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Living under the Jim Crow Laws: Richard Wright's Black Boy: the Role of Hunger, Fear and Family Members in Shaping Richard's Growth and Beliefs.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of master degree in British and American studies.

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The Outline:

Living Under the Jim Crow Laws:

Richard Wright’s Black Boy: The Role of Hunger, Fear and family members in Shaping Richard's Growth and Beliefs.

Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to examine the conditions of life of Black Americans during the Jim Craw Era both historically and socially, and to try to find out how huger , fear and Richard ‘s family members contributed in shaping his growth and beliefs. It contains historical review of the Jim Crow Laws concerning the conditions under which the African-Americans lived and an examination of the role of Richard’s family members in” teaching” him submission through different means.

Introduction:

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 came to declare, for the first time in the history of the African-Americans, that all African-Americans who are living in the south of the United States are free from slavery. This victory announced by Abraham Lincoln did not last for a long time. Legislations were taken into action and brought out the segregation again. Richard Wright in his autobiography Black Boy describes the hardship of life in the south of the United States. He describes the social and financial problems that faced him in particular and African-Americans in general. They faced problems in education, transportation and in public facilities because of the Separate but Equal policy. The Plessey v. Ferguson made Separate but Equal policy constitutional. In education the Brown v. board of education provides a striking example. Violence also represented a great problem for African-Americans. When we look in history it could be found that thousands of African-Americans were lynched and murdered for reason or no reason. My present research will talk up this issue taking Richard Wright's autobiography as a case study to clarify the point that despite racism and segregation African-Americans were able to overcome their problems and achieve their goals.

Rationale of the Work:

Taking Richard Wright's Black Boy as a case study, the problem then is a racial problem. The problem of African-American youth growing up in a segregated south was the conditions which whites forced them to live upon .Whites designed a system to make African-American be submitted to their will through legislating acts like separate but "equal" facilities in public places. Facilities provided to blacks where old and outdated. The same thing is valid for the equipments provided for schools. This

made African-Americans leave school and always submissive to whites will. Concerning jobs, African-Americans were unable to find good jobs. As a result, African-Americans were living in a constant financial hardship. These were the conditions in which African-Americans youth were living in the segregated south.

Methodology:

The material comprises historical books for the historical background and literary analytical books for the analytical part of the work. The work will be descriptive in its historical, the Jim Crow Era, part and analytical in its literary part, the role of hanger, fear and family members in shaping Richard's growth and beliefs.

Structure of the Thesis:

The thesis is composed of three chapters:

Chapter1: Historical overview of the Jim Crow Era.

Chapter2: The Role of Hunger and Fear in shaping Richard's growth and beliefs.

Chgapter3: The Role of Family Members in shaping Richard's growth and beliefs.

This work probes into the subsequent question of how did the hardship of life during the Jim Crow Era from one side, in the other side fear, hunger and family members contributed in shaping Richard's growth and beliefs?.

Introduction:

Living under The Jim Crow Laws: the role of hunger, fear and the family members in shaping Richard's growth and beliefs articulates the conditions that the black's were living under in the south, exactly in Mississippi, during the Jim Crow era; and the role of Richard's family members in shaping his growth and beliefs as being narrated in his autobiography Black Boy.

What motivated me most and pushed me to work on an African-American issue is that the Constitution of the United States of America clearly declares that "All men and women are created equal" , but in the Jim Crow South Blacks were continuously persecuted in the early 20th century, the south was a place of racial prejudice , discrimination and hate . Blacks could be punished for simply looking to whites in a "wrong manner" as George M.Fredrickson illustrates in his book entitled *Racism*:*"Individual blacks had been hanged or burned to death by the lynch mobs to serve as examples to ensure that the mass of southern African Americans would scrupulously respect the color line."*(Frederickson2)

Another thing which motivated me to do this work is that white racists had done so many things to prevent African-Americans from getting their rights as American citizens. From racism to segregation, ending up with lynching and murdering, African- Americans were labeled as second class citizens and were treated on those bases. Even though African-Americans gained some very simple rights through the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865, whites did not stop their racist practices. Through reading *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia edited NikkiL.M.Brown, M.Stentiford* . I got convinced that, despite the violent history of the African-American and the murdering, the lynching, the racism and all the harsh periods that they were obliged to go through because of their color, they were able to survive and create an appropriate place in the present American society.

My dissertation will talk up this issue through three chapters. The first chapter will deal with the historical background of the work by examining the conditions of life for the blacks at that time meaning The Jim Crow Era in one side and in the other side how it affected Richard Wright in his growth and beliefs.

The second chapter will be dealing with will be dealing with how did hunger and fear affected Richard. One main problem that touched African-Americans and made them misachieve their goals is the white racist attempts to keep African-Americans always hungry, malnourished and constantly afraid of claiming their rights. Keeping African-Americans malnourished from childhood cause them to grow weak and fearful, thus they would always be submitted to the whites' will as stated in Richard Wright's autobiography Black Boy.

The third chapter will show how Wright's adult family members contributed in shaping his growth and beliefs. Anyone in this life got affected by his own relatives, at least by his very close ones. Wright got affected by his own family but not in the right way. Wright's family tried to "subdue him and suppress in him any impulse towards individuality, liberty and transgression of the prevailing segregated America."[1] This created in Richard his rebellious spirit.

This dissertation probes into the subsequent question of how hunger, fear and family members shaped Richard's growth and beliefs as stated in his autobiography Black Boy.

I. Chapter 1: Historical Overview of the Jim Crow Law

From the 1880s into the 1960s, a majority of American states enforced segregation through "Jim Crow" laws. From East to West and from North to South, many states and cities could impose their punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated .Financially, unable to accommodate for separate facilities, even non-racist whites were forced to turn away black job applicants and patrons. These laws effectively forced racist practices by citizens merely desiring to obey the law.

Historians assumed that the term Jim Crow had been originated around 1830 when a white, minstrel show performer, Thomas "Daddy" Rice, painted his face with black color and danced ridiculously while singing the lyrics to the song, "Jump Jim Crow." While he was traveling in the south of the United States, Rice saw an elderly black man or some say a young African-American boy dancing and singing a song ending with these words: I jump Jim Crow. Other historians believed that a man named Mr. Crow owned the slave who inspired Rice's act, thus the reason for the Jim Crow term in the lyrics.

The term was first coined in 1904 according to the Dictionary of American English, although there is some evidence of earlier usage.

