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Cultural racial and psychological tension in Richard Wright's *Native son* and Barack Obama's *Dreams from my father*.

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Abstract

This study examines the complex intersection of cultural, racial and psychological tensions depicted in Richard Wright's "Native Son" and Barack Obama's "Dreams from My Father". By conducting a comparative analysis of the protagonists' experiences, it explorestheir struggles with identity formation, systemic oppression and the pursuit of self-actualization in a racially divided society. Furthermore, it argues that both works shed light on the deep-rooted effects of racial discrimination and the enduring psychological impact it has on individuals and communities. Through their narratives, Wright and Obama offer insightful commentary on the intricate dynamics of race in America, emphasizing the ongoing battle for equality and the psychological burden of racialized identities.

Keywords: Cultural tensions, Racial discrimination, Identity formation, Systemic oppression, Psychological impact

Introduction

The world contains different races. Each race has its own characteristics, abilities and qualities. One may distinguish them according to the different continents (Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and America). Racism is distinguished between inferior and superior groups in which the inferior group is dominated by the superior group. Race is at the heart of the division between Black and White with great impact on the cultural and psychological beliefs of the races; it makes them to act in prejudiced ways that harm them. Culture has direct impact on the psychology of the people in relation to their outlook and stability. Slavery brought together people who would never have encountered one another and who had never considered their color or residence on a single continent a source of identity and unity. Slavery brought them together and was used as a source of subjugation, denial, oppression, fear and dehumanization.

Racism and racial discrimination in the United States has been a major issue since the colonial and slave era. Certain privilege and rights were granted to white people which were not granted to other racial groups such as African-Americans and others. European-Americans (particularly Anglo Americans) were privileged by law in matters of literacy, immigration, voting right, citizenship, land acquisition and criminal procedure over periods of time

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extending from the seventieth century to the 1960s. Many non-protestant European immigrant groups, particularly Jews, Irish people, Poles, Haitains and Blacks suffered racist attack and other forms of discrimination in American society on the account of racism in American. It is certainly true that racism is not as serious a problem now as in the past; this is because the history of the United States is, in part, a story of debates, disagreements, and struggles over freedom. The black struggle for equal treatment was first triggered off by slave narratives which helped the blacks to establish an African-American identity in America and it has continued to exert an important influence on black fictional techniques and themes throughout the 20th century. Black American authors of the twentieth century employed many themes as the search for identity by Richard Wright, anger against discrimination by James Baldwin, and the sense of living invisibly by Ralph Ellision. Richard Wright uses his work to fight against injustice in American society and oppression of the Blacks by the whites. He wanted to spread the idea of democracy and find a solution to the racial problems plaguing the nation. This paper studies the cultural, racial and psychological tension in Richard Wright's *Native Son*[2] and Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father*[3].

Cultural, racial and psychological tension in Richard Wright's *Native son* and Barack Obama's *Dreams from my father*

In Richard Wright's *Native Son*, racism is placed as a burden in the minds and lives of African. Americans; a phenomen that started before 20th century and still in practice in today's American society, but to a minimal level. *Native Son* projects a poor,wrenched African-American character Bigger Thomas, who is the persona used to represent the life and condition of the Blacks in America who are denied access to education, good environment and freedom of expression, hence, the destruction of their cultural and psychological stability.

Bigger Thomas cannot envisage any atom of hope and survival in the environment where the basic structures of the society are under the control of the whites and do not give the blacks the opportunity to rise above the standard set by American society. This is revealed in the discussion between Bigger and his friend Gus:

> 'Goddammit!'
> 'What's the matter?'
> 'They don't let us do nothing'
> 'Who?'
> 'The White folks,'
> 'You talk like you just now finding that out; Gus said'
> 'Nwa. But I just can't get used to it;' Bigger said 'I swear to God I can't , I know I oughtn't think about it, but I can't help it. Every time I think about it I feel like somebody's poking a red-hot iron down my throat[4].

