

# [The the hopelessness, repression, and social injustices](https://assignbuster.com/the-the-hopelessness-repression-and-social-injustices/)

[Economics](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/economics/)

Thenovel Native Son, written by authorRichard Wright is the story of a young black male living in the raciallysegregated black belt community on the Southside of Chicago in the 1930’s. Themain character, Bigger Thomas, finds himself seeking an opportunity outside ofthis community only to have it all go horribly wrong during a moment of panic, which then sends his life into a downward spiral. The author brings intoquestion whether or not Bigger’s fate was a result of his own doing or if itwas predetermined by the fact that he is nothing more than a product of thehopelessness, repression, and social injustices inflicted upon the AfricanAmerican minorities in the United States during that period in history. The maincharacter, Bigger Thomas, is depicted as a poor African American male whostruggles with all of the issues associated with life in the Black Belt. Thiswas until an opportunity presented itself in the form of a job offer with awealthy white family across town.

This opportunity created some major innerstruggles for Bigger. More specifically, his under lying resentment towards thewhite community that discriminated against himself and his community, but hewas also envious of their success and while fearful of their power. Heultimately recognized that despite his internal struggles, this was anopportunity to make something of himself and improve his disposition. Acceptingthis new opportunity would allow him to get out of his current neighborhood andall of the disadvantages that came with it. But, this opportunity did not comewithout some well-founded concerns on his part. The family who provided Biggerwith this opportunity was strongly entrenched in the wealthy white communityacross town, which was generally distrustful of the African American communityas whole.

As a result, this struck fear in his heart over what his role mightbe. In orderto analyze this novel, we must identify why Bigger committed the act of murder, which is the main event that the story is centered around. When he was facedwith a life changing decision at his new job on the first day, Bigger respondedin the only way he deemed rational. As a result, Bigger Thomas accidentallykilled the Dalton’s daughter Mary, because he thought it was necessary in orderto protect himself and save his job. Biggers’ intent was never to kill Marywhen he used a pillow to smother her; he sought merely to silence her so as toavoid having Mrs.

Dalton detect his presence in the room. He was fully aware ofthe potential repercussions of a black man in the bedroom of a young whitewoman and being accused of something he hadn’t done. His experiences withracial stereotyping had taught him to assume that because he was black andalone in a room with an unconscious white girl he would immediately be accusedof rape. At the time of the murder, Bigger was not angry with, nor was heintent on striking a blow for African American rights by sending a messageusing the death of a white female at the hands of an African American male. Later on in the novel, Bigger admits to his attorney that Mary’s behaviortoward him in fact made him hate her. At the same time, his hate for Mary isnot what caused him to smother her to death, it was simply a misguided attemptto evade discovery by her mother. How does societydiscourage criminal behavior among its citizens? This is accomplished throughprocesses that are in intended to regulate behavior or social control.

Thesecontrol measures are internal in the form of norms and values, and external inthe form of rewards and punishments. The author of Native Son utilizes thissocial control theory extensively throughout this story with examples of howcrime and deviance played a major role in Biggers life and the overallstoryline. The social control theory unlike most criminology theories placesits focus on why people obey the laws and rules to conform to the generallyexpected societal norms. Elizabeth Groff explains to us that, “ Aspeople bump into one another, their familiarity with and liking for each otherincreases… In this manner, norms emerge and strengthen over time” (Groff 94). The main elements thatconstitute this conformity are tied to societal bond, attachment to others, commitment for following rules, involvementby typical societal behaviors, and a belief in a basic value system. Ingeneral people obey the laws of the land based upon a fear of the consequencesof breaking said laws. An example of this concept plays out when Biggerconsiders the consequences of committing a robbery with his friend. “ They had always robbed “ negroes”.

