



Queering Contemporary Minority Issues through Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*

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Abstract

This paper examines Richard Wright's novels through a queer lens. Drawing from my Master's dissertation on Minority Empowerment, it explores how queerness shapes the experience of living as a black individual under Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan in America. The aim is to demonstrate how Wright's work illuminates empowerment for marginalized minorities in oppressive contexts. By queering contemporary minority issues through Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*, this paper can demonstrate how Wright destabilizes heteronormative sexual regulation, exposes the surveillance of Black masculinity, and dramatizes racialized fear as a structuring force of oppression. These novels reveal how queer theory illuminates the intersections of race, sexuality, and power, showing that minority identities are not only policed by racial hierarchies but also by normative expectations of gender and desire. In doing so, Wright's work anticipates later African American literary interventions that challenge the rigid binaries of masculinity, sexuality, and racial identity. Apart from Queer Theory, the paper uses also psychoanalytic criticism and Intertextuality for the analysis. "Queering contemporary minority issues, has the advantage of understanding the concept "queer" beyond issues of gender. The term "queer" includes several societal issues. The paper sees Bigger Thomas and Rex Fishbelly Tucker, respectively protagonists in *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*, as leaders of the marginalized Black-belt community. The two protagonists are in quest of empowerment and self-empowerment to empower others, but they experience trauma and incomprehensible events imposed by white people. This paper argues that the struggles of Wright's protagonists, who persevere through trauma and adversity, exemplify contemporary minority issues. By analyzing *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*, the paper seeks to clarify how literature can address current challenges faced by minorities and propose empowerment through education and self-affirmation.

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Introduction

This paper argues that *Native Son* henceforth (NS) and *The Long Dream* henceforth (TLD) can be “queered” to reveal how minority struggles destabilize normative categories of race, sexuality, and identity, offering insights into contemporary debates on intersectionality.

A queer reading of Richard Wright’s work highlights dimensions of sexuality, dissemblance, and non-normative identity that traditional criticism – focused mainly on race, class, and politics – has overlooked. It shows how wright’s characters resist heteronormative and patriarchal structures, complicating the revolutionary and racial narratives usually emphasized. In short, queer criticism fills a gap in Wright studies by foregrounding sexuality and dissemblance, revealing how his texts destabilize heteronormative structures alongside racial oppression.

After a careful analysis of Wright’s sensational novels *Native Son* (1940) and *The Long Dream* (1958), an idea rose to promote the topic of minority’s empowerment and the queerness the heroes and their fellows experience as black people in the USA. This paper is based on contemporary minority issues, i.e., it observes and denounces what happens to minority groups today to bring change in society. The paper attempts to answer the question: “How can self-empowerment and empowerment be realized today in a marginalized community?”

Racial discrimination and segregation, which are the dilemmas faced by marginalized black people in the USA, have taken another color, another path today, that is, they have gone underground to operate otherwise. The leaders of African countries and of recognized minority groups ought to design an education system for the self-empowerment and empowerment of their fellows. The paper explores the conditions in which minority black people live confined in shanties called “Black-Belts” where a red line is drawn between them and the white people. Some scholars among them Frail, have argued that Richard Wright is a figure of the struggle for freedom beside Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Emery Lumumba, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and others who fought against racial discrimination and for the unity of Africa (Frail).

To understand “Queering contemporary minority’s issues in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*”, one should approach it through three lenses: queer theory, race and minority studies, and intersectionality.

This means analyzing how Wright’s texts destabilize norms of race, sexuality, and identity, while showing how overlapping systems of oppression shape minority struggles.

Queering contemporary minority issues involves analyzing how concepts of gender and sexuality intersect with and complicate issues faced by other minority groups, such as ethnic, racial, or national minorities. It examines how identities like being a sexual minority or gender minority (e.g., LGBTQ+) can create unique experiences intersecting with other forms of marginalization, like racism or homophobia within a community itself. This perspective helps identify and address intersectional issues, such as the “minority stress” experienced by LGBTQ+ people of color, i.e., African American people, which is compounded by racial discrimination and homophobia (Retrieved on November 30, 2025, <https://www.scholar.google.com>). Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and *The Long Dream* are examples of queering contemporary minority issues not only in the USA, but also in Africa.