[2]Richard, Wright. Native Son. Vintage.2000
[3]Obama, Barack. Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance: Three Rivers Press. 2004.
[4]Richard, Wright. Native Son. Vintage.2000 :49-50

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This position angers him, and makes him grow bitter and distant from the society, thereby casting him as an antihero to the reader rather than a pure-hearted protagonist. This seduction makes him bow to the pressure of his family needs and develops in him a deep feeling of anger and frustration.

Wright shows how racist physical boundaries induce blacks to take out aggressions on one another. Because of their isolated lives, blacks "felt that it was much easier and safer to rob their own people because the white policemen never really searched against other Negroes who committed crime against other Negros"[5]. They are allowed to commit crime in their environment and culture, but when they try to cross boundaries they are gripped with fear. They could neither change their situation nor summon enough courage to rob the white man, because of fear. Bigger intentionally fights his friend Gus in pretense that he did not come on time in their arrangement to rob the Blum stores, While the actual reason was to avert the punishment of the white man if they are caught:

> Halfway down the block he passed Blum's Stores; he looked out of the corners of his eyes through the plate glass window and saw that Blum was alone and the store was empty of customers. Yes; they would have had time to rob the store, infact, they still had time. He had lied to Gus and G.H and Jack… Yes; they could have robbed the store and could have gotten away. He hoped the fight he had with Gus covered up what he was trying to hide[6].

Wright continues to present the limitations of the blacks when Bigger and his friend Gus on a South side street are discussing and encouraging each other in a free atmosphere, compared to their living in one bedroom apartment. They suddenly notice a skywriting plane spelling out something. They cannot see it clearly but Bigger gazes in childlike wonder and says: "God I would like to fly up there in that sky"[7].His desire is to be free in a wide space; he wants his condition to change. He realizes his position and expresses himself in a dialogue with a friend:

> We live here and they live there. We blackand they white. They got things and we ain't. they do things and we can't. it's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence[8].

Wright compares between White and Black races showing their differences and limitations right from the time he was born in America. The condition of the black as at that time has no solution or self-develop methods to improve race relation and establish themselves; they resort to hate and violence. This limitation breeds anxiety and aggressiveness on the surface but deep inside he

[5] Richards (Native Son, 44).
[6] Richards (Native Son, 70).
Richards(Native Son, 47)
[8]Richards (Native Son 49-50)

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is feared. Thus, Bigger by experiencing the hazards of the culture he lives in becomes an accidental killer. However, before he becomes an accidental killer he first becomes the victim of racism, culturally structured and socially bounded. As a matter of fact, Bigger who grows up in a culture that makes relationship between whites and blacks strange and unfriendly believes that white people's act of kindness to him is something to be feared rather than be accepted. He is controlled by such a cultural psychological feeling when Jan offers his hand to shake him and he is shocked:

> Jan smiled broadly and then extended an open palm toward him. Bigger's entire body tightened with suspense and dread. Jan's hand was still extended. Biggers' right hand raised itself about three inches, then stopped in mid-air. 'Come on and shake', Jan said. Bigger extended a limp palm, his mouth open astonishment. He felt Jan's fingers tighten about his own. He tried to pull his hand away, ever so gently, but Jan held on, firmly, smiling, 'I will call you Bigger and you will call me Jan'[9].

Bigger shows surprise and cannot understand why Jan is acting like this. He also cannot understand Mary's response to him as if he has suddenly become a human who shares the same world with them. Bigger's cultural and psychological background have not prepared him to accept being treated as a human like the whites. He is shocked by the fair racial treatment and he is unable to respond to them as a person. Mary and Jan assume that Bigger will accept their friendship, not realizing that Bigger has been conditioned racially and culturally to react with suspicion and fear.

Richard Wright portrays the vicious circle of racism from the white perspective as well as from the black angle, emphasizing that even well-meaning whites exhibit prejudice that feeds into the very same black behavior that confirms the racist white sense of superiority. Wright also portrays a picture of interiority complex when Jan drives the car with Mary in the passenger's seat. Bigger feels trapped between these two white people. He feels less free than when he is in his one bedroom apartment. The narrator explains: "He could have made all this very easy if he had simply acted from the beginning as if they were doing nothing unusual. But he did not understand them. He distrusted them, really hated them. He was puzzled as to why they were treated him this way" (*Native Son* 121). The unusual treatment created hesitations and fears that projected cultural mental picture of racism.

