

# Oppression



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Oppression In the novel *Native Son* written by Richard Wright a young adult named Bigger Thomas goes through a metamorphosis, from sanity to insanity. He starts out a normal trouble youth, living in a run down housing project, where all he does is hang out with his gang. But the city relief program gives him an opportunity to work and make something of himself. All he has to do is chauffeur for a very rich family. But on his first job everything goes wrong and he ends up murdering the family's daughter. Through this novel Bigger meets many other people, which have the same oppression as him but handle it in different ways. Some of these people include his mother, his girlfriend, and Max his lawyer. All of these people have a certain amount of oppression given to them by the outside world. The only difference is the way each one of them handle it. Ever since Bigger was a little boy he has felt very oppressed by the world because he was black. Bigger feels that he has nothing to be proud of so he takes this oppression to the heart and turns it into fear. The only way that he could express himself was to show the world that they should not oppress what they don't know the power of. Bigger demonstrated that he should be feared and acknowledged by murdering the daughter of a very rich family. At one point after Bigger killed the daughter stated that "... for the first time in my fear-ridden life a barrier of protection between him and a world of fear."(p. 119) Bigger feels as though know that he has killed this person that all will be well because of this new sense of power that he received from doing this horrible act. At this point Bigger feels assured that he could fool the world into thinking that he was normal. He started referring to all the people around him as blind, even when they where already physically blind; " Ms. Dalton was blind; yes blind in more ways than one"(p. 120) but in his own mind he

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no longer felt the oppression or fear after he killed the Daughter. The next most oppressed person is Bigger's mother. She can not get a job because she is black and is of the female gender. So the world has oppressed her into poverty and the only way that she can respond to this oppression is to pray and worship the lord. You can tell that this is her only release because she uses it frequently in the book. In the very first time she was in the book she was already using it. " Lord, Lord, have mercy..."(p. 5) she stated as Bigger killed a merciless rat. Later on in that same conversation she uses the lord's name again stating " Bigger, for God's sake!"(p. 5) So as you can see the word of God is literally planted in her mind , but she has good reason. Her husband died and Bigger ends up getting the death sentence, so there is no source of income for her except the relief money from the government, which is a very little amount when you have two kids still to raise. So the only way that she can express herself is to pray. Also Bigger's girlfriend has many problems with the oppressive world that she lives in. Her name is Bessie and she works all day and almost everyday just to pay for a roof over her head. She cooks for a family all day long, they work her like a slave. Bessie tries to not to express herself, but tries to run from this problem by chronic drinking. You can see this because the first time she comes into the book she is already asking for alcohol. Right after her and Bigger finish " being intimate" her own words where " Lets get dressed and go out and get something to drink."(p. 157) This also shows the early problem she has with her boyfriend. Bessie tries to ignore the problem she has with Bigger because she knows that she can't do anything to stop it, or control it. So the only thing she can do is try to ignore it or get drunk to forget about it. When the police catch on to Bigger and he is convincing her to come with him she

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says to Bigger that "... I had to get drunk to forget it."(p. 265) Max doesn't come into the book until the last chapter, but he plays a very key role not just as Bigger's lawyer but as a symbol of hope for Bigger, his mother and all the other oppressed people in the book. Max is a very oppressed person because he belongs to the communist party during the cold war. But Max takes a very different approach to his oppression, he fights back and he tries to insite other people to fight back as well. During one of his numerous talks with Bigger he tells Bigger that "... you're facing a sea of hate now and that's no different from what you've faced all your life. And because it's that way you've got to fight. If they can wipe you out, then you can wipe others out, too."(p. 400) From this quote you can see that Max is the light at the end of the tunnel for allot of people. Later on in the book Bigger realizes what Max is trying to do, he is not trying to set him free he is trying to show that people are equal and if treated equally then there will be no problems. When Bigger realizes that he thinks to himself that he has " this new sense of the value of himself gained from Max's talk."(p. 418) He symbolizes hope because all the other people in the book fell victim to their oppression when he fought back for everyone. In this book there is a very strong lesson to be learned. That lesson is to not let yourself be oppressed but to let your light shine. Also if someone tries to blow out your light relight it till it is lite eternally. Bigger, Bessie, and Bigger's mother all fell and let their light be burnt out by society. But when Max came in he showed the readers and the characters in the book that there is a way to let yourself shine in a very oppressive world