

The evolution of theme in black boy

Business



When Richard Wright expounds that society “ had cast millions of others [out]” (301), he calls attention to the stalemate between an individual and society. In his autobiographical novel *Black Boy*, the book’s inherent themes evolve as Wright develops as an artist and intellectual in a society that repudiated him. The novel’s incipient theme of survival is largely characterized by Wright’s struggles in overcoming oppression and ultimately realizing his goal of moving to the North. To begin, Wright’s identity as a black man in the South confines him to conform to the prototypical model of behavior that whites have projected on blacks. This type of racially-conscious ambiance correspondingly makes Wright sentient to the reality that whites had the power to “ violate [his] life at will” (73), against whom he is powerless.

In the same manner that he is duped into fighting with Harrison, Wright’s environment continues to trap him. Additionally, his noncompliance to the racist social order in the South creates more problems for him as he grows up, particularly when it comes to securing and maintaining a job. His colorblind sensibility made it “ utterly impossible for [him] to calculate, to scheme, to act, to plot all the time” (185) within a society that rejected him. Wright craved a world where he would be accepted, regardless of the color of his skin. In any case, he believes that the only way he could survive as a black man in that time would be to move to the North.

To him, the North represented “ a place where everything was possible” (168), and by instigating this decision, his hope for the future is revived. This hope accordingly reinstates his belief of being able to live in an environment that is comprehensible to him. By and large, the first part of Wright’s life is

themed by an inveterate tendency for personal survival. Wright's successful odyssey to the North engenders a shift in theme to political desire.

Communism served as a catharsis for Wright, allowing him to make political contributions through his creative work; however, Wright's experiences with the Communist Party dually leave him with a profound sense of disillusionment. His conviction that "each man [could] have his say" as a Communist is contested when, at a caucus, he discovers that he had only been called in to "give [his] approval to a decision previously made" (344).

Not only does this anger him, it disconcerts him, for he had left the South to be able to speak freely and escape the pressure of fear only to be confronted with fear again. At this point in his life, Wright believes he better understands the sociology of American life. Working in Chicago, he recognizes that "perhaps even a kick was better than uncertainty" (265), for his presupposed notions of tolerance are transformed by the actuality that these early experiences in the North are mere variations of what happened to him in the South; likewise, his freedom to express his ideas are limited. Essentially, the premise of a political agenda has afforded Wright with the awareness needed to make these distinctions of life in America. In short, the transition of theme in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* emulates the author's own awakening as an intellectual.

Throughout the novel, Wright's Southern and Northern experiences expose the deeply felt irony of equality in America, culminating to a final political critique on society.