They feltit was much easier and safer to rob their own people, for they knew that whitepoliceman never really searched diligently for “ negroes” who committed crimesagainst other “ Negroes” (Wright 23). He considered the costs and risksassociated with his potential deviant activity. Control theorists furtherbelieve that criminal behavior is part of basic human nature and that allhumans have a tendency towards violence or criminal behavior. When anindividual’s bond with society is broken, the logical result will be criminalactivity. The less an individual believes that he or she should or is requiredto obey society’s laws, the more likely he/she is to violate them.

This examplelies in the next quote, “ You’ll regrethow you living someday,” she went on. “ If you don’t stop running withthat gang of yours and do right you’ll end up where you never thought you would”(Wright. 117). This is primary example of Bigger’s separation from his societalbonds and a feeling that he did not fall within the bounds or normal confinesof society.

Anotherimportant factor of the social control theory is the concept of free will. Thecrucial question associated with free will is whether an individual has thepower to make a choice and whether his or her decision was inevitable and theyreally could not have done otherwise. This point gains relevance in the NativeSon as Bigger was faced with a life changing choice when Mary’s mother enteredthe room. Some might argue as Bigger might as well, that he lacked theopportunity to exercise free will. Mary’s behavior, his situation, the social implications, and the presence of Mary’s mother all left him the inevitable decision tosilence Mary.

In fact, Bigger later in the book expresses that he even believesMary’s actions played a role and even contributed to her eventual demise. Afterthe commission of the murder, Bigger then began to consider the fact that hehad deviated from the social norms and the possibility of harsh treatment hemight receive from the white community and the judicial system. Given thecurrent societal standards, if was very reasonable for Bigger to assume that hewould be treated harshly and any assertion on his part of accidentalcircumstances would most likely have been immediately dismissed by the judicialsystem as well as public opinion.

So that raises the question of whether infact if Bigger ever really had the ability to exercise his free will. WhileMary’s death was excessive and unnecessary, the fact that Bigger had to takesome action to avoid detection was most likely unavoidable. Bigger feared thatbeing a member of the African American lower class, his transgressions wouldcertainly be treated much more severely by the justice system automaticallyregardless of the circumstances. As a result once Bigger identified hispredicament, his thought process resorted to that of basic survival instincts.” She was dead and he had killed her. Hewas a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer.

He had killed a whitewoman. He had to get away from there.” (Wright, 87). His recognition thathis skin color compounded his existing problem was a key motivator in guidinghis actions when he was disposing of the evidence.

But these actions onlyserved to further support the white community’s preconceived deviance traits ofthe African American community. His actions in effect eliminated his ability toutilize the truth, that it was an unintended and accidental event. No matterwhat explanation he had, ultimately society will judge him harshly based uponthe color of his skin and that would always make him guilty. Biggersflight was also in part influenced by the overall lack of community resourcesand material inequalities of the Black Belt area of Chicago at that time. TheBlack Belt was a predominately African American impoverished area in Chicago’sSouth Side.

This segregated community was almost exclusively home to many ofthe African American residents of Chicago during this time period. This areawas plagued with extreme overcrowding, dilapidated tenements, high rents, andcramped “ kitchenette” style apartments. In addition to these deplorable livingconditions, many of the African-American residents that were fortunate enoughto purchase homes were subjected to unfair and discriminatory practices.

Thisincluded housing covenants and redlining tactics by the local financiallenders, who were largely owned and operated by the wealthy white community. “ No white real estate man would rent a flatto a black man other than in the sections where it had been decided that blackpeople might live.” (Wright. 161). Also of note was the area’s highunemployment rate, inadequate housing, extreme poverty, high crime rates, andover-crowded conditions also contributed to an overall sense of frustrationamong this African American community. The denial of basic rights and frequentviolent protests in nearby white neighborhoods played a major role in thebelief that these residents were second class citizens and less worthy thantheir white counterparts. Despitea series of state laws that were passed during the late 1800’s to include an1885 law against discrimination in public places, the of segregation of theAfrican American community remained rampant in the Black Belt area. Moreimportantly, in context with this analysis, it was common place in both beliefand practice that laws were rarely equally enforced.