In its historical context, The Jim Crow Era represents the end of the effectiveness of The Emancipation Proclamation of 1865 presented by Abraham Lincoln, in which he freed the slaves of the south. But in the aftermath in the aftermath of Reconstruction Era and the ratification of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments southern segregationists increasingly turned to their state legislatures to enact discriminatory legislation known as Jim Crow laws.

In the South, segregation became the law of the land, a status quo that was put in place in 1896 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "separate but equal" facilities for blacks and whites were constitutional. Moreover, the Jim Crow laws gained its significance from U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

White southern legislatures added insult to injury by passing other laws that made it difficult for blacks to vote, effectively disenfranchising a significant number of black citizens. Southern white racists turned to other extra legal means to deny the African-Americans vote. In fact, the 1880_s in the history of the United States history is marked by a massive growth in racial violence. The racist created terrorist groups for the sake of lynching African-Americans. The most popular group at that time was the KKK or The Ku Klux Klan[10]. The Klan was right-wing[3] organizations in the United States . Its members used masks[4,] the whip[5], darkness[6], and the noose[7] to implant fear in African-Americans as well as the whites who might openly help African-Americans.

The Klan's activities were not only violent but worked also political. The Klan also worked on the political level. After the Reconstruction the democratic party dominated the south, the thing that pushed all white people get involved within as stated in The Jim Crow Encyclopedia edited NikkiL.M.Brown, M.Stentiford;: *« Coupled with the violence, political shifts in the legislative and judicial Branches led to the exclusion of people of color from the Democratic Party by 1890 and the entire political process by 1900 »*[8]

The aim was to alienate the African-Americans from all aspects of life violently and politically.

The racists did not stop in eliminating African-Americans from political activities but went beyond to cut any direct contact with African-Americans. The most striking example to

illustrate this view is when Louisiana in1890 required by law that African-Americans ride in separate railroad cars. Six years later, African-Americans tried to challenge that law by having a light-skinned African-American, Homére Plessey board a train where he quickly got arrested for sitting in a place reserved for whites. The court ruled against Plessey and this case became known in the history of the United States as Plessey v. Ferguson. The court claimed that Plessey's rights were not denied since the separate accommodations provided to blacks were equal to those provided to whites under the Civil Rights Act of 1875 which declared that:

> *"That all persons ... shall be entitled to full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public discrimination on a railroad and in public sites, including a theater in San Francisco and the Grand Opera House in New York. In declaring the federal law unconstitutional..."*[9]

The Plessey case opened the door for the elimination of African-American schools in districts able to financial hardship. It is obvious that the Supreme Court was interested more in enforcing the separate part over the equal one. As a result of the Supreme Court approval, southern states passed laws which restricted the equal access of African-Americans to all kinds of public areas.

The Plessey case created a major obstacle to equal rights for African- Americans, reaching its highest point of racism by authorizing a long series of Court decisions that ignored and crushed civil rights for African-Americans beginning in the 1870s. The most famous ones were the Slaughterhouse Cases, United States v. Reese, United States v. Cruikshank, and the Civil Rights Cases of 1883. The Supreme Court provided additional

support for segregation in 1899 in the case of Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education.

In this first case using Plessey as the precedent, the Court decreed that separate schools in Georgia were allowed to operate even if comparable schools for blacks were not available; this was the first case to apply the separate-but-equal doctrine to education. In this case, a unanimous Court ruled that because Richmond County, Georgia, had only enough money to provide a high school for whites it need not shut down the white school in the interests of separate but equal[10]. This case opened the door for the elimination of black schools in districts able to demonstrate (or assert) financial hardships. It also clearly indicated that the Court was more interested in enforcing the separate part of Plessey over the equal. With the Supreme Court's approval, southern states quickly passed laws that restricted the equal access of blacks to all kinds of public areas, accommodations, and conveyances. Local officials began posting "Whites only" and "Colored"[10] signs at water fountains, restrooms, waiting rooms, and the entrances and exits at courthouses, libraries, theaters, and public buildings. Towns and cities established curfews for blacks, and some state laws even restricted blacks from working in the same rooms in factories and other places of employment

Another thing that the white racist insisted on and enforced was The White Supremacy. Creating White Supremacy from 1865 to 1890, the year 1890, when Mississippi wrote a disfranchisement provision into its state constitution, is often considered the beginning of legalized Jim Crow. But there were attempts from African-Americans to practice a kind of rights created by themselves. These kinds of practices were faced by violence:*"With white supremacy challenged throughout the South, many whites sought to protect their former status by threatening African Americans who exercised their new rights."*[11]

In the first days after the Civil War, most southern states adopted so-called Black Codes aimed at limiting the economic and physical freedom of the African-Americans who had their freedom from the Emancipation. These early attempts at legally binding southern African-Americans to an inferior status, however, due to the presence of federal troops in the former Confederate states during Congressional Reconstruction (1866-1876)[10] and the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, the Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875[10], and the three Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871. It would be mistaken, however, to think that these federal efforts effectively protected the civil rights of African Americans. Waves of violence and vigilante terrorism swept over the South in the 1860s and 1870s laid by the Ku Klux Klan. Such actions often accomplished in reality what could not be done in law. It depended upon states to legalize these practices: *"In 1866-1876 States of the former Confederacy adopt laws that place free blacks in a condition similar to slavery."*[12]

District in North Carolina where blacks continued to hold power until after 1900, blacks found themselves exercising limited suffrage in the 1870s, principally because their votes were manipulated by white landlords and merchant suppliers, eliminated by vigilantism, stolen by fraud at the ballot boxes, and compromised at every turn.