To achieve the objective of this paper, we have split it into four main parts, notably: Methodology and Key concepts, the plots of *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*, the outcomes of contemporary minority’s issues, and a discussion on contemporary minority’s issues. The paper will end with a conclusion and a works cited.

1. Commented Summaries of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*

1.1 Commented Summary of *Native Son*

Richard Wright’s *Native Son* is a powerful novel about Bigger Thomas, a young Black man in 1930s. He lives in poverty with his family in Chicago’s South Side, trapped by systemic racism and limited opportunities. Bigger accidentally suffocates Mary Dalton, the daughter of his wealthy white employer, while trying to keep her quiet. He attempts to cover up the crime by burning Mary’s body in the furnace, then fabricates alibis. His fear and desperation lead him deeper into violence, including the murder of his girlfriend Bessie to silence her. Bigger is captured after a citywide manhunt. His trial becomes a spectacle, exposing racial prejudice and social injustice. He is sentenced to death. The novel closes with Bigger’s partial recognition of his humanity, but society reasserts its oppressive order through his execution.

1.2 Commented Summary of *The Long Dream*

Richard Wright's *The Long Dream* (1958) is a powerful coming-of-age novel about Rex "Fishbelly" Tucker, a young Black boy in Clintonville, Mississippi during the mid-1930s, whose journey exposes the brutal realities of racism, identity, and emasculation in the Jim Crow South. The novel explores how systemic oppression shapes his family, his psyche, and his struggle to find dignity in a hostile world. Son of Tyree Tucker, a prosperous Black undertaker, Fishbelly grows up in relative comfort compared to many Black families, but his father's wealth cannot shield him from racism. The theme established the tension between aspiration ("the long dream" of equality and success) and the harsh reality of racial oppression. Fishbelly witnesses traumatic events such as lynching aftermaths, humiliations of Black men, and the constant threat of violence. He develops a castration complex, symbolizing emasculation under systemic racism. His father's ambition to rise socially clashes with white society's determination to keep Black families' subordinate. Fishbelly's growing awareness of racial injustice culminates in his confrontation with the limits imposed on him. His personal dreams – education, independence, dignity – are crushed by the realization that white supremacy controls every aspect of life. Fishbelly recognizes that his long dream" of freedom is unattainable in the South. He decides to go to France. The novel ends not with triumph but with disillusionment.

2 Methodology and Key Concepts

Chiefly based on Queer Theory, which argues that "analyzing with a queer perspective has the potential to undermine the base structure on which any identity relies (although it does this without destroying or forsaking categories or identity); the concept has been understood to be just about questions of sexuality" (Jagose 12). This paper aims to explore Wright's queering of contemporary minority issues and to examine the impact of minority stress, challenges to inclusion, empowerment, and self-empowerment. It will also tackle a psychoanalytical perspective. Bressler states that "Unlike some other schools of criticism, psychoanalytic criticism can exist side by side with any other critical method of interpretation" (Bressler 124). This approach attempts to explain the how and whys of human actions. Bressler argues then that, "A work of literature, for Freud, is the external expression of the author's unconscious mind. Accordingly, literary works must then be treated like a dream, applying psychoanalytic techniques to texts to uncover the author's hidden motivations, repressed desires, and wishes" (Bressler 130).

Intertextuality, “the shaping of a text’s meaning by another text”, will be used to show the interconnection between similar or related words of literature that reflect and influence an audience’s interpretation of the text (Porter 34), since the paper will analyze *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*.

2.1 Queer Theory

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, and the dominant. It is a sociological and philosophical method used to analyze literary texts to identify the abnormality observed in society and to state that queer theory interrogates normativity and power suffered by the minority. Critics who use queer theory place excessive importance on discourse, obscuring or ignoring material factors. Tim Edwards, cited by Elisabeth Weed, argues that in its examination of the social, queer theory makes excessively broad claims derived exclusively from textual analysis (Weed viii).

