

The representation of african american women in native son



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In the *Native Son*, Richard Wright cultivates supporting characters as threats to the main character Bigger in ways that range from being highly significant to extremely minimal. In analyzing the way the African American women are represented in the novel we see a common negative feeling shared by Bigger towards them. Feminist scholar Trudier Harris argument that the black women in this story are portrayed as a “ stifler’s for Bigger’s dreams for freedom and success” is something that entirely true and is sexist as well as demeaning on Wright’s behalf.

Beginning with Bigger’s interactions with his mother, readers are able to recognize Bigger’s feeling that his mother’s sole purpose is to scowl at him and ridicule him for his shortcomings. He has constant feeling of hate towards his mother and feel as if she is the reason that he isn’t destined for greatness because it is her “ foul attitude” towards him that keeps him in a state where he is mentally oppressed ultimately making him settle for being physically oppressed as well. In the novel Bigger always describes her as if she is a bother to him and nags a lot about the things he lacks. In the little moments that Ms. Thomas is shown in the story she always portrayed as having some type of animosity or anger towards Bigger, due to Wright portraying her this way he is reinforcing the racist and demeaning idea of the “ angry black woman” stereotype. Also, Ms. Thomas’ sole issue with Bigger is that he is not financially providing for their family, reinforcing the idea that women need to be dependent on men and are unable to efficiently provide for their family. Although Bigger’s interactions with his younger sister Vera are very short, readers are able add these interactions to the growing case showing Bigger’s and Wright’s underlying sexist attitudes specifically to

African American women. In the story Vera is represented as a very scared character who also represents someone who is a nuisance to Bigger.

Bessie's character also falls into the similar persona that Wright has made for all of the female characters in the novel. She nags at Bigger and ridicules him of his shortcomings, and mistakes. She shows a great amount of dependence on Bigger like all the other black women in the story however, Bessie proves to not only be the weakest black women but the weakest character in the whole entire novel. Throughout Bigger's scheme to get money from the Daltons and run away from his crime Bessie is portrayed as a crying wreck, who does nothing but sob and sob about the mess Bigger has gotten her into. " She ran to the bed, fell upon it and sobbed." With her mouth all twisted and her eyes wet, she asked in gasps" (pg 225) Although her reaction could be considered reasonable for someone in her position I see it as Wright intentionally making her as a weak character who does not know how to deal with problems in a way that will benefit her.

For the sake of such character analysis, it is also important to consider what Bigger and Bessie's relationship is based off on - a fulfillment of one another's personal wants. Bigger only comes to Bessie when he need comfort and sex and Bessie only seems to be invested in Bigger when he provides her with alcohol or money. Although the relationship is detrimental to both characters Wright frames the story to make it that Bessie is the weaker one who brings a larger sense of harm onto Biggers path. For example in the novel it states " A woman was a dangerous burden when a man was running away. He had read of how men had been caught because of women, and he did not want that to happen to him. But, if, yes, but if he <https://assignbuster.com/the-representation-of-african-american-women-in-native-son/>

told her, yes, just enough to get her to work with him?”. Bessie proved to be the “burden” he thought about prior to him making the choice to run away from the murder he’s committed. Also on page 225, Bigger acknowledges that if he were to leave Bessie behind he knows that she is too weak and naive to keep her guard up against police if they questioned her about Bigger whereabouts, this also shows the weakness of Bessie’s character.

When thinking about the overarching idea of survival that is shown in this novel we see that Wright believes that black women stand as an obstacle in the progression of black men. He writes these black women not as actually characters but reasons- reasons as to why Bigger acts the ways he acts and why Bigger views the world as he does. In doing this Wright proves himself to be extremely sexist by subtly pushing the message that black women (or even all women in the story) prove to be burdens, and roots of failure in Bigger’s life.