

"the man who was almost a man" racial criticism

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Forced to work in the fields for minimal pay, Dave's situation is just a step up from slavery. From a racial standpoint, Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" conveys racial differences concerning the attainment of power and manhood. It is clear that black characters are treated as inferior to white characters; this is made apparent through Dave's language, differences in social status of the characters, and relations between races. This story shows as a whole how downtrodden early African-American families were, seen as inferiors in the racial battle for manhood. As soon as Dave begins thinking, it is clear that he has not received a proper education, as a white child would.

His pronunciation is terrible, and he probably doesn't know how to spell. He consistently combines and shortens words, missing a few vowels or consonants every so often, and, bluntly, talks like a hayseed. For example: "Shucks, Ah ain scareda them even ef they are biggem me!" (1). Further conveying his social standing and possible low self esteem is his constant use of what would now be considered racial slurs: "Them niggers; can't understand nothing" (1). Being black, he has been raised to feel like a regular "nigger," out working in the fields for minimal pay.

In this story, it seems obvious right from the start that all the black characters are laborers, scraping up a living from the bottom of the barrel, whereas all the white characters are fairly wealthy. Dave works all year to make enough money to go to school, as seen when he asks his mother for two dollars: "ain no usa yuh thinking bout throwin it erway. Ahm keepin tha money sos yuh kin have cloes t go to school this winter" (4). All of Dave's hard work in the fields throughout the year goes toward his few months of

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schooling in the winter. The white characters, however, are all wealthy land and business owners.

Mr. Hawkins, for example: " Mebe Ma wil lemme buy one when she gits mah pay from ol man Hawkins" (1). Dave's family relies on Mr. Hawkins, the wealthy white landowner, to send their child to school. The most obvious statement of the black characters' " inferiority" to the white characters comes in the form of racial relations. It is clear that, as opposed to white characters, the black characters are seen as laborers and children.

For example, when Dave arrives early to Mr. Hawkins's plantation, he is greeted as such: " Good. Since you're so early, how about plowing that stretch down by the woods?" (7). Rather than being treated as a diligent worker who has shown up early to do his job, he is told to get straight to work. He receives no reward or recognition, but is ordered to serve Mr. Hawkins.

Furthermore, after shooting the mule, he is not treated as an adult who has made a mistake and is willing to pay for it, but is instead ridiculed as a child: " Something hot seemed to turn over inside him each time he remembered how they had laughed" (11)." Though he felt he was a man, Dave was treated like a misbehaving child; left victim to his humiliation while the adults figured out his problems for him. He was never allowed to solve his own problems or make his own path, and so he was denied his manhood. So overall, this story stated the difficulties faced by black children in the search for manhood. This is clear through Dave's language, the social status of characters based on race, and relations between races. Dave, an average

black child, is put in a situation where his manhood is given to him, tested, and revoked when he fails the test.

Because of the color of his skin, he must then seek his own manhood, with no mentor to guide his way.