As for the concept “queer”, Kornak explains clearly that, initially, “queer” was politicized in the context of the AIDS crisis, but soon afterward, the term was used to address political, social, and cultural marginalization of minorities. Queer theory intervenes to study this minority put apart as a new identity and the causes of this marginalization (Kornak iii).

Queer theory is a field of critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women’s studies. It includes both queer readings of texts and the theorizations of queerness itself (Jagose 9). Noreen Giffney adds that “queer is an umbrella term for those who are not only deemed sexuality deviant but also for those who feel marginalized as a result of standard social practices” (Giffney 75).

Critiquing Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, Jagger argues that gender is not a fixed identity but something continuously produced through repeated social acts, while norm regulation refers to the cultural rules and structures – like the “heterosexual matrix” – that enforce and constrain these performances (Jagger). In essence, gender exists because we keep performing it under societal expectations, and norms regulate which performances are seen as legitimate. Butler’s ideas opened space for understanding non-binary and queer identities as legitimate performances. By recognizing gender as performance, individuals and movements can challenge and destabilize oppressive norms (Jagger 19-20).

Eve Sokofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the closet* is a foundational text in queer theory that critiques binary understandings of sexuality and

express how the “closet” structures knowledge, identity, and power. Her central claim is that the opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality oversimplifies human sexuality and profoundly shapes modern Western culture. The closet organizes how society understands sexuality, secrecy, and disclosure. Sedgwick’s work helped establish queer theory as an academic field, influencing literary criticism, cultural studies, and activism. Her book also reflects the urgency of the AIDS crisis, which shaped Sedgwick’s thinking about secrecy, stigma, and survival.

The paper has attempted to discuss understandings of some scholars about queer theory, but it is important to note that queer theory cannot be limited to sexual deviation. Queer theory as a critical approach can be extended to other societal issues such as politics, race, religion, etc. In this case, the present paper has used Queer theory to critique the abnormal situations of minority today through Richard Wright’s novels under analysis.

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas’s alienation can be read as a “queered” identity—he exists outside normative social belonging. His violence and sexuality are framed through racialized stereotypes, which queer theory helps us unpack as distortions of identity.

The Long Dream, however, focuses on Fishbelly Tucker’s coming-of-age in a racist society. Queer readings highlight how his desires, fears, and masculinity are shaped by oppressive racial structures, destabilizing “normal” identity categories. Black Lives Matter and queer rights movements highlight overlapping oppressions. Furthermore, reading Wright through queer theory enriches our understanding of minority struggles, and the contribution to minority studies shows how literature anticipates contemporary debates on identity politics.

Therefore, one is tentative to assert that Wright’s characters embody multiple marginalization: being Black, poor, and socially excluded. Queer theory allows us to see how these identities are not separate but intertwined—minority struggles are “queered” because they resist neat categorization.

2.2 Contemporary Minority

In Wright’s novels, minority issues, these primarily involve African-American struggles with racism, poverty, systemic violence, and identity formation. By contemporary relevance, even though Wright wrote in the mid-20th century, his themes resonate with today’s debates on intersectionality, structural racism, and queer identity politics.

However, a minority is seen as a “small group in a community or a nation, differing from others in race, religion, language, etc.” (Hornby 742). It is also the smaller part of a group, less than half of the people in a large group. Minority can concern race, religion, culture, gender, language, etc. It must be understood in opposition to the majority. Yacoub expresses this idea in the citation below, which states that the minority is:

An autonomous ethnic cultural community (understood in the broadest sense) structure, underestimated on the spot or at distance, of varying dimension, at large or thumbnail, within its national territory, or beyond and within diverse states under which its members live since old generations, within which they are citizens and are an integral part, in a vulnerable position. (Yacoub 127)

The minority group is often in quest of autonomy of its cultural community. This is the purpose of its struggle. The minority group would like to confirm its citizenship, integrity, and vulnerability in the territory members have lived for generations.