> *"In some cases, progressive measures to reduce election fraud acted against black and poor white voters who were illiterate. While the separation of African Americans from the general population was becoming legalized and formalized in the* Progressive Era *(1890s–1920s), it was also becoming customary. Even in cases in which Jim Crow laws did not expressly forbid black people to participate, for instance, in sports or recreation or church services, the laws shaped a segregated culture."* [13]

When the Compromise of 1877 allowed the Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes to assume the presidency of the nation after the disputed election of 1876, political power was essentially returned to southern, white Democrats in nearly every state of the former Confederacy. From that point on, the federal government essentially abandoned the attempt to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in the South, and the removal of the military forces from the southern states: *"The Compromise of 1877 removes off the last federal troops from the former Confederate states. Reconstruction ends, but the Jim Crow period is not underway fully."*[14]

These events did not prevent African-Americans from creativity. In the beginning of 1900_s and the emergence of new methods both for entertainment and defending for rights such as Jazz, blues and ragtime. African-Americans used this kind of music to transmit their hopes peacefully: *"Blues, ragtime, and jazz develop in Southern cities, particularly New Orleans, as the most popular musical forms among African Americans."*[15]

The most powerful element that helped the white racist to enforce the white supremacy is the absence of political equality and the fact that lynching was legalized:

> *"The Nadir of the Negro, a historical period named by historian Rayford Logan, begins in 1890 and runs to the mid 1910s. Lynching, legal disenfranchisement, and the absence of political equality institutionalize white supremacy and African-American subordination."*[16]

Another landmark case in the history of the African-American history is the Brown v. Board of education. For much of the ninety years preceding the *Brown* case, race relations in the U.S. had been dominated by racial segregation. The *Brown* decision put fire on education and social status of the African-American and started a wide range of reforms through the United States and was under the aim of launching the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Bringing about change in the years since the *Brown* case continues to be difficult. But the *Brown v. Board of Education* victory brought the United States one step closer to giving up on its democratic ideas. The broad lines in *Brown* asserts that this system of racial separation, while disguised as providing separate but equal treatment of both white and African-Americans, instead they provided inferior accommodations, services, and treatment for African-Americans. Racial segregation in education varied widely in different states that required racial segregation to the 16 that prohibited it. Brown was influenced by UNESCO's 1950 Statement, signed by a wide variety of internationally renowned scholars, titled *The Race Question*.[17] This declaration denounced previous attempts at scientifically justifying racism as well as morally condemning racism. Another work that the Supreme Court cited was Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944). Myrdal had been a signatory of the UNESCO declaration. The research performed by the educational psychologists Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark also influenced the Court's decision.[18] The Clarks' "doll test" studies presented substantial arguments to the Supreme Court about how segregation had an impact on black schoolchildren's mental status.

> *« In 1951, a class action suit was filed against the Board of Education of the City of Topeka, Kansas in the United States District Court for the District of Kansas. The plaintiffs were thirteen Topeka parents on behalf of their twenty children. »*[19]

Separate elementary schools were operated by the Topeka Board of Education under the 1879 Kansas law, which permitted, but did not require, districts to maintain separate elementary school facilities for black and white students in twelve regions with population over 15,000. The plaintiffs had been recruited by the leadership of the Topeka NAACP. Notable among the Topeka NAACP leaders were the chairman McKinley Burnett; Charles Scott, one of three serving as legal counsels; and Lucinda Todd.

« Oliver L. Brown, a welder in the shops of the Santa Fe Railroad, an assistant pastor at his local church, and an African American. He was convinced to join the lawsuit by Scott, a childhood friend. Brown's daughter Linda, a third grader, had to walk six blocks to her school bus stop to ride to Monroe Elementary, her segregated black school one mile (1.6 km) away, while Sumner Elementary, a white school, was seven blocks from her house. »[20.21]

In this quotation, it states clearly the problem of education for African-American with the separate but "equal legislation concerning education.

As directed by the NAACP leadership, the parents each attempted to enroll their children in the closest neighborhood school in the fall of 1951. They were each refused enrollment and directed to the segregated schools. Linda Brown Thompson later recalled the experience in a 2004 PBS documentary:

«. . . Well. Like I say, we lived in an integrated neighborhood and I had all of these playmates of different nationalities. And so when I found out that day that I might be able to go to their school, I was just thrilled, you know. And I remember walking over to Sumner school with my dad that day and going up the steps of the school and the school looked so big to a smaller child. And I remember going inside and my dad spoke with someone and then he went into the inner office with the principal and they left me out. . . to sit outside with the secretary. And while he was in the inner office, I could hear voices and hear his voice raised, you know, as the conversation went on. And then he immediately came out of the office, took me by the hand and we walked home from the school. I just couldn't understand what was happening because I was so sure that I was going to go to school with Mona and Guinevere, Wanda, and all of my playmates. »[22]

The District Court ruled in favor of the Board of Education, citing the U.S. Supreme Court precedent set in *Plessey v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), which had resulted a state law requiring separate but equal segregated facilities for blacks and whites in railway cars.[23] The three-judge District Court panel found that segregation in public education has a bad effect upon African-American children, but denied based on the ground that the African-American and white schools in Topeka were substantially equal with respect to buildings, transportation, curricula, and educational qualifications of teachers.[24]

The case of *Brown v. Board of Education* that had been discussed by the Supreme Court consisted of five cases: *Brown* itself, *Briggs v. Elliott* (filed in South Carolina), *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* ,filed in Virginia, *Gebhart v. Belton* filed in Delaware, and *Bolling v. Sharpe* filed in Washington D.C. It can be seen that the Brown v. Board of Education compromise half affected, practically, all African-Americans in the United States. All the cases were NAACP-sponsored cases. The *Davis* case, the only case of the five originating from a student protest, began when sixteen-year-old Barbara Rose Johns organized and led a 450-student walkout of Moton High School.[25]

To conclude this chapter concerning the Jim Crow Laws we can say that this chapter of history for the African Americans was the hardest period to survive.

President Woodrow Wilson introduced segregation in Federal offices, despite much protest.[26] Wilson appointed Southern politicians who were segregationists, because of his firm belief that racial segregation was in the best interest of black and white Americans alike.[26] At Gettysburg on July 4, 1913, the semi-centennial of Abraham Lincoln's declaration that "all men are created equal", Wilson addressed the crowd:

« How complete the union has become and how dear to all of us, how unquestioned, how benign and majestic, as state after state has been added to this, our great family of free men! »[27]

A *Washington Bee* editorial wondered if the reunion of 1913 was a reunion of those who fought for the extinction of slavery or a reunion of those who fought to perpetuate slavery and who are now employing every artifice and argument known to deceit" to present emancipation as a failed venture.[27] One historian notes that the Peace Jubilee at which Wilson presided at Gettysburg in 1913 "was a Jim Crow reunion, and white supremacy might be said to have been the silent, invisible master of ceremonies."[27]

End Notes:

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II. Chapter 2: The Role of Fear and Hunger in Shaping Richard's Growth and Beliefs.

