

The ethics of living
jim crow – an
autobiographical
sketch by richard
wright essa...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. Introduction

Jim Crow was the name of an early African American minstrel song and it refers to the discrimination meted against African Americans (Blue, J., n. d.). This piece of writing details the author's experiences of dealing with such discrimination.

1. Early days of the author, Richard Wright

1. Richard Nathaniel Wright was born in Roxie, Mississippi.
2. His father was illiterate and a former sharecropper while his mother was a teacher. At the age of six his father left them in poverty. Richard Wright along with his mother and brother moved to Mississippi to live with relatives. He attended school but had to discontinue due to his mother's illness (" Richard Wright," 2007).
3. He then took up various jobs and often spent his earnings to buy school books, magazines and novels in order to continue learning.
4. He later continued his studies and graduated from the Jackson public school in year 1925 (" Richard Wright," 2007). His first story, however, was published at the age of fifteen in Southern Register a local African American newspaper.

2. His days in Chicago

5. He then moved to Chicago hoping for a life without discrimination and began writing where he joined the Communist Party and was executive Secretary of the John Reed Club comprising of Leftist writers and authors of Chicago.
6. He also wrote poetry for various journals. His experiences played a very important role in the works that he wrote later and often formed

the basis of his writing. He then relocated to New York where he worked as an editor of Daily Worker (“ Richard,” 2003).

3. His writings

7. His important works include Uncle Tom’s Children, Native Son, Black Boy, Outsider, White Man Listen, Black Power, Savage Holiday, The Color Curtain, Pagan Spain, The Long Dream and Eight Men, which was a collection of short stories published posthumously (“ Richard,” 2003).
8. Uncle Tom’s Children, his first book, was a collection of short stories while Black Boy was an autobiography in which he has written about his life and his experiences (“ Richard Wright,” 2007).

4. His last days

9. In 1944 he traveled France as a guest to the French government where he was invited to join the Congress of Cultural Freedom which he rejected. He later settled in Paris to become a permanent American Expatriate. (“ Richard,” 2003).
10. In his last years he wrote about 4000 poems using Haiku, a Japanese form of poetry and a book containing his favorite 817 Haiku was published. He finally died in 1959 of heart attack in Paris (“ Richard,” 2003).

1. Meaning and History of Jim Crow

1. Meaning

1. Initially the term “ Jim Crow” signified the African Americans themselves but by the end of 19th century it signified the laws laid out for the African Americans after the civil war

reconstruction, i. e., the period between mid 1870s till 1960s (Blue, J., n. d.).

2. This term highlights the difference in the economic, social, political and cultural rights between the African Americans and the whites (“ Jim Crow”, 2003).

2. History

1828. The term finds its roots in a song called “ Jim Crow” sung by Thomas Dartmouth “ Daddy” Rice in 1828. This song was first sung by an African American in a park theatre in New York. Rice while performing the character of Jim Crow-a highly exaggerated, stereotypical, ignorant African American character sang this song. Rice was the first white American to play the character of an African American (Pilgrim, D., 2000).

1. Relation of Jim Crow with Oppression and Privilege

1. Status of African Americans in the early days before the Civil War

1. A young girl stating participating in an essay competition conducted post World War stated that the punishment that would be apt for punishing Adolf Hitler for his crimes would be birth as an African American living in the United States. This essay shows the apathy of and inequality meted out to the African Americans during that age and time (“ Jim Crow”, 2006). During this period the African Americans were denied voting rights and positions of responsibility.

2. Jim Crow Lessons

1. His first Jim Crow lesson was as a child in Arkansas, where he learnt that Whites are always right and no one can go against them and to fight against them is wrong (Wright, R., 1937).
2. His second lesson was on his first job in an optical instrument shop where he learnt that African Americans had no right to learn new things. It was a shop owned by a white man and Wright's immediate superiors were also whites. The owner had given Wright the job in order to help him learn new things but this was not to be, as his immediate superiors never involved him and showed him his place by making him leave the job when he expressed his willingness to learn new things (Wright, R., 1937).
3. His third lesson was that an African American had no rights at all and even the law was against them (Wright, R., 1937). Soon after leaving the optical instrument shop he worked in a clothing store when one morning he saw his boss and the boss's son kicking and dragging an African American woman inside the store. After hearing some shrieking sounds from the store he saw the woman coming out of the store bleeding and crying. When she came out a policeman arrested her after accusing her of being drunk. When he returned to the store the boss and his son told him that this was how an African American was treated when they did not pay their bill and asked Wright to keep his mouth shut about this incident.
4. The next Jim Crow lesson taught him that even when an African American refuses something given to him by the Whites, he has

to use the titles “ sir” or madam and remain within the realm of politeness (Wright, R., 1937).

5. Another valuable Jim Crow lesson was that no African American can roam in an All-White neighborhood in the night. While a white person can roam at all times unmolested, in those ages it was unheard of that an African American ever passed a road at night without being stopped and questioned. This happened to the author who was detained by a policeman and was later released when the latter realized that there was nothing incriminatory on his person (Wright, R., 1937)
6. Another lesson learnt was that of survival skills such as to lie, to steal, to feign in order to survive anywhere (Wright, R., 1937). This is demonstrated by the instance where he borrowed a library card from a white man to get books from the library. He had to make sure that the librarian thought that he worked for the white man and it was the white man who wanted the books (Wright, R., 1937)

3. Oppression and Privilege

1. This autobiographical sketch of the author is a mirror of the society as it existed during the Civil Rights Era. The various experiences of the author show us the apathy and plight of the African Americans whose rights and privileges depended on the whims and fancies of the white people (Wright, R., 1937).
2. Though the African Americans were included in conversations but the topics for discussion were restricted and if they were found

discussing taboo subjects then they were beaten up (Wright, R., 1937).

3. They had no political or social rights and were also not allowed the privilege of basic self respect (Wright, R., 1937).

4. Summation

1. In any social situation, persons normally react to such kind of violent oppression but this resigned attitude of the African Americans can be seen from the concluding point of the author where he aptly describes the reaction of the African American to any such discrimination.

2. This piece shows that not only were the whites discriminating but the African Americans realizing the futility of fighting against it allowed their selves to be enslaved by accepting and resigning to the situation. They never questioned the fact that they could not hold important positions, or that their learning was restricted to early schooling or that they had to always accept and agree that the whites were right, even when they were wrong.

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