Quite unlike Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son* who was overwhelmed by his degraded environment, lack of education as dictated by the white's racist and cultural supremacy. Barack Obama sees these conditions as a springboard to uplift himself. He subdued his emotions and rage to focus on reality. Obama's story also begins with the kind of place and environment he leaves in New York:

> I was living in New York at the time … part of that unnamed, shifting border between East Harlem and the rest of

[9]Richards(Native Son 97-98).

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> Manhattan. It was an uninviting block, treeless and barren, lined with soot-colored walk-ups that cast heavy shadows for most of the day. The apartment was small, with slanting floors and irregular heat a buzzer downstairs that didn't work, … None of this concerned me much, … I was impatient in those days, busy with work and unrealized plans, and prone to see other people as unnecessary distractions[10].

Obama does not allow this condition to impugn on his emotion. He keeps himself busy with work to avoid anything that could cause distractions, hate and violence,even when white people bring their dogs to defecate in black neighborhood and call them names to demean them. He laughs over it and does not allow such condition to affect his psychology:

> When the weather was good, my roommates and I might sit out on the fire escape to smoke cigarettes and study the dusk washing blue over the city, or watch white people from the better neighborhoods nearby walk their dogs down our block to let the animals shit on our curbs – "scoop the poop, you bastards" my roommates would shout with impressive rage and we'd laugh at the faces of both master and beast, grim and unapologetic as they hunkered to do the deed[11].

In Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the racial boundary between the two races, black and white, is quite visible, with its attendant discomfort on the two races. The whites consider it demeaning and strange to live in the same area or vicinity with the black, let alone attending the same school with them. The situation in Barack Obama's *Dreams From my Father* improved a little, in spite of the fact that there were still traces of racism in the American system. Obama and other blacks live in the same area with the whites and could attend the same school with them:

> I was free to live like most middle-class blacks in Manhattan, free to choose a motif around which to organize my life, free to patch together a college of styles, friends, watering holes, political affiliation[12].

Denial of these privilages and racial relation in Richard Wright's *Native Son* cause hatred, violence and fear. Obama believes in the acquisition of education, skills and positive attitude as a way to dismantle racism. He could not come to terms with characters like Sadik and Macus who allowed their history and racist behavior of the white to discourage them from completing their education:

> I wasn't sure what had happened to Marcus. He should have had one more year left, but something had gotten to him

[10]Obama, Barack. Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance: Three Rivers Press. 2004. 3
[11] Obama (Dreams From My Father 15).
[12] Obama (Dreams From My Father 61).

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> midway through his junior year, something that I recognized, even if I couldn't quite name it. I thought back to one evening, sitting with him in the liberary, before he'd decided to drop out of school …[13].

Obama considers it strange and feel that someone like Marcus has no reason to leave school or allow the past history and present experiences to stall his dreams for equal opportunity and justice:

> … there were more than enough reasons for someone like Marcus to feel restless in a place like occidental … I began to notice changes in him, as if he were haunted by specters that had seeped through the cracks of our safe, sunny world… He began to skip classes, … finally he told me that he was going to take a leave from school for a while. "Need a break from this shit, "he said[14].

Obama is quite conscious of what happened to his father and other blacks, how his father could not realize his dreams in America as a result of racism and white power of control. The younger Obama's role as a social worker makes him to understand the intricacies of racism. He believes that racism overwhelmed his father in America and he returned to Kenya as a "divide man". Obama's foray into social works and level of association prepared him to stick to his dreams. He made conscious efforts not to escape into violence and crime and could not allow the shackles of his skin, as did Biggers Thomas in Richard Wright, to weigh him down. He tries to balance the power of dreams, education and determination in the struggle for racial equality. Obama's analogy between the past and the present in race relation is apt and vivid as he declares:

> The relationship between black and white… would never be quite the same for me as it had been for Frank, or for the old man, or even for Roy. And as segregated as Chicago was, as strained as race relation were, the success of the civil right movement had at least created some overlap between communities, more room to maneuver for people like me[15].