How is the minority considered today? Khan argues that “In today’s interconnected world, the process of becoming a minority has gained critical importance due to socio-political, economic, and demographic changes. (...) By examining historical and contemporary examples, this research highlights the systemic challenges faced by minority groups, including discrimination, exclusion from socio-economic opportunities, and cultural suppression” (Khan 2137). Kymlicka, cited by Khan, adds that the concept of minorities has evolved significantly over time, reflecting changing societal, political, and economic dynamics. In a globalized world marked by migration, demographic changes, and socio-political upheavals, the phenomenon of “becoming a minority” is increasingly visible (Khan 2137). This citation leads us to the understanding of contemporary minority issues and what outcomes are suggested for their coming out of problems.

2.3 Social Problems

Social problems are widespread issues within society. However, it is to be noted that poverty, inequality, racism, hunger, and a lack of healthcare are some problems found in society. They prevent people from reaching their full potential, harm large groups, and require systemic societal solutions rather than just individual fixes. These problems stem from the way society’s institutions are structured and encompass economic, political, health, and

environmental challenges, with examples ranging from climate change and digital divides to civil rights and discrimination.

Additionally, *Social Problems* addresses the most challenging issues in contemporary society and highlights key sociological findings and theories. A primary focus is the serious issue of inequality, with an ever-widening gap between the wealthy and the poor (Mandel et al.). Specific forms of inequality include poverty, unemployment, unequal opportunity, racism, and malnutrition, as well as substandard housing and employment discrimination. Studying social problems thus helps to understand deep-rooted inequalities and how systems like family, economy, and government contribute, making both individual and collective action necessary for meaningful change.

2.4 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment comes from the verb “to empower,” which means to grant power or authority to an individual or group. This term is rooted in American community psychology and is associated with Rappaport (25). Rappaport defines empowerment as measures designed to increase autonomy and self-determination in individuals and communities. This enables them to represent their interests responsibly and act with authority (Rappaport 16). More broadly, empowerment refers to the process through which individuals or groups become stronger and more confident, particularly in exercising control over their lives and advocating for their rights.

Empowerment, in its most literal sense, means “becoming powerful.” In the context of social work, however, it refers to the process of helping marginalized individuals become responsible for their own lives. Adams emphasizes that empowerment encompasses both theory and method (Adams 8). This is why Thomas and Pierson describe empowerment as a “theory concerned with how people can gain collective control over their lives to pursue their shared interests, as well as a method that social workers use to enhance the power of those who currently lack it” (Thomas and Pierson 134).

2.5 Self-empowerment

Self-empowerment is the process through which an individual or a community takes control of their own lives to achieve their goals. This can be accomplished through personal initiatives, training, self-defense, activism, and participatory actions. Self-empowerment involves actively engaging in the empowerment of oneself or a marginalized community. For example, when a marginalized community constructs social housing, these homes become

shelters that enhance their living conditions (Lusuna 38).

Rather than merely responding to life's circumstances, you can actively shape the reality you desire. By recognizing and tapping into your inner strength, you can take intentional actions that lead to meaningful change. Embrace this empowering path of self-discovery and become the hero of your own story. This experience not only encourages significant personal growth but also guides you toward a more authentic and gratifying life. (<https://www.google scholar.com>).

3 Outcomes to Contemporary Minority Issues

Three findings will be better interpreted and explained to better understand the queer aspects of contemporary minority issues. They parallel Richard Wright's *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*, in which protagonists stand as leaders of the black community.

3.1 Crisis of leadership for minority groups

Every society, community, or group of people requires strong and empowered leadership to guide its members. A leadership crisis occurs when leaders lose the trust and confidence of their followers. Okoye states that "Leadership is conceived as a vocation of service, backed by the authority to exercise administrative powers, not for personal gain, but for the benefit and development of the people and the state" (Okoye 20). He notes that leadership in Africa often strays from this admirable understanding, shifting from a people-centered approach to an egocentric model focused on the interests of individual leaders and their inner circles. This shift contributes to underdevelopment in many African nations and results in prolonged suffering for their citizens, manifesting in mismanagement of funds, human rights abuses, and rampant discrimination.

