

# A racial cultural critique of ;the man who was almost a man;

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“ Mebbe Ma will lemme buy one when she gits mah pay from ol man Hawkins.

Ahma beg her t gimme some money. Ahm ol ernough to hava gun. Ahm seventeen. Almost a man” (Wright). In the story, *The Man Who Was Almost a Man*, Dave is a young African American boy working for Jim Hawkins, a white farm owner. After Dave shoots “ Jenny” the mule, Wright makes a point to say that “ There were white and black standing in the crowd” and Dave “ cried, seeing blurred white and black faces”.

So, not only does the issue of the dead animal become a concern, but the colors of the people around Dave become important as well. The gun becomes an equalizer in Dave’s eyes when he says “ Could kill a man with a gun like this. Kill anybody, black or white. And if he were holding his gun in his hand, nobody could run over him; they would have to respect him”(Wright). The gun blurs the color line and all Dave can see is the prospect of having others respect him. When it comes down to it, Dave is bound to his debt and has no choice but to pay Jim Hawkins.

The mention of skin color makes this about more than just that debt, but about the ideas of bondage. Using racial/cultural criticism, the reader can analyze Richard Wright’s *The Man Who Was Almost a Man* through Dave, dialogue, and the gun. To begin with, in the story, *The Man Who Was Almost a Man*, it states “ He did not want to mention money before his father. He would do much better by concerning his mother when she was alone. He looked at his father uneasily out of the edge of his eye” (Wright). Dave was closer to his mother.

Dave knew his father was strict. He feared his father and this shows that he was still childish although he thinks he is old enough to handle a gun. He has a better relationship with his mother than his father. His mom was the head of the household so he talks to her about getting the gun. Dave often showed how he wanted a gun but when it came down to using it he didn't know how and this example of that in this quote, " But he had not fired it; he had been afraid that his father might hear.

Also he was not sure he knew how to fire it" (Wright). Dave didn't know how to use the gun nor did he want his father to hear the gun if he were to shoot it. This showed he was still somewhat of a child being scared of his father. He wanted to prove to everyone that he was a man by having a gun but he was still a kid. Furthermore, in the story, *The Man Who Was Almost a Man*, it states " He slowed, looking at the ground. Shucks, Ah ain scareda them even ef they are biggem me! Aw, Ah know whut Amma do.

Ahm going by ol Joe's sto n git that Sears Roebuck catlog n look at them guns" (Wright). Dave was uneducated and this made him illiterate. Dave didn't use proper English. Dave and his family spoke improper English and by this you could tell that none of them were educated. His combination of two or three words does not only show his lack of education but also how much he doesn't seem to care about his vocabulary.

He lives around white people, so he has to notice that his speech is improper. Not only does Dave combine his words, but he uses incorrect spelling and grammar too. " Nawsuh. Ah wans t take t home wid me. Ah'll

bring it back termorrow when Ah come in from the feils” (Wright). By the way that Dave spoke people could tell he was an uneducated African American.

In the old days this how most African Americans spoke. Education wasn't as important back then so many people spoke like Dave did in the story. In addition, in the story *The Man Who Was Almost a Man*, Dave felt that if he had a gun no one would see him for his size anymore and everyone would respect him and this can be seen in this quote, “ The first movement he made the following morning was to reach under his pillow for the gun. In the gray light of dawn he held it loosely, feeling a sense of power. Could kill a man with a gun like this. Kill anybody black or white” (Wright).

Dave felt he had power with the gun and he also felt that everyone had to respect him with a gun. Dave felt like he would be a man if he had a gun. He didn't care if he was shooting a black or white man, they both would have to respect him. “ It was a big gun, with a long barrel and a heavy handle. He raised and lowered it in his hand, marveling at its weight” (Wright).

He thinks that by having a gun that people should fear him and show him respect no matter what size he is. He feels the gun will make him a bigger person. Having the gun made Dave feel empowered and made him feel like he would get respect from everyone, black or white. All in all, using racial/cultural criticism, the reader can analyze Richard Wright's *The Man Who Was Almost a Man* through Dave, dialogue, and the gun. What can be learned from this story is that Dave kept saying that he was an adult but when he was faced with a problem he really showed how immature he really

was. Buying a gun didn't make him a man it just embarrassed him in front of  
" white and black faces.

" He chose to escape from realism as he feared that people might punish or  
even scold him. He wanted to escape into another world, where people will  
respect his character. Dave not only embarrassed himself in front of many  
people but he showed how much of a child he still was.