Obama's reference to Frank, Old man and Roy is an indirect reference between black characters like Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright *Native Son*, and the blacks of that era, who could not transcend their cultural and racial burden placed on them by the society. Rather, they resort to hatred, violence and killing. He acknowledges that efforts of the blacks of that era prepared grounds for people like him to surmount certain aspects of cultural and racial conditions in America.

Barack Obama recognizes the importance to build confidence in the black characters, and restore their cultural and racist beliefs that black people cannot aspire to do certain jobs or profession in America base on the colour. Characters

[13] Obama (Dreams From My Father 116).
[14] Obama (Dreams From My Father 117).
[15] Obama (Dreams From My Father 278).

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like Kyle believes that blacks are culturally not worthy to fly an airoplane. This cultural belief makes him cancel his childhood dream of becoming a pilot. It makes him to join bad gag and his zeal in education dropped. Obama said:

> One day I volunteered to sound Kyle out, inviting him to join me for a pick-up basketball game at the University of Chicago gym. He was quiet most of the ride up to Hyde Park, fending off question with a grunt or a shrug. I asked him if he was still thinking about the air force, and he shook his head, he'd stay in Chicago, he said , find a job and get his own place. I asked him what had changed his mind. He said that the air force would never let a black man fly a plane[16].

An average black like Bigger Thomas believes that blacks are culturally not worthy to go into certain professions as they have been culturally programmed in that manner. But Obama consentaneously tries to change the psyche of the blacks of his time as he said: I looked at him crossly, "who told you that mess?" Kyle struggled, "Don't need somebody to tell me that. Just is, that's all". Obama quickly responded, "Man, that's the wrong attitude. You can do whatever you want if you're willing to work for it". Obama cautioned Kyle in the same manner when Kyle reacted violently to the man that called him 'punk' when they were playing basketball. Obama said:

> On the drive back, I gave Kyle a long lecture about keeping his cool, about violence, about responsibility … When I was finished he turned to me and said, "just don't tell my momma, all right?"[17].

In Richard Wright *Native Son,* there is no character like Obama that could tame the cultural, racist and psychological debasement of the blacks. Psychologically, White peoples' sudden compassion for Bigger makes him uncomfortable because of the society he grew up in; it is the society and environment that has destabilized his psychological balance and built racial tension in him. Bigger knows that blacks have been negatively presented in the American culture and have been treated unfairly. Therefore Jan's and Mary's treatment differ with the stereotype image in Bigger's mind. Our reception and acceptance of stereotype, "images of things we fear and glorify", according to David Sibley, "is a necessary part of our coming to terms with the world"[18]. Bigger shows this process; however, it is not easy; in his case it proves impossible. He is shocked, unable to understand the act of Jan and Mary. Their behaviour is strange to him and contrary to his stereotyped image of the white race. Bigger's fears and anxieties stem from the fact that Jan and Mary violate the racial order in which the blacks mean nothing in American society.

The estrangement in *Native Son*gives rise to lack of interracial interaction that results in exploitation and violence. When Bigger as a debased black enters into White territory, it results in accidental killing of a white girl. When a white

[16] Obama (Dreams From My Father 254).
[17] Obama (Dreams From My Father 255).
[18]Sibley, D. Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West. Routledge, 2016.

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enters the blacks territory it is basically to earn money, space and power in order to control the blacks. They see each other as object of exploitations; all are metaphorically "blind". White and Black do not see each other as human because of this strange gap that exists between them. Thus, after he murders the white girl, Bigger takes comfort in his assumption that everyone is "blind" and as such no one will suspect him of murdering a white girl, says;

> It might be a long time before anyone would think that Mary was killed and a still longer time before anyone would think that he had done it. And when Mary was missed, would they not think of the reds first? [19].