Paraphrasing Idike as cited by Okoye, leadership can be defined as a vocation focused on guidance that is closely linked to administration. This role assigns the leader the responsibility of managing the affairs of their constituency and ensuring the well-being of those under their care. Consequently, leadership entails the ability to take initiative in order to motivate, influence, direct, and control the thoughts, opinions, and actions of individuals in a society to achieve a desired outcome (Okoye 138).

Several important leadership characteristics need to be cultivated, such as integrity, which encompasses honesty and strong moral principles. Integrity fosters respect and compassion, leading individuals to treat others with dignity

and empathy. Effective leadership also requires gratitude and recognition, meaning that leaders should appreciate contributions and motivate others for the benefit of the community. These qualities are evident in Tyree, who is the father of Fishbelly; however, his collaboration tends to align with the oppressive white man through corrupt means for his own protection.

3.2 Empowerment and self-empowerment of African leaders

The two concepts interact to make a coherent whole as processes towards the achievement of African leaders' personality. Racism, as seen in Richard Wright's writings, notably in *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*, seems to be the main matter that hinders the success of empowerment and self-empowerment of African leaders. Nelson argues that "Racism today takes the form of the systematic withdrawal of jobs, welfare benefits, business opportunities and social mobility resources from the Black community" (Nelson 2). This situation is clearly observed in *Native Son* when Bigger Thomas says:

Look! We live here and they live there. We black and 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. (Wright 23)

Bigger Thomas, the protagonist and leader of the community, is unable to act. He only observes the queer situation in which they are living without any social support. He must overcome fear and get to self-empowerment and empower his fellows.

Strategies for empowering individuals are evident through the metaphorical language used in the novel. Some approaches facilitate the empowerment of marginalized groups, such as what Freire refers to as "consciousness-raising," along with self-determination and self-confidence. In this context, Adams argues that "the idea of empowerment is inherently contradictory when set against the realities of people's lives as they encounter illness, disability, aging, problems of poverty, unemployment, and discrimination" (Adams 33). Therefore, empowerment must navigate a central paradox: it aims to provide both strength and wholeness while also acknowledging weakness and fragmentation.

This highlights that one of the main challenges faced by the Black community is powerlessness. African communities, both at home and abroad, experience various weaknesses. If these communities do not acquire power, such weaknesses may result in corruption and decline. As we have

demonstrated, the relative powerlessness of the Black community is not due to a lack of resources but rather to the misjudgment and misguided intentions of their leadership. Okoye emphasizes that “the responsibility of development rests on the leadership of a nation. The leader is often tasked with uniting the nation according to the constitution, which contains laws that protect citizens’ rights and encourage them to fulfill their civil obligations. The effectiveness of the leader and the support provided to them contribute to a nation’s development. Thus, it is clear that the progress of a state or nation largely depends on its leadership and the backing of its citizens” (Okoye 20).

3.3 Queering black African social problems

In literary studies, “queering” means challenging or destabilizing normative categories (race, gender, sexuality, class). It is not only about LGBTQ+ identities but also about questioning rigid binaries and dominant narratives. It is also at this purpose Warner asserts that:

stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. (Warner)

This quotation answers to the question why we deal with queer theory in a literary work. However, the binary opposition black vs white, female vs male dominating society, gay in a mostly heterosexual world, lower class in a world ruled by the rich, etc. is the proof of queerness in society. Queer theory ought to operate change in society from abnormality to normativity.

