisis, shedding light on the insidious nature of racism and its far-reaching consequences for Black Americans. Through his work, Wright challenges dominant representations, humanizes Black experiences, and illuminates the ongoing struggle for Black subjectivity and self-discovery. The research aims to examine the key themes of identity crisis and racial segregation in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. The paper focuses on the notions of racial segregation and identity crises, which have been and continue to be contentious issues in African American literature. It claims that black American literature was developed to oppose racial segregation, injustice, and hostility in order to gain self-esteem and identity.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Racism, oppression, Richard Wright, Black Boy, Jim Crow, inferior.

Black Boy is Richard Wright's deftly and meticulously written fictitious autobiography. Its primary goal is to challenge the white southerner's perception that he is an inferior son of white civilization. Through structure and ideas, Richard Wright represents not only his own predicament, but also the overall situation of black people in the white South. *Black Boy* was and remains one of the best works in African-American literature, revealing the genuine lives of black people not only in South America but all over the world.

In his work, Richard Wright addresses racial segregation, alienation, identity crisis, oppression, and exploitation of black people in America. It depicts life in South and North America. Richard Wright is a well-known African-American writer whose writings have

brought him fame and money. Wright is widely regarded as the first African-American to speak out against white Americans' transgressions of racist segregation.

He is regarded as the salvation of his generation of African-Americans who are unable to present their arguments to the public. Richard Wright, an African-American writer, wrote *Black Boy*, one of his best works of literature. *Black Boy*, Wright's gritty memoir about growing up in the segregated South, became a milestone in American literature despite the fact that his publisher cut a portion of the manuscript.

Racial segregation was associated with a variety of settings, including public swimming pools, cafes, public stations, hospitals, theatres, weddings, schools, colleges, and courts where no African-American could testify as white. During apartheid and racial segregation, African-Americans were abused by whites, who referred to blacks as "barbarians," "ghosts," and compelled to serve their masters (Hooks, 1992, p. 165). These individuals are not permitted to participate, study, or even sit on a train or bus. They were exploited and discovered to support white power. "I knew that my life was revolving about a world that I had to encounter and fight when I grew up." (107)

Richard and his family had many problems and the biggest problem is the lack of food because his father Nathan refuses to help them. As a result, his mother Ella takes her child to an orphanage to stay there. Despite the children's difficulties, Ella brings her children back from the orphanage and goes to live with Aunt Maggie in Arkansas. Arkansas is a major source of black anti-segregation. White and black have their place. When he tries to say something about his uncle standing up to the whites, Ella's mother stops him and slaps him.

Racial segregation is also referred to as a dangerous problem pervading American society. Some of the *Black Boy* characters are portrayed as abused, downtrodden, depressed characters filled with horrific violence and oppression. White Americans are not very kind to Richard in this *Black Boy* because he is black and different.

When his mother Ella tells him stories about Blue beard and his seven wives. Richard Wright is still unhappy and he claims it was the first time he felt very strong emotions. Wright and the readers of this book want to know the secret of Wright's positive or negative emotions.

Second, when his grandfather retired from the Union Army for certain and bureaucratic reasons, he did not receive the disability pension he was entitled to from the

government. Perhaps he was wounded in the Civil War and disrespected by the white government. The white officer deliberately misspelled his name because he was not eligible for a disability pension.

Even after his grandfather's death, the government did not provide compensation or an official apology to his family. In this regard, Richard believes that black soldiers used to serve the white society. Even black people risk their lives to protect their country, only to be treated cruelly. “Had a black boy announced that he aspired to be a writer, he would have been unhesitatingly called crazy by his pals. Or had a black boy spoken of yearning to get a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, his friends—in the boy’s own interest—would have reported his odd ambition to the white boss.” (166)

It is the climax of Richard's racial discrimination when he arrives in a white area to sell his dog. It makes him so anxious and worried. This mirrors Wright's anguish in *Black Boy* when he goes into a white neighbourhood to sell his dog to a white woman for a dollar so she can buy food. “If I were a member of the class that rules, I would post men in all the neighbourhoods of the nation, not to spy upon or club rebellious workers, not to break strikes or disrupt unions; but to ferret out those who no longer respond to the system in which they live.” (249)

During the long wait, Right admired the silence and the cleanliness of the white place. He thought these houses were for white people, not black people. She told herself that maybe she was telling someone the wrong thing about him. Her excitement and anxiety bothered her. As a result, he decided to leave the place for the safety of the blacks rather than take his dog with him.