1. The Role of Hunger:

Hunger is a physical aspect of life. Generally, when you think of hunger you think of food. Hunger is a different thing in Richard Wright's Black Boy. In this autobiography, Richard tells of his life from a young boy in the prejudice south to an adult in the north. In Black Boy, Richard's expression of hunger goes beyond the physical sense. Hunger overflows into the mental sense, and gives Wright a hunger for knowledge, independence, and understanding.

Wright's largest hunger, the hunger that is fed by all others, is his hunger for knowledge. This hunger sets him apart from those around him, which drives the wedge created by their differences further between them. Nevertheless, it gives Wright's life meaning and direction. The hunger starts growing at a young age, with his first real bite of knowledge coming from a coal man teaching him how to count to a hundred. His next substantial bite comes from a schoolteacher named Ella reading him a story; this is where the hunger really begins to grow. About this he wrote: *"'Ella,' I begged, 'please tell me what you are reading.'... 'Your grandmother wouldn't like it if I talked to you about novels,' she told me." (Wright, 32).*

He then starts to seeking around to read Ella's novels, knowing that his grandmother disapproved. He shows courage and defiance for the sake of knowledge. When Richard starts school Granny refuses to pay for his textbooks, thinking that they were "worldly". Richard also went around his grandmother's word, and got a job selling newspapers.

"Now, at last, I could have my reading in the home, could hove it there with the approval of Granny. She had already given me permission to sell papers." (Wright,112).

He tried to sell the newspapers, but found out that they were of Ku Klux Klan origin and stopped. Although he didn't make enough money, he still had the nerve to ask his Granny to let him.

Independence was won in American a long time ago. Still, Richard hungers for a different independence. Independence from authority was one of them. An example of this was with his Uncle Tom.

"Now, Uncle Tom, what do you want with me?' I asked him. "You need to be taught a lesson in how to live with people,' he said. "If I do need one, you're not going to give it to me,' I said."(Wright, 139).

Even though Uncle Tom is his elder, Richard refuses to put up with him. Another example of this independence from authority was with his Aunt Addie. Like with his uncle, he refuses to be beaten, or disciplined in any way.

"The moment Aunt Addie came into the house—I reached home before she did—she called me into the kitchen. When I entered, I saw she was holding another switch. My muscles tightened. 'You're not going to beat me again!' I told her."(Wright, 92)

Again he stands by his beliefs and refuses authority for the sake of being independent.

Understanding was another thing that Richard hungered for. The first time he hungered for understanding was in the very early stages of his life.

"... a "black" boy had been severely beaten by a "white' man, I felt that the "white" man had had a right to beat the "black boy, for I naively assumed that the "white" man must have been the "black" boy's father."(Wright, 19).

Richard didn't fully understand all the racial issues in the south when he was a boy, and didn't start to comprehend them until later in life.

Many things in Richard Wright's Black Boy, such as knowledge, independence and understanding, represented hunger. A great amount of people hunger for different and new things, and much like Richard, their hunger was always changing.

"But to feel that there were feelings that denied ,me that the very breath of life itself was beyond my reach, that more than anything else was hurt, wounded me. I had a new hunger."(Wright, 220)

2. The Role of Fear

In a close reading of Richard Wright's Black Boy we can see direct textual correlations between fear and hunger. There are correlations between fear regarding family roles as well as racism correlated with physical hunger, as well as fear regarding conduct and position within the Jim Crow South correlated with the hunger for knowledge. As these correlations move us from physical hunger to the intellectual hunger we notice that Richard begins to overcome his fears, which leads him to stop living passively and start questioning his surroundings, thus propelling him on his journey to discover his identity.

The killing of the kitten scene is the first instance in which we see the correlation between the fear regarding family roles and physical hunger. Richard sees killing the kitten as a means to overcome his father's authority, and simply to keep from getting beaten.

"I had made him know I felt he was cruel and I had done it without his punishing me" (Wright, 09).

It also partially reveals the role of the father, in this household at least, as the disciplinarian, and in a moment we will see the primary role of father as the supplier of food, leading Richard to correlate his hunger with hatred for his father.

"Hunger stole upon me so slowly that at first I was not aware of what hunger really meant. Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside, staring at me gauntly. The hunger I had known before this had been no grim hostile, stranger; it had been a normal hunger that had made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But this new hunger baffled me, scared me, made me angry and insistent...I would feel hunger nudging my ribs, twisting my empty guys until they ached. I would grow dizzy and my vision would dim. I became less active in my play, and for the first time in my life had to pause and think of what was happening to me" (Wright, 11).

" Interesting enough this hunger causes him "for the first time...to pause and think". So for the first time he begins questioning his surroundings, and why he is so hungry. This questioning leads him to discover that his father has left him and his mother, and thus, *"...the image of my father became associated with my pangs of hunger, and whenever I felt hunger I thought of him with a deep biological bitterness" (Wright 12)*

A new hunger, a hunger for knowledge is awakened in Richard, after he overcomes a small fear in an encounter with Ella, the schoolteacher who was the boarder at his grandmother's house, we are told that he was *"...as much afraid of her as he was attracted to her (32)"*.

This attraction allows him to overcome his fear and ask her about her books, which awaken the hunger for knowledge.

"I hungered for the sharp, frightening, breathtaking, almost painful excitement that

the story had given me, and I vowed that as soon as I was old enough I would buy all the novels there were and read them to feed that thirst for violence that was in me, for intrigue, for plotting, for secrecy, for bloody murder...Ella's whispered story of deception and murder had been the first experience in my life that had elicited from me a total emotional response. I had tasted what to me was life, and I would have more of it, somehow, someway" (Wright, 33).

Here, we have another experience which seems to spark up a determination. "I would have more of it, somehow, someway". His first experience of physical hunger made him "pause and think". This new intellectual hunger seems to give him a push into action. This push is exactly what Richard needs in order to break free from the boundaries that his family, as well as, the society of the Jim Crow South has given him.

Our final correlation is one between fear regarding race and physical hunger, but what is interesting to note is that he is no longer passive about his hunger; instead he tries to take action. After his "uncle" and Aunt Maggie run away, Richard's hunger leads him to try and sell his poodle; however this causes him to face his fears regarding race, which he clearly isn't ready for.