Indeed, both novels deal with racial problems not only between black and white people but also between blacks and whites themselves. This tension destabilizes normative situation in which marginalized communities tend to forge their voices for social integration. The protagonists of the two novels are black people, and their antagonists are white people. In both novels, words such as Black-Belt (NS, pp.164-228 or TLD, pp.164-319), “FOR WHITES” (NS, p.4 or TLD, p.380), “FOR COLORED” (NS, p.4 or TLD, p.41-380), etc., portray two separated worlds. Jim Crow laws (NS, p.327 or TLD, p.35) and the Ku Klux Klan (NS, p.313 or TLD, p.83) are based on segregation and discrimination of African Americans. Other expressions, such as “black ape” and “black lizard” (NS, pp.253-373) and “NIGGER or NEGROES” used all

along the two novels, are rude words to intimidate and make black people ridiculous. This part will tackle some of these in their respective contexts for illustration. Both novels show fractured identities shaped by race, class, and sexuality.

Below is the intertextual chart showing aspects and queering insights between *Native Son* and *The Long Dream*:

Aspect	<i>Native Son</i>	<i>The Long Dream</i>	Queering Insight
Protagonist	Bigger Thomas	Fishbelly Tucker	Both embody fractured identities resisting norms
Theme of Sexuality	Racialized fear of Black male sexuality	Exploration of masculinity and desire	Sexuality is politicized and destabilized
Minority Struggles	Systemic racism, violence, and alienation	Poverty, racial oppression, and generational trauma	Minority identity is fluid, not fixed
Queer Reading	Alienation as “queered” existence	Masculinity destabilized by oppression	Both show identity beyond rigid categories

To better understand this chart in simpler words, *Native Son* focuses on alienation and violence. Whereas *The Long Dream* focuses on desire, masculinity, and generational continuity. Both destabilize normative categories, showing minority struggles as inherently “queered.”

Richard Wright’s *The Long Dream* engages with queerness primarily through its exploration of emasculation, sexual repression, and the destabilization of normative masculinity in the Jim Crow South. Although it is not overtly a “queer novel,” *The Long Dream* uses sexual discourse to reveal how racism, violence, and patriarchal expectations fracture identity and desire.

The protagonist, Rex “Fishbelly” Tucker, grapples with a recurring castration complex—symbolizing a fear of emasculation under white supremacy. This fixation undermines heteronormative masculinity, creating space for queer interpretations. Wright portrays Black male sexuality as fractured, surveilled, and vulnerable, rather than dominant. The anxiety

surrounding emasculation aligns with queer theory's focus on how power structures regulate bodies and desires (<https://www.ebsco.com>).

Another prominent theme in *The Long Dream* is “sexual discourse and ambiguity.” Wright intertwines racial oppression with sexual repression, illustrating how Black men's sexuality is policed and distorted. Fishbelly's experiences often blur the lines between desire, shame, and violence, generating a queer tension where sexuality is neither stable nor purely heterosexual. It is worth noting that Wright's exile in France influenced his willingness to explore taboo subjects, including sexual ambiguity (<https://www.jstor.org>).

The third theme focuses on the dynamics between father and son, specifically Tyree Tucker and Rex Fishbelly Tucker. In this relationship, Fishbelly's father, Tyree Tucker, represents compromised masculinity. He amasses wealth through morally questionable means, including the exploitation of women. This is illustrated in the passage: “In rent collecting, the women were his worst trial, waiting to pay in dribbles...” (Wright 201). Wright elaborates further: “There were women who tried to swap their bodies for rent, who waited for him naked upon beds in semidarkened rooms, leaving doors slightly ajar, calling out when he knocked: ‘Come in, Mr. Rent Man!’” (Wright 202).

The father-son relationship also highlights the complexities of patriarchal authority, which is simultaneously desired and resented, creating a queer dynamic of attraction, repulsion, and identification. This tension is poignantly illustrated when Tyree tasks Fishbelly with collecting the rent as illustrated in the excerpt below:

Now, on every Sat'day night, about two o'clock in the morning, you collect from Maud Williams. I guess you remember her, hunh? “yessir, Papa.” “She' going to give you a hundred and twenty dollars. Twenty dollars of that is her rent. The other hundred is for us and the police. Fifty goes to the chief of police. We keep fifty. Git it? A fifty-fifty split.” “I got it, Papa.” “Say nothing to *nobody* about this. Fish, it's worth my life if this gits out ...” (Wright 190)