In order to conceal his crime, Bigger takes the body to the basement and stuffs it into the furnace. This action is subject to two interpretations. The first is fear and white superiority over blacks; he wants to get rid of the corpse of Mary and to leave no evidence behind, while the second is taking revenge on the whites. In effect it is "You Stuffed me in a room apartment, I stuffed your dead body in a furnace", which is the feeling that transpires in the following position of *Native Son*:

> It was not Mary he was reacting to when he felt that fear and shame. Mary had served to set off his emotions, emotions conditioned by many Marys'. And not that he had killed Mary he felt a lessening of tension in his muscles; he had shed an invisible burden he had long carried[20].

Bigger's flight, apprehension, trials, and conviction are significant for what they show of Richard Wrights' indictment of the destructive psychological impact of racism. After murdering Mary Dalton, Bigger wishes not to be caught; he plans to implicate Jan in the crime. It would be easy for him because Jan is a communist, a Red. Like African-Americans, communists are marginalized, even persecuted, in the American society.'

Ironically, the Communist party was committed to civil right for the black man in America in the 1930's and 1940's[21]. Later in the story after Bigger is arrested a communist, Boris Max defends him. Wright shows in *Native Son*that communism was closer in defending the oppressed, contrary to the words of the Declaration of Independence which recognizes "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" are rights necessary to each human being and should never be taken away[22]. The American society is afflicted by both racial prejudice and paranoia of communism. As Huston Baker has written, "Communism was in fact, an ideology that fits Wrights' fundamental cultural assumptions". Bigger's attempt to frame Jan emphasizes the ironic cultural mistrust that exits in America.

[19] Richard (Native Son 143)
[20] Richard (Native son 144)
[21]Kinnamon, K. New Essays on Native Son, Cambridge University Press. 2014.4
[22]Foner, Eric. Give me Liberty! An American History. Second Edition, Norton & Company, 2007.197

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Bigger succeeds in getting Jan arrested but he is not psychologically balanced to handle so many facts and lies relating to his indictment of Jan. He continues to lie when he decides to send ransom notes to Mary's parents, allowing them to think Mary had been kidnapped. However, when Britten, the detective Mr. Dalton hired to investigate Mary's Murder, brings Bigger face to face with Jan for questioning, Bigger's confidence crumbles. He goes to his mistress Bessie and forces her to go with him and to hide in an empty building in the slum area of the city. There he instructs her to pick up the ransom money he hopes to receive from Mr. Dalton. But when he attempts to stoke a fire he accidentally draws attention to the furnace and realizes that reporters have discovered Mary's bones. Thus, afraid of being caught and leaving Bessie behind to be caught and questioned by the police, he kills her and throws her body down an airshaft. Killing Bessie, the young black woman, does not make him feel as alone and scared as when he killed Mary, the young white woman. Even Bigger Thomas realizes that murder of a white woman carries more consequences than murder of a black woman, an awareness that shows how blacks and whites are valued in a white dominated America.

Immediately Bigger is apprehended, he decides not to say anything even when he knows that Bessie's body has been found. He, however, reacts when Buckley begins to explain the crimes of rape and murder charges against him. Bigger Thomas strongly denies the issues of rape and the role of Jan in Mary's death. Under a serious and vigorous questioning, Bigger succumbs to the overwhelming influence of the whites and signs a confession. After Jan's statement, the prosecutor perceives him as a communist and cross-examines Jan to understand his beliefs about psychological cultural racism.

> Do you believe in social equality for negros?
> 'I believe all races are equal....' Jan began. 'Answer yes or no,
> Mr. Erlone! You're not on a soap box,
> Do you believe is social equality for negroes?
> 'Yes',..
> How many times have you eaten with negroes before ?
> 'I don't know,, many times'
> 'You like Negroes'?
> 'I make no distinctions…[23]

This type of cross examination by the prosecutor portrays serious demarcation of racial boundaries between the whites and the Blacks. It also casts aspersions on the prosecutor's investigation of Bigger. The hatred and deep rooted prejudice in the questions to Jan show that the blacks are not regarded as human beings. However, this questioning ends when Max rises to protest the racial bigotry of the prosecutor. Then Max questions Mr. Dalton about his ownership of the high-rent rat-infested tenements where Bigger's family live. Max asks Mr. Dalton why he charges the Thomas family a high rent. Dalton explains saying that "there was housing shortage", and if he were to charge lower rent he would be unethical[24]. Dalton represent the white bourgeoisie

[23] Richards (Native Son 346-347)
[24] Richards (Native Son 357)

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who control power and other sources of wealth in the society and place high rents on the blacks in America.