> *"...I remembered that these houses were the homes in which lived those white people who made Negroes leave their homes and flee into the night. I grew tense. Would someone say that I was a bad nigger and try to kill me here? ...My mounting anxieties drowned out my hunger. I wanted to rush back to the safety of the black faces I knew. The door opened and the woman came out, smiling, still hugging Betsy in her arms. But I could not see her smile now; my eyes were full of the fears I had conjured up." (Wright, 60)*

Even though this was one of the first instances that force Richard to acknowledge a

difference between races, it leads him to an emotional response that allows him to not only question his surroundings, but also question himself, leading him to discover the strength of his personality.

> *"Because I had no power to make things happen outside of me in the objective world, I made things happen within. Because my environment was bare and bleak, I endowed it with unlimited potentialities, redeemed it for the sake of my own hungry and cloudy yearning...I had grown able to respond emotionally to every hint, whisper, word, inflection, news, gossip, and rumor regarding conflicts between the races. Nothing challenged the totality of my personality so much as this pressure of hate and threat that stemmed from the invisible whites...It filled me with awe, wonder, and fear, and I asked ceaseless questions (Wright, 62-63)."*

Thus, his fear and hunger serve to no longer hold him back, but pushes him forward. It leads him to write his short story, and even to publish it, furthermore, separating himself from his family, and other black people.

As he continues to realize his disfunctioning relation between him and his peers, family, and other black people, and after a long struggle with society in the Jim Crow south, he truly begins to establish his identity.

> *"Had I been conscious of the full extent to which I was pushing against the current of my environment? I would have been frightened altogether out of my attempts at writing...I knew that I lived in a country in which the aspirations of black people were limited, marked-off. Yet I felt I had to go somewhere and do something to redeem my*

being alive. I was building up in me a dream which the entire educational system of the South had been rigged to stifle...In me was shaping a yearning for a kind of consciousness, a mode of being that the way of life about me had said could not be, must not be, and upon which the penalty of death had been placed." (Wright148)

The overcoming of his fears and his strength to push «against the current of (his) environment allows him to discover his identity. He discovers that he has a specific place in the world; he is not just simply a black boy to be pushed around by whites or even other blacks. He discovers that he has a voice, and he would use it to fight, to fight against racism, against hunger, against the stifling of black people. He would fight like Mencken fought, with words. Finally, his life meant something, and maybe he could use his life and his identity to change the lives of others living his time and after it.

Hunger also appears for Richard in his relations with his family. Richard's family was all the time unable to provide everything that the family is supposed to, such as love security and respect. In fact almost all of their interactions are the opposite of Richard's. He managed to argue with his adult family members. They prefer to have as little contact with him as possible.

Richard's struggle with hunger started within his family. His family was never able to provide everything that a family is supposed to, such as love, security and acceptance. In fact, the majority of their interactions are the exact opposite of this. The adults in his family often argued with him, and prefer to have as little contact with him as possible. His struggles with his family are epitomized during his struggles with his Aunt Addie. As his schoolteacher, she is able to make doubly difficult for him, such as when she accuses him of leaving shells all over the floor in school. She punishes him at school, and then tries to punish him a second

time at home when she finds out that he really did not left the shells there but would not tell her who had. The altercation resulted in Aunt Addie refusing to speak to Wright, to which he responded:

"I was conscious that she had descended to my emotional level in order to rule me, and my respect for her sank"(Wright, 95).

Richard's opinion of Aunt Addie is reflective of his opinion of his entire family, which leads Wright feel as though he is an outsider in his own home. On the rare occasions that they are amicable with him, Wright cannot trust their motives, and it therefore pushes him further out of the family. This is the case when his family is attempting to 'save' his soul.

"The entire family became kind and forgiving, but I knew the motives that prompted their change and it drove me an even greater emotional distance from them." (Wright, 98)

This emotional distance takes a toll on Wright; despite that distance, and despite the antagonistic and demoralizing experience Wright experiences in his family, he is able to maintain his hunger for a better life, one that he could better comprehend.

Richard is never fully able to satisfy the hunger for acceptance, even amongst his peers. The other African-American boys he comes across are never able to understand Wright and his attitude, nor he theirs. As a result, he is never able to really fit in. Although Wright desires to fit in socially, his inability to concede to their point of view makes this impossible.

> *"I longed to be among them, yet when with them I looked at them as if they were a million miles away. I had been kept out of their world too long to ever be able to become a real part of it." (Wright, 131)*

This hunger for acceptance agitates his hunger for understanding, since it exaggerates his inability to understand why he is unable to fit in anywhere. His interactions with other

blacks in the South often leave him frustrated with both himself and others. After one incident, he states:*"I walked home slowly, asking myself what on earth was the matter with me, why I never seemed to do things as people expected them."(Wright, 125)*

Richard becomes more and more introverted, and 1never fully comfortable sharing his thoughts and opinions with others. He explains this by saying: *"I began to be aware of myself as a distinct personality striving against others. I held myself in, afraid to act or speak until I was sure of my surroundings, feeling most of the time that I was suspended over a void."(Wright, 25)*

This void follows him throughout his life in the South, seeping into all aspects of his daily life and separating him from those around him, leaving him empty of the love and acceptance he so greatly needs.

A large part of why Wright could not understand his peers was his inability to understand the racial gap between blacks and whites. Even as a young boy at the age of six, Wright's hunger for understanding this aspect of his life is prevalent. He explains by saying: *"I wanted to understand these two sets of people who lived side by side and never touched, except in violence"(Wright, 39).*

He questions the adults around him, asking them about the racial inequalities he sees and why they have come to be, but is never able to receive any answers. In fact, he is typically punished for asking these questions. Because he is never able to receive any valid answers, Wright is still unable to accept the treatment he receives.

In a way that only happens when dealing with the unknown, Richard develops a hope that is completely naive for that time in the South, a hope reflected in this statement: works his hope is crushed.

He begins to see his world more for what it is, but still struggles to remember to act differently around white people. He himself does not see how white people are so different than blacks, and therefore does not think to treat them differently. This causes problems for Wright while he is growing up, particularly when it comes to securing and maintaining a job. He tries to control himself in order to act more appropriate, but he soon discovered that:

> *"it was simply utterly impossible for me to calculate, to scheme, to act, to plot all the time" (Wright, 162).*

His difficulties with the whites of the South are greatly discouraging, and Wright constantly craves a world where he would be accepted regardless of his skin color. He knows that the only way he could survive as a black man in that time would be to move to the North, where the world is one he thinks he will be able to better comprehend. He writes that:

> *"The North symbolized to me all that I had not felt and seen; it had no relation whatever to what actually existed. Yet, by imagining a place where everything was possible, I kept hope alive in me" (Wright, 147).*

This hope follows him everywhere, and although he does not understand the environment he is forced to endure living in during his youth, it makes him believe that at some point he will be able to live in an environment that is comprehensible to him.