Tyree is initiating Fishbelly into illegal patriarchal practices aimed at the Chief of Police, seeking protection. The three individuals involved in this scheme are Maud, Tyree, and Chief Cantley. Tyree uses his son, Fishbelly, to deliver money and instructs him to keep it a secret. Mayor Wakefield of Clintonville

is also implicated in this corruption. Chief Cantley is concerned about the incriminating evidence of canceled checks that Tyree possesses, which serve as proof of the payoffs Cantley has been receiving every Saturday night for years (Lusuna 106). This tension undermines traditional family structures and aligns with queer critiques of heteropatriarchy (<https://www.ebsco.com>).

In the analysis of TLD, it is noted that queerness serves as a form of resistance. By depicting Black male sexuality as fragmented, Wright challenges the racist stereotype of hypersexuality often associated with Black men. Instead, queerness emerges as a counter-narrative, presenting sexuality as vulnerable, complex, and influenced by systemic violence. This redefinition confronts both white supremacist and heteronormative narratives.

The social issues faced by black Africans can be compared to the experiences of Bigger Thomas and Fishbelly Tucker, who are notable figures in the black American community. Bigger Thomas experiences alienation and violence, while Fishbelly grapples with desire and masculinity. These challenges reflect the broader social problems encountered by black Africans as a result of Western oppression.

This is why the current paper emphasizes the importance of awakening the consciousness of black Africans. Such awakening can be achieved through improvements in the education system and the empowerment, as well as self-empowerment, of young Africans. Additionally, the rejection of homosexuality and the “Marriage for All” movement are critical issues that can help empower African people. As Richard Wright states, “If you possess enough courage to speak out about who you are, you will see that you are not alone” (Wright 45). Badie adds, “No longer alone in this world.”

4 Discussing Contemporary Minority’s Issues

This section is closely connected to the discussion of contemporary minority issues. The paper addresses three key points: the challenges faced by minority Africans within the education system, the personalities and motivations of heroes who drive development, and it concludes with an analysis of the main characters, Bigger Thomas and Rex Fishbelly Tucker, who are leaders in the Black community within an antagonistic American society.

4.1 The education system is designed for minority African

One of the contemporary issues facing minorities is the education system, which is often designed for marginalized groups to help them escape the

oppressive situations imposed on them by oppressors, including white people and imperialists. To create an educational system suitable for minority Africans, it is essential to develop new curricula tailored specifically to the needs of young Africans in schools and universities. Freire critiques the education system in the Third World, stating:

The third world faces a teaching of under-development through its anti-dialogical education. This education system is based upon a philosophy of domination or oppression. The anti-dialogical education excludes science and dissimulates social realities on the one hand, and creates, on the other hand, a naïve and oppressed consciousness in the learner instead of awakening a critique and liberated consciousness in the latter (Freire 32).

The primary purpose of the school system in the Third World was to prepare young people for their roles in domination and exploitation. This form of education fosters subordination and exploitation, contributes to mental confusion, and promotes underdevelopment.

Freire criticizes the political and cultural imperialism present in the education systems of the Third World. He advocates for a dialogic approach to education that fosters interaction between teachers and learners. He views this method as an effective tool for combating both mental and political-cultural alienation. Freire opposes what he calls “banking” education, which he defines as a system where students merely memorize information without receiving any feedback, akin to depositing money in a bank (Freire 9).

Marginalized individuals do not require the type of education system that promotes what he refers to as the “pedagogy of the oppressed.” This approach conditions oppressed people to obey their oppressors without question. Instead, they need a pedagogy of liberation (Lusuna 50). The goal of this pedagogy is not to teach meaningless content, but rather to provide tools that empower individuals to transform their realities (Freire 32). Furthermore, the government must support people in transforming their social lives (p. 9). Liberation is possible only in democratic countries where governments recognize all their citizens as equals, as outlined in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Finally, Freire asserts that the primary purpose of educational activity is to awaken the learner’s consciousness (23). It is essential for learners to become aware of their own status as oppressed individuals. Therefore, the

most effective pedagogy for liberation is one that is created and applied by the individuals themselves. This approach enables the oppressed to improve their conditions of existence. It is important to note that this pedagogy of liberation cannot be defined by oppressors. The following excerpt illustrates the injustice present in the education system through the conversation between Bigger Thomas and Mr. Max:

“What would you like to have been?”