After the testimonies of other people, Bigger is called to the stand. The prosecutor submits the kidnap note to the jurors, the blood stained knife, the blackened hatchet blade, the communist pamphlets, the rum bottle, the trunk and the signed confession. Lastly he brings Bessie's dead body into the courtroom to prove that Bigger had raped and murdered the white woman, Mary. This exposes the racist judicial system where the prosecutor can only use Bessie, the black woman murdered by Bigger, to prove the case of the white woman's murder. This confirms the thinking of Bigger Thomas as the say: 'He had not thought of Bessie but once since his capture. Her death was unimportant beside that of Mary's, He knew that when they killed him it would be for Mary's death, not Bessie[25].

In Bigger's defense, Max does not call any witness or cross-examine the prosecution's witness; instead he makes a long speech to the court, outlining the destruction of the human relation and social structure in the American Society; its effect on an individual such as Bigger and the inner psychological impact. In his plea for leniency, he makes it clear that Bigger is not responsible for his crime. Max condemns the racist American society which created negative psychological and cultural conditions for average Black American to do extreme things. He admits that white people had thwarted Bigger all his life, until he killed Mary Dalton. He says that the act has released him from psychological and physical confinement. Max attempts to delay death by appealing to the governor, but he is unsuccessful in the last hours before his execution; he helps Bigger to see that White American authority is itself filled with fear. Bigger can forgive them because they are suffering the same ignorance that he has suffered. They do not known the guilt of their own social crime.

On the psychological level, Barack Obama is someone who tries to discount himself from fury in an intellectual manner and he seriously tries to keep matters in clear focus. He does not only contain his rage or hold it inside his mind, he dissociates a psychoanalytic term for disconnecting thought from feeling. This gives him the advantage to tower above the vistas of psychological slide and grotesque pain of his history and challenges of racism as he said:

> ... I learned to slip back and forth between my black and white worlds, understanding that each possessed its own language and customs and structures of meaning, convinced that with a bit of translation on my part the world would eventually cohere[26].

This level of psychology makes him to put things in proper perspective and protects himself from the disruptive influences of excessive passions like Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son*. This spirit makes Obama not to allows situations within his environment to affect his psychology. Any opportunity he has, to prove his mantle or skill between him and the whites, he puts up the best

[25] Richards (Native son 334)
[26]Obama(Dreams From My Father 82) .

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attitude and vigor that would make the white to know that colour is not synonymous with skill and intelligence.When Obama sets out to play basketball, in-spite of the demoralizing attitude of the white and their thinking that blacks cannot play basketball, Obama proved himself and becomes the best in punahou's team and was selected to play in the university court:

> I was playing on punahou's teams, and could take my game to the university courts, where a handful of black men, mostly gym rats and has-been, would teach me an attitude that didn't just have to do with the sport. That respect came from what you did and not who your daddy was. That you could talk stuff to rattle an opponent, but that you should shut the hell up if you couldn't back it up. That you didn't let anyone sneak up behind you to see emotions like hurts or fear-you didn't want them to see[27].

Obama excelled against every uncertainties and became friends to the whites who ordinarily could not give him any chance. He said: At least on the basket court, I could find a community of sorts with anluner life all its own. It was there that I would make my closest white friends, on turf where blackness couldn't be a disadvantage [28]. Obama is quiet conscious that anytime the white praises or recognizes a black for certain feat, skill or quality, there is secret tricky motives behind it. The white cannot in all honesty think good of the blacks. So, when they (whites) give him such hypocritical praises, he maintains his cool and guides himself:

> ....When the school principal told me I was cool. I did like Stevie Wonder, I did love basketball, and I tried my best to be cool at all times. So why did such comments always set me on edge? There was a trick there somewhere,... [29].