It was very common forAfrican American residents to be subjected to harsh penalties for offenses thatmany white offenders would go completely uncharged. The African-Americancommunity was a regular the target of harassment by the police and crimescommitted against them were an everyday occurrence. Ultimately, white racialsuperiority was used to justify any act of violence or oppression taken againstthe African American community. Biggerknew nothing but frustration his entire life. He often found himself frustratedby being poor and that he was made to feel inferior simply because he wasblack.

He was also continually frustrated by his desire to be more and hisrealization that those desires were largely unattainable. This also resulted ina level of anger and at the same time fear of the white community. “ Why had he come to take this goddamn job? Hecould have stayed among his own people and escaped feeling this fear and hate”(Wright, 15). Another example of this realization presents itself when Biggerwas talking with Gus about his dream of becoming a pilot. Gus’ response toBigger was, “ If you wasn’t black and ifyou had some money and if they’d let you go that aviation school, you could flya plane” (Wright, 17). This statement reinforces the assertion that whatthe white community perceives the African American community to be, is morepowerful than what the African American community believes about themselves.

Inequality imposed upon the African American community was common place andBigger often found himself on the bottom end of these inequalities. There was avery clear a visible difference between the white world and the black world inChicago. The mostidentifiable limitations or weaknesses of the control theory is that it that itplaces too much importance on the bonds between an individual and society, anddoes not effectively address self-determination and impulsiveness. Mary’sdeath, I would argue was nothing more than a series of unfortunate andaccidental events, which were escalated by panic or impulsiveness. Bigger wasnot seeking revenge, money, status, or power when Mary was killed.

Rather, hesimply panicked and Mary’s death, while tragic, was far from intentional. Bigger had no forethought or ill will in his actions that resulted in Mary’sdeath. In fact, Mary’s death was the direct result of impulsiveness and anoverreaction by Bigger in the heat of the moment. Ultimately Bigger chose notonly his response but also the level of his response. Anotherspecific flaw in this theory is that it places a high correlation between asingle parenting and criminal behaviors, it tends to ignore the fact that thisfamily dynamic does not automatically lead to individuals becoming criminals. There many examples of single parent homes that produce law abiding andproductive citizens who never consider engaging in deviant behavior. One cannotsimply ignore the many other outside factors such a peer or group pressure thatcan play a significant role in which path people chose to take. In Biggersworld deviant behavior is considered more of the social norm, if a person israised in and around a community that the majority finds it morally acceptableto break the law, then members of that society will not be persuaded to avoidbeing labeled with these deviant behaviors.

Inconclusion, the reader is most likely moved to feeling empathy for Bigger as aresult of all of the cards being against him and the belief that no one willever believe the true sequence of events. Bigger was driven to his actions byfear that if were discovered that at a minimum he would lose his job and beback to his old life. As a result, convinced himself that he was morallyjustified in his actions. Bigger’s understanding of the societal implication ofhis actions was in fact accurate and he in fact would face severe repercussionsregardless of his decisions or actions on that day. His racial and socialeconomic position in the community most certainly would have negativelycontributed to his fate. The author asks the question of whether it is fair tocondemn someone that was created by their environment. WhileBigger eventually felt remorse for Mary’s death, he still failed to see theerror in his decisions or deeds. While this is tragic sequence of events, wecannot allow those feelings to excuse his actions and damage that resulted fromthose actions.

Bigger, in fact, took an innocent life and as such should beheld accountable. Furthermore, the motivation in this case does not outweighthe results of his actions. Thejudicial system needs to act accordingly in the blind in this case and judgethe act itself rather than the man and any of the prejudices that were thrustupon him by the color of his skin. If a person commits the crime, they must beobligated to suffer its consequences regardless of whatever advantages ordisadvantages they may have been afforded in their development.

Ultimately itcomes down to a choice and living with the consequences be it good or bad ofyour decision. Individuals make choices about deviance based on costs andbenefits to themselves in the form of positive rewards for socially approvedbehaviors and negative costs for breaking the social norms. Social controloccurs only works when costs of deviance outweigh or are higher than rewards.