This sensation furthers his existing curiosity, helping Wright to realize his love of literature. His hunger for knowledge is immense, yet Wright is never really allotted the opportunity for a decent formal education. His instability at home forces him to miss many years of school, which he makes up for by ascertaining a different form of education on the streets. Living in such a hostile and misery filled world, it is no wonder that that the majority of Wright's education takes place in similar environments. There he discovers a new language with more emphasis on cursing words and other profane language learns how to put on a

mask of indifference, and how to fight. He is able to observe some of the ways of the world, and sometimes participate, all the while never fully understanding exactly why things are wrought with so much inequality. The street is not his only cruel classroom, and schools themselves often provide Richard with this cold dose of reality. One such environment is the religious school that Aunt Addie teaches at. Here, Richard's family problems clash with his hunger for knowledge, leaving him detached and unmotivated. Eventually he is able to return to public schooling, where his interest and drive help him excel, but his family never supports this sentiment and makes it difficult for him to maintain his studies. During the last of his formal education, things are so strict at home that Wright skips meals in order to stay away for longer hours. With regards to this, Wright states: *"To starve in order to learn about my environment was irrational, but so were my hungers" (Wright, 127).* He is never able to receive a consistent formal education, and the formal education he does receive is sub-standard and rife with contention. In spite of this, Wright always continues to learn, and his thirst for knowledge continues to grow.

Richard's education does not end when he graduates from school. After fleeing to Memphis in order to escape the oppressive environment in Jackson, Wright begins to read anything he can obtain. At one point he meets a sympathetic Jewish man who lends him his library card, and Richard is able to feed his hunger. These books open up his world, and change him forever. Wright says, "*In buoying me up, reading also cast me down, made me see what was possible, what I had missed" (Wright, 251).* His new understanding of the world intensifies his desire for a better life, and forces him to question himself. However this questioning never stops his hunger for further knowledge, as evident in the following:

> *"I was overwhelmed. I grew silent, wondering about the life around me… Could I ever learn about life and people? To me, with my vast ignorance…it seemed a task impossible of achievement…I had learned to live with hate. But to feel that there were*

feelings denied me, that the very breath of life itself was beyond my reach, that more than anything else hurt, wounded me…I felt trapped and occasionally, for a few days, I would stop reading. But a vague hunger would come over me for books, books that opened up new avenues of feeling and seeing… Again I would read and wonder as only the naïve and unlettered can read and wonder." (Wright250-252)

In short, Wright's hunger can never be satisfied. The more he feeds his hungers with knowledge, the more ravenous those hungers grow. Each morsel of knowledge enlightens him to a world he has no experience with, which serves to create further questions about the world in which he is entrenched. His acquired knowledge about the many possibilities that life could possibly have held for him expands the hunger for a world that he can understand and could therefore accept him. Although it is true that his intense appetite for knowledge often alienates him from others, it is still his greatest asset, acting as both the motivation and the key to his life's success.

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III. Chapter 3: The Role of Family Members in Shaping Richard’s Growth and Beliefs.

Black Boy is full of a series of episodes that illustrates various forms of racial oppression, the center of attention lies in our hero’s transcendence of that oppression. Racial oppression is caused not only by the external forces of society but by the internal problems of the oppressed. *“Some,”* Wright admits*, “may escape the general plight and grow up, but it is a matter of luck.”(Wright, 23)* To the hero of Black Boy, most of them were victims of racial prejudice, failures in the battle for survival. No small wonder an anonymous reviewer, calling Black Boy “the most ferocious exercise in misanthropy since Jonathan Swift,” was appalled by the hatred Wright expresses toward both whites and blacks

In this part I will try to explain how Richard's family members shaped his growth and beliefs.

1. Richard's Mother:

It is difficult to get a clear impression of Richard's mother. This is one of the difficulties in writing about people close to one; one is unable to see them as types. It is often simpler to treat such people only in subjective terms; that is, how does *she* affect *Richard.*

Richard's mother is a solid presence throughout the book. She speaks with harsh voice often, beats and slaps him, and seems to be very hard and sever in nature, a tiny twin of her own mother. According to Ralph Ellison:

« One of the southern Negro family's method of protecting the child is the severe beating – a homeopathic dose of the violence generated by black and white relationships Such beatings Wright's were for the child's own good »(Ellison,85)

Yet somehow one senses that Richard may have received some of his training in rebellion from her. She is not happy living in the religious household they are forced so often to inhabit, and she even rewards Richard with a kiss when he successfully revolts against his grandmother's will. Her suffering, her paralysis, and private sorrows do not hinder her from influencing her son.

One feels that Richard's mother is a tremendous force in his life, probably the most important influence on his character. She is strong in the face of overwhelming adversity. Her anger at his behavior seems far less motivated by abstract ideas of goodness than by the frustrations of her own existence. She strikes out at him because there is no one else around to strike. Those who have destroyed the possibilities of a full life for her are people she can't touch. Abandoned by her husband for another woman, she is left with herself alone, at first, and is then dependent on her family for survival. As soon as Richard is grown, she chooses to be with him, no matter how insecure the life may be.

Although Ella Wright lives by the ethics of Jim Crow, she has a dignity which cuts across those limitations. We see her always in terms of Richard; by the way he reacts to her. The reader has a feeling that she has great spirit as she endures her daily humiliations and suffering

2. Richard's Grandmother:

With her white face and black hair, her repressive religiosity and hot temper, Granny comes to represent everything that Richard must struggle to escape from. He and she are locked in warfare. It seems to be an irrational conflict at first, but soon it becomes clear that a clash of temperaments is not the only problem between them

Silent and fearless, an Indian maiden drowns herself rather than break a mysterious vow. This is the essence of Richard Wright's first short story, written on his knees during a time of prayer. Each day his grandmother pleaded with him "to pray hard, to pray until tears came," so frustrated was she with her grandson's rebelliousness, "his willful religious doubts, and feeble attempts at Christian devotion" (Wright,103). Wright consented to the older woman's wishes, like many of his own characters in the years and novels to come, with much apprehension and dismay. Convinced that his prayers were empty words that "bound noiselessly against the ceiling, he manipulated the daily hour of private ref lection toward his own creative ends. After failing to write a hymn, the thirteen year old put aside his Bible, turned to his studies in Native American history, and found his own voice in imaginative prose. (*Wright, 104)*

I had never in my life done anything like it; I had made something, no matter how bad it was; and it was mine," Wright remarks in his 1945 autobiography, Black Boy. Closed away from the world in his room, Wright chose not to commune with his grandmother's god, and yet the moment retains a special reverence in light of his career as a writer. Nevertheless, the story is made sacred through his account of its creation in Black Boy.