It exposes the critical social problems faced by blacks such as racial segregation, decay, hunger and the mistreatment of blacks by white society. Over time, he begins to see differences between white and black societies that he does not understand at first. This is a time of segregation and racism in America. Due to Justice's serious life situations, he decides to look for a job to raise world awareness. He gets a job delivering newspapers to his home. He sells a certain newspaper to read the stories in them. It seems impossible to escape.

However, his path to the world is closed when he learns that the newspaper contains racist and particular actions against black people. Richard is locked in a racist world. He is looking in the hope of being kind to the white characters. One of them helps him as an optician Mr. Crane, who hires Richard and successfully tries to “protect him from the white

shop workers” who fear him and eventually fire him, but some white people are shy, black people fear white people who helped black people in the segregated South, violent reprisals still await (Dow and Craven, 2011, p. 41). Richard Wright and most African-American writers fight for freedom from a dominant white society that exploits and oppresses black Americans. He used literature as a weapon to show the reality and rights of black people to achieve an authentic black identity in American society.

Richard Wright explains the different aspects of black identity that *Black Boy* presents. It analyses the role and identity of black people in American society through the role of some of the *Black Boy* characters.

It also focuses on the American social conditions that defined black identity. It portrays the black man as an innocent hero who is a victim of a guilty society. It explores a black man's search for identity in a world dominated by white power and law. Losing your true identity is caused by culture, traditions, norms, people and is a victim of the social environment.

He also focuses on black identity in American literature. *Black Boy* was written during the Jim Crow era, when racism and identity crisis were very visible in American society. Through laws and local conventions, whites controlled both the geographic and representational mobility of South African Americans, who were clearly defined as inferior because they occupied ‘inferiors’ paces such as Jim Crow cars, often literally celebrated people of colour and throughout the country because they appeared as visibly inferior characters at fairs, advertisements and movies. Alienation, identity, oppression and exploitation, insecurity and big issues in American society. He wants to rid white American society of the bad traditions that destroy black culture and identity.

In the novel *Black Boy*, Richard Wright describes how his childhood involved acts of violence, such as burning down a log cabin and hanging a small cat to death. As a child, he wants to create his own black identity to improve the quality of life for his family. As an African-American writer, he discusses black identity not only in America, but around the world. King and his friends argue that the struggle for blackness is dominated by white people in the world.

In Wright's opinion, the emancipation of black feudal serfs was not based on the preservation or development of a black "national" culture in the South, but on the achievement of a "black" historical and cultural national identity.

There are many events in *Black Boy* that reflect Justice's psychological and physical abuse from childhood as a crisis of black American identity. First, the right defeated his family and the white man never hit him. Many of his clashes are with his grandmother, who is a very religious person.

It is surprising when Richard sets the grandmother's house on fire so that the mother can mercilessly beat the young child. Each chapter of the book has elements of violence and abuse. Sometimes Richard deserves to be punished for setting the house on fire, but the amount of violence, abuse and oppression he is subjected to is staggering.

At one point Richard is told by his father to kill a cat and he says, "Kill the damn thing!" my father exploded. "Do what you want, but get out of here!" As a result, he violently kills the kitten and his mother scolds him for this cruel act. Richard describes violence and oppression as tools of tyranny and control. Violence and oppression are possible in the house against Richard. It reflects white violence and black oppression in America.

White people think teaching black people are a waste of time in school. Therefore, Richard breaks the white views of black people and builds his own unique identity. He does not expect that the headmaster's speech was better than his. He wants his conversation to be unique and better than all the white teachers.

Richard continues to build his true identity as a fighter who fights for black school children. The changing phases of American society created a major identity crisis for blacks. Black people still live in America with memories of slavery and fighting between black people and Americans. They fight for freedom and peace because of the white dominant identity.

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