Obama understands these tricks well and will always beat them to their game. In one of Obama and Ray's encounter with Kurt, Obama makes Ray to understand that he has to be conscious anytime the white man praises him beyond his imagination. He says:

> … One of the senior, a stout defensive tackle named Kurt, was there, and he shouted lonely as soon as he saw us.
> 'Hey, Ray! Mah main man! What's happening'!
> Ray went up and slapped Kurt's outstretched palm
> But when Kurt repeated the gesture to me, I waved him off.
> 'What's his problem? I over heard Kurt say to Ray as I walked away. A few minutes later, Ray caught up with me and asked me what was wrong.'Man, those folks are just making fun of us, 'I said 'What're you talking about'.'All that 'Yobaby, give me five bullshit'[30].

[27] Obama(Dreams From My Father 79)
[28] Obama(Dreams From My Father 80)
[29]Obama(Dreams From My Father 82)
[30] Obama(Dreams From My Father 83)

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Ray could not understand what Obama is telling him, until he asks Obama to invite some of the white friends for a party he organized in his house. Jeff and Scott came to that party. But, because they are not in charge they could not fit into the party. After a while, they asked Obama to take them home. Psychologically, they could not feel comfortable in a place where they are not in control and dictate the way things should go; Obama observes:

> The presence of Jeff and Scott seemed to make no waves; Ray introduced them around the room, they made some small talk, they took a couple of the girls out on the dance floor. But I could see right away the scene had taken my white friends by surprise...After maybe an hour, they asked me if I'd be willing to take them home[31].

Jeff, on the way home acknowledges that they were psychologically low at the party and imagined how Obama and Ray have been coping with the psychological racial condition within the American system:

> Jeff put an arm on my shoulder, looking at once contrite and relieved. "You know, man," he said, "that really taught me something. I mean, I can see how it must be tough for you and Ray sometimes, at school parties... being the only black guys and all" [32].

This statement by Jeff makes Obama to understand the level of racial psychology of the whites against the blacks. He discovers that whites and blacks are in two separate worlds. Barrack realizes that he was playing on the white man's court. Even if the white man treated you like a man or come to your defense, it is because he knows that the words you speak, the clothes you wear, the book you read, your ambitions and desires are already his.As he said:

> I had begun to see a new map of the world, one that was frightening in its simplicity, suffocating in its implications... if the principal, or the coach or a teacher, or Kurt wanted to spit in your face, he could, because he had power and you didn't[33].

Today, looking back, Barack reflects on what he now calls 'maddening logic' as an excuse to withdraw into a smaller coil of powerlessness until being black meant only the knowledge of your own powerlessness and defeat. All through the time Obama worked with the churches in Chicago, he could not really disclose his religious inclination or spiritual state. He has dominant feeling that preachers are sanctimonious beards preaching pre-in-the sky or stick holy rollers with flashy cars and eyes on the collection plates. This feeling changed when he met Revered Wright of Trinity Baptist Church. Barack like the preacher and particularly liked what he referred to as "A Disavowal of the pursuit of middle-classiness," separate from middle-incomeness, which was perfectly fine

[31]Obama(Dreams From My Father 84)
[32] Obama(Dreams From My Father 84)
[33] Obama(Dreams From My Father 85)

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to pursue, the church believe that blacks must avoid the psychological entrapment that hypnotizes them into believing they are better than the rest and teaches them to think in terms of "We" and "They" instead of "Us"[34]. Barrack still sees most faith as folly or nothing more than simple endurance and was not willing to accept salvation so easily. But, before the thanksgiving of Mayor Washington who died few months after winning reelection and the city of Chicago and the blacks were devastated by his death, Obama decided to attend the Holy Trinity Church for the first time. The Sermon delivered by Revered Wright realigned his psychology and moved him beyond the narrow dreams in race relation:

> The title of Revered Wright's sermon that morning was "The Audacity of Hope", He began with a passage from the book of Samuel.The story of Hannah, who, barren and taunted by her rivals had wept and shaken in prayer before her God. The story reminded him, he said, of a sermon fellow pastor had preached at a conference some years before, in which the Pastor described going to a Museum and being confronted by a painting titled Hope[35].