In Black Boy, the accounts of Wright's upbringing, defines Granny primarily as an archetypal oppressor. Well-intentioned but adversarial attacks and militaristic campaigns are the key to her extremely hard attacks. As a result, Margaret Bolton Wilson looks favorably upon her grandson only once in Black Boy, when he "sees" an angel during revival services at their Jackson, Mississippi church. After hearing the elder describe Jacob's angelic visions from the book of Genesis, he whispers, *"You see, granny, if I ever saw an angel like Jacob did, and then I'd believe" (Wright, 102).*Here young Wright hopes to lessen the intensity of his grandmother's concern for his soul. Any faith that he embraces will require "infallible evidence" and, in his mind, angels cannot thrive in the "dread, fear, hunger, terror, and loneliness" beyond the church doors (Wright, 100). Like the bizarre pulp fiction serials that he reads at night, Wright regards the "cosmic tales" of his grandmother's religion as elaborate fantasies created to satisfy the needs of a willing audience (Wright, 102). Believing that he would never actually see an angel, Wright uses the Old Testament story to articulate a clear rationale for his unbelief.

But Granny fails to hear his "if." She believes in the power of visions, as do the churches elder and the rest of the congregation. She misinterprets Wright's challenge and assumes that the young boy has, in fact, already witnessed a vision of God. After service she shares her grandson's miraculous awakening with the elder. His response to the boy

"She says that you have seen an angel"

Forces Wright to stammer aloud,

"No. . . N-nooo, sir! No, sir! "

And when questioned repeatedly, he admits:

"But I didn't see anything" (Wright, 102).

Indeed, Richard underestimates the serious implication of his suggestion which becomes "an obscene act" that awakens their hopes "wildly high":

Granny rushed to me and hugged me violently, weeping tears of joy. Then I babbled, speaking with emotional reproof, censuring her for having misunderstood me; I must have spoken more loudly and harshly than was called for—the others had now gathered about me and Granny—for Granny drew away from me abruptly and went to a far corner of the church and stared at me with a cold set face I was crushed. I went to her and tried to tell her how it had happened. .

"You should't've spoken to me," she said in a breaking voice that revealed the depths of her disillusionment. (Wrighte, 103)

The elder is disappointed, but Granny is even more disgraced by her grand-son's apparent recklessness. His action, intended to ease her worry, has only magnified his impiety. Over two decades later, Wright would remember the mistake in Black Boy as the incident that brought his grandmother "the greatest shame and humiliation of her entire religious life" (Wright, 101).

Wright recounts this same mistranslation in "Memories of My Grand-mother." This time he prefaces the incident with the suggestion that he and Granny had previously agreed upon rudimentary guidelines for belief, conversion, and church membership. Wright reasons, "When she would ask me what real objections I had, I would tell her that I had to see something before I would join [the church]. She had to accept my explanations, because she had told me that she had not joined until she has seen something" ("Memories of My Grandmother" 5). Biblical accounts of Jacob, in particular, would have resonated with Wright's insistent yearning to "see something." In four separate instances, the Old Testament figure not only beholds angels in his dreams, but hears the voice of a heavenly messenger

warning him against danger. Once again Wright tells his grandmother: “If I ever saw an angel like that man did, I’d join the church,” but in this version, his fictional self is not overcome with emotion and uncontrollable outbursts; Wright does not “babble.” Instead, he sharply corrects the older woman and publicly counters her unrealistic hopes with an appeal to logic: “You did tell me you saw an angel,” my grandmother said. “You told me during service . . .”

“No’m,” I said hastily, burning with embarrassment, ashamed that so many people were listening. “I told you that if I saw one I’d join church . . .” The elder smiled. My grandmother was angry".

“You did tell me!” she said stoutly".

Church members began to laugh.

“Granny, you didn’t understand,” I said.

My grandmother walked away, hurt. For a week there was coolness between us. Such was the atmosphere in which I spent my most sensitive and formative years.

In Black Boy, Wright blames these supposedly nonsensical expectations on the fundamental character of his Granny’s religion. He is “crushed,” we are informed, by her anger and coldness.

In Black Boy, the Seventh - day Adventist commitment to healthy living can be found, to offer one example, in Granny’s refusal to serve pork, veal, fish without and other foods considered harmful. Wright learns to navigate around many of these practices; he stomachs his grandmother’s peanut roast and is eventually allowed to work on Saturday for extra

money. Black Boy demonstrates that Wright faced a similar set of obstacles with his own mother, Ella Wright, who worked hard to convert her son after Granny failed.

In his autobiography, Wright recalls the creation of his first short story as a transformative moment in which he refused to be bound by his grandmother's siren-like religious obligations. He got up of his knees and began to write. And he would continue to assert his own identity in this way, even when alienated by his family and friends. Indeed, Wright's way of bridging the spiritual and temporal gaps between himself and his grandmother came primarily through his art. The act of writing was, as Tate notes, "therapeutic" for Wright; he described it as a profoundly sensual experience and "a kind of significant living" ("How Bigger Was Born" 457).

3. The Father:

Richard's father is only very briefly presented in the book, but the effect of his personality is strong. Richard never feels close to him; he is only frightened by him. At first, in Memphis, his sleeping habits interfere with the boys' games and his temper is irrational. Later on, when Richard's mother tries to get some support from him and brings along the boy to remind him of his responsibilities, he is openly living with another.

When Richard's family moves to Memphis, Richard, afraid to go into the strange city streets a lone, is confined to home where he must be quiet while his father (a night porter) sleeps. One morning Richard finds himself forced to quiet a kitten whose mewing provokes his father. "'Kill the damn thing ... Do anything, but get it away from here'" (Wright, 08), his father commands. Immediately resentful, Richard hangs the kitten and so, Wright tells us, enjoys his "first triumph" (Wright09) over his father.

