

Society's condemnation: bigger thomas

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



“ Southern trees bear strange fruit. Blood on the leaves and blood at the root. Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze. Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees”-Billie Holliday. Consider being condemned by someone or something even before you were cognizant of their existence. More specifically, this encompasses the fictitious narrative of Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son*, by Richard Wright. Bigger represents the impoverished African American community of Chicago who is forced into subservience by Whites. Bigger's struggles also signify some of other common problems that plague the Black community at present such as gang violence and widespread feelings of pessimism in face of oppression. In Book one of the novel *Native Son*, Wright uses the symbolism and juxtaposition in order to suggest that when one is confined societal norms it perpetuates immense fear and causes one to be violent in response to such confines.

To begin Wright uses the symbols of a rat, a gun and Mrs. Dalton's blindness in order to establish the societal positionality of bigger and to suggest that when one is confined it causes them to become violent in response. The first book of the novel is titled fear and Wright depicts this initial fear in the lines, “ it reared once more and bared long yellow fangs, piping shrilly... He's over a foot long” (Wright 6). The phrases “ long yellow fangs” and “ over a foot long” depicts the rat as vile creature, which is capable of vast destruction.

Through this illustration of the rat it accomplishes two things: it establishes the impoverished state of the Thomases as their home is overrun with vermin and it emphasizes the portrayal of “ fear” of this animal. The symbol of a rat shows the substandard living environment that the whites force blacks into and the inferior position of African Americans on the economic

ladder.. More generally, rats tend to dwell in unlit locations where they have access to garbage and food. Rats are seen as a pest and they are mostly undesirable in any home. This notion and widespread connotation of rats causing the Thomases to experience this initial “fear”. Bigger eventually kills the rat but the line “The huge black rat squealed and leaped at Bigger’s trouser-leg” (Wright 5) helps to generate the idea that no matter how hard one struggles they will always fall victim to the system. Similar to the rat, Bigger is a force that is already disliked by the larger White majority and no matter what he does his resistance is futile. He is disadvantaged and like the rat, Bigger is also trapped and he has no choice but to surrender. Subsequently the symbol of a gun is also a compelling factor in the development of book one.

The gun is introduced when Bigger says, “We better take our guns this time...but I’ll feel safer with a gun this time”. Guns are a typically a symbol of , masculinity, power, and safety, and this can be seen with Bigger and his gun. In a society teeming with oppression and racism, Bigger sees his gun as the only way to resist societal pressures. However this struggle is futile because this material strength doesn’t provide him enough power to resist the institutionalized oppression. Additionally Wright strategically uses Mrs. Dalton’s blindness to represent the view of the world through the “white lens” at this time. Wright introduces this by saying, “He went to the sink...feeling that she could see him even though he knew that she was blind”. Traditional blindness concerns the loss of sight. However, in a more figurative sense Wright does this to suggest that Ms. Dalton is numb and is not empathetic to the issues of the black community. Mrs. Dalton is also

symbolically blind to what black people face. She claims to help educate blacks but contributes to the injustice that has built her husband's fortune. Furthermore, her blindness reflects the blindness all of white society has to the suffering of the black community. White society fails to see the injustice it causes

To add on, Wright uses juxtaposition in order to further emphasize that when one is pressured by the confines of society, it causes them to be helpless and violent. This can be explicitly seen within Bigger's interactions with Jan and Mary. This is depicted in the lines, " She doubled with laughter. He tightened with hate. Again she was looking inside him" (Wright 81)". The words " laughter" and " hate" are words with remote connotations one dealing with immense joy and the other extreme anger. Wright includes this scene in order to portray the view of Bigger's world both through a White and an African American lens. Like most other whites Mary is numb to advantages she gains by being white, and this contributes to Bigger's source of anger. Bigger is enraged and feels that he has to submit to a larger power. Despite this being a misunderstanding Bigger's hatred is birthed from the intrinsic racism of his society. Overall Wright includes this juxtaposition in order to contrast the view of the world contingent on race. This also emphasize how oppressed groups respond to social confines. Moreover Wright also provides a juxtaposition by describing the living conditions of the Dalton family.