At Kenyatta International Airport, his psychological fears are allayed. A local Kenyan British Airways employee recognizes his name: "You wouldn't be related to Dr. Obama by any chance? This moment of recognition is a key turning point in the narrative and a new landmark in his life's journey. "For the first time in my life", he writes, "I felt the comfort, the firmness identify that a name might provide... my name belonged, so I belonged"[36]. The Nairobi world provided a new psychological boost. This new experience of having a name that actually belongs is enhanced by the privilege of being able to sojourn in a place where everybody is black and where you can afford to just be yourself:

> For a span of weeks or months, you could experience the freedom that comes from not feeling watched, the freedom of believing that your hair grow at it's supposed to grow and that your sways the way a rump is supposed to sway. You could see a man talking to himself as just plain crazy or read about the criminal or the front page of the daily paper and ponder the corruption of the human heart, without having to think about whether the criminal or lunatic said something about your own fate. Here the world was black, and so you were just you; you could discover all those things that were unique to your life without living a lie or committing betrayal[37].

Many things seem to naturally change the perception and psychology of Obama,especially his acceptance among his people in Kenya. His visit to Aunt Zeitum, Uncle Kezin Obama and his father's grave. The story surrounding his

[34]Obama(Dreams From My Father 284)
[35] Obama(Dreams From My Father 292)
[36] Obama(Dreams From My Father 305)
[37] Obama(Dreams From My Father 311)

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history and family background makes him to see life as real and complete for the first time as he said:

> I realized that who I was, what I cared about, was no longer just a matter of intellect or obligation, no longer a construct of words. I saw that my life in America – the black life, the white life, the sense of abandonment I'd felt as a boy, the frustration and hope I'd witnessed in Chicago- all of it was connected with this small plot of earth on ocean away, connected by more than the accident of a name or the color of my skin. The pain I felt was my fathers' pain. My questions were my brothers' question. Their struggle, my birth right [38].

Conclusion

In *Richard Wight's Native Son*, the racist and structural domination of the white people gave them power to control the means of production, society and other means of production. These conditions impinge on the psychological, social and the cultural system of the two races. Either directly or indirectly, both White and Black are responsible for the prejudiced racist views and negative stereotypes and boundaries created in the system. Bigger represent the pain, fear and anger of his race, while the Daltons effectively represent the ruling white power, in guilt hate and complex. Thus, to be black in America in the period Bigger represents means to be the victims of social degradation of values and race prejudice. Bigger Thomas fear, flight, fate and trial dramatize American racism, its pervasiveness and the way racism prevents social and cultural understanding or compassion for the other.

In Barack Obama's *Dreams From My Father*, there are racial issues and preponderance of evidence that show numerous incidents of racial discrimination. But Obama continues to challenge America's racial status quo in a more proactive manner; unlike Bigger Thomas Obama redefined himself as American and symbolizes the greatness of America.

In the 1920's and 1930s Richard Wright represents blacks as people who could not socially and psychologically transcended race to become new people in America. Black was not a category admitting transcendence, but rather subject to the enslavement of racism. Obama scales in between racial mythology to create new order in racial relation. Obama destroyed the long ages barrier that in April 2010, after more than two centuries of slavery went into the oval office as the president of United State. While, Bigger Thomas at the end, became a debased killer and prisoner. Comparatively Obama keyed into the call made by Bob Marley and the Wailers in their redemption songs thus.

> Old pirates yes they rob I,
> Sold to the Merchant ship,
> Minutes after they took I,
> From the bottomless pit.
> But my hands was made strong,

[38] Obama(Dreams From My Father 430)

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By the hands of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly,
Won't you help to sing,
The songs of freedom,
Cause all I ever have
Redemption Songs,
Redemption Songs,

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery,
Non but ourselves can free our minds,
Have no fear for atomic energy,
Cause none of them can stop the time,
How long shall they kill our prophets,
While we stand beside and look?
Oooh !!

Some say it just a part of it,
We have got to fulfill the book,
Won't you help to sing,
These songs of freedom,
Cause all I ever have,
Redemption Songs,
Redemption Songs,
Redemption Songs.

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