When Richard had hanged the kitten, his mother had warned him "That kitten's going to get you ...' (Wright, 09), a warning Richard shrugged off, saying "that kitten can't even breathe now' (Wright, 09). But Richard learns he is wrong: "My mother's words," he reports, "made it live again in my mind" (Wright, 10). As a final gesture, his mother forces him into a prayer of forgiveness—"Dear God, our father, forgive me, for I knew not what I was doing" (Wright, 10)—which perhaps for the first time links biological and spiritual fathers. Subsequent episodes will enforce the connection: When Richard complains of hunger, his mother insists that he will have to wait for God to send food because his father is gone; a preacher, "God's representative," a man also used to having his "own way" (Wright,21), eats all the fried chicken while Richard labors unsuccessfully to finish his soup. Fathers, spiritual or biological, Richard's experience lead him to believe, satisfy their own appetites at the expense of their children.

With his father gone, Richard's mother sends him out to buy the groceries. Richard sets out "proud" and feeling "like a grownup" (Wright, 13). When he is robbed and beaten (and forced out of the house by his mother), he compensates for his youth and small size, arming himself with a big stick, defending himself first against the boys who stole from him and then against their parents who "rushed into the streets and threatened : They had never seen such frenzy. For the first time in my life I shouted at grownups, telling them I would give them the same if they bothered me." Richard's victory here is a multiple one. Excluding his father as provider of food, he triumphs over him a second time and more decisively. At the same time he triumphs over his own fear. Where Richard had been "afraid to go into the strange city streets alone" (Wright, 07) now he has "won" for himself the "right to the streets of Memphis" (Wright, 15).

Once free from fear, Richard quickly familiarizes himself with the adult world which has captured his father, showing himself to be his father's son. Far from home, the boy

frequents a saloon, learns to drink, and is taught to proposition women. At the age of six, "for a penny or a nickel I would repeat to anyone whatever was whispered to me," (Wright, 17) encouraged by the responses he got. "In my foggy, tipsy state, the reaction of the men and women to my mysterious words enthralled me. I ran from person to person, laughing, hiccoughing, spewing out filth that made them bend double with glee" (Wright, 17). The absence of the father, the one who can guarantee the good education, life became hard for Richard especially with his addiction to alcohol.

Richard sees his father one last time in boyhood, at the home of his father's mistress. He recoils from the encounter for reasons he cannot make clear to himself: We left. I had the feeling that I had had to do with something unclean. Many times in the years after that the image of my father and the strange woman, their faces lit by the dancing flames, would surge up in my imagination so vivid and strong that I felt I could reach out and touch it; I would stare at it, feeling that it possessed some vital meaning which always eluded me. (Wright, 42)

With Richard's father out of the picture, his grandmother becomes head of the family and the authority figure, Richard must deal with on a day-to-day basis. She is a religious woman, a fanatic Seventh Day Adventist, according to Wright, and from the very beginning her religiousness conflicts with Richard's free expression: "I was dreaming of running and playing and shouting," the first paragraph of the autobiography goes, "but the vivid image of Granny's old, white, wrinkled, grim face, framed by a halo of tumbling black hair ... made me afraid" (Wright,01).

The mother, the Father and the Grandmother are the most influential family members concerning Richard's growth and beliefs. But there are other family members such as the Grandpa, Aunt Addie, Aunt Maggie and Uncle Hoskins affected Richard but not for a long

time. They affected him through the encounters between him and them, and considered as a bad or a good memories.

4. The Grandpa:

“Grandpa was a tall, skinny, silent, grim, black man who had fought in the Civil War with the Union Army “(Wright, 36). This is how Richard described his grandpa. After Richard had said that filthy words to his grandmother, during the time granny was cleaning them, without knowing that the words he just uttered were bad words” when you get through, kiss back there”(Wright,34) . Of course granny became angry and sent Richard’s brother to bring grandpa, “I trembled. Granny was sending my brother to fetch Grandpa “of whom I was mortally afraid” (Wright, 36). Later on, when grandpa came Richard escaped under the bed and sooner the grandpa gave up and went to his room. When the night fell Richard get out from his hiding place driven by hunger he faced his Granny and took his share of beating “I followed her and she beat me “(Wright,37) .This make things clearer that Granny is the discipliner force in the house.

5. Aunt Maggie and Uncle Hoskins:

At the home of Aunt Maggie and Uncle Hoskins, Richard has more food than ever before. For a while, he kept biscuits because he is afraid the supply of food will not last because the constant hunger he has throughout the novel. One day, Uncle Hoskins teases him by driving their horse and buggy into the middle of a river. Richard is terrified, and the terror creates a permanent barrier between him and Hoskins. (Notice how rare it is that Richard does not feel a barrier between himself and others.)

One night Uncle Hoskins does not return from work at the saloon he owns. He has been shot and killed by whites who want to take over his business. They threaten to kill his family also, so Maggie, Richard, and Richard's mother and brother flee to the town of West Helena. Maggie is not even able to see her husband's body or to claim any of his assets. Soon thereafter, the family moves back to Granny's in Jackson. This incident made Richard aware about the fact that they were living in a very dangerous area and he must learn to survive.

To conclude this chapter, I can say that as Richard gets older, he stands up to the discipline his aunts and uncles impose on him and threatens to retaliate with physical violence. Later, the feisty, independent spirit Richard develops at home leads him to refuse to accept the codes of behavior the white world has set for Southern blacks. And when Richard finally decides to become a writer, that career represents a declaration of independence from those in the black community who ridiculed his ambitions and a declaration of war on the white racists who have oppressed him.

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Conclusion:

Hunger, fear and family members did really affect Richard's growth and beliefs. But not as much as someone thinks is a product of conditions he was raised upon. i,e the Jim crow law, and his family grownups. Richard suffered chronic hunger through the novel both on the physical and the mental level. He also experienced fear inside and outside home. Inside home with his Granny and her religious orientation, his Aunt Addie, and her insecurity in school, his mother and her stroke. Outside , Richard faced the harsh life under the segregation system. Richard experienced this life through the incident witch happen to him at the jewelry store, and the news he receives about lynching. Richard had his own destiny between his hands. He was a self-made-man. He decided to be a writer at an early age. He got the talent; he wrote his fist short story when he was a six year old boy. Later on he became one of the most talented African-American writers in America in a time were African-American had practically no rights at all.

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