Bigger was silent for a long time. (...)

“I wanted to be an aviator once. But they wouldn’t let me go to the school where I was suppose’ to learn it. They built a big school and then drew a line around it and said that nobody could go to it but those who lived within the line. That kept all the colored boys out.”

(Wright 327)

Bigger aspired to be an aviator, but as a Black boy, he was denied admission to the school that was exclusively for white boys. This situation is one example of the many forms of discrimination that exist. In this society, the ruling class of white people determines the educational principles and practices that serve to protect its own social class and interests. This type of education system is designed to perpetuate the exploitation and domination of the oppressed. To maintain the efficiency and reinforcement of this system, the ruling class, or the oppressor, develops a specific pedagogy—an educational framework with a predetermined curriculum.

Freire criticized the existing educational system and proposed a “pedagogy of liberation,” which he defined as an approach that encourages individuals to fight for their own freedom. This kind of pedagogy is particularly relevant for oppressed groups, who must become aware of their situation and take action to liberate themselves from their oppressors. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Denying someone access to a quality education and the opportunity to attend school is a form of slavery, as it forces individuals to view others as their masters.

For example, the Jim Crow laws imposed on Black Americans required them to use respectful titles when addressing white people. Terms such as “Sir” were mandated, and a Black man could not call a white man by his name without including “Sir,” under the threat of severe punishment,

including lynching. Richard Wright recounts an incident where he was slapped by a white man, who scolded him, saying, “Nigger, ain’t you learned no better sense’n that yet? Ain’t you learned to say sir to a white man yet?” (Wright 143).

The term “sir” originally meant “lord” or “my lord,” derived from the Old French word “sire” and ultimately from the Latin word “senior,” meaning “older” or “elder.” Initially, it was a title of respect for knights, baronets, and priests during the Middle-Ages before evolving into a general polite form of address. The Normans introduced the term “sir” into English after 1066. This word stems from the Proto-Indo-European root “sen-,” which means “old” and also gave rise to terms like “senior” and “senate.” By the 15th century, “sir” became common in letter salutations, such as “Dear Sir.” over time, it broadens to become a polite form of address for any man. Importantly, the term “sir” was historically a respectable title for gentlemen or kings, not a vulgar term as it may sometimes be perceived today. It was generally not used to address just anyone, but rather those within the bourgeois class.

4.2 The heroes’ personality and motivation development

Sigmund Freud proposed a theory of personality development that occurs in childhood, which McLeod (2019) describes as taking place through five stages: the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages. In addition, Allport defines personality as “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic behavior and thought” (Allport 28). He further explains that personality is shaped by the ongoing interaction of temperament, character, and environment (28).

During each stage of development, sexual energy, or libido, is expressed in different ways and through various parts of the body. These stages are referred to as psychosexual stages because each one represents the focus of libido—essentially understood as sexual drives or instincts—on a specific area of the body. As a person physically matures, certain areas become significant as sources of potential frustration (known as erogenous zones), pleasure, or both (McLeod 18).

In literary terms, Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* and Rex “Fishbelly” Tucker in *The Long Dream* are considered heroes and protagonists. They reflect the psychological scars inflicted by systemic racism. Their characters are shaped by fear, anger, and survival instincts, and their motivations arise from a desperate struggle against oppression and a sometimes destructive yearning for dignity and freedom.

Bigger Thomas's personality traits include anger, fear, impulsivity, and alienation, all of which are evident in his actions. He feels fear when he enters the area dominated by white men, particularly in the presence of Mr. Dalton. As the text describes, "He hated himself at that moment. Why was he acting and feeling this way? He wanted to wave his hand and blot out the white man who was making him feel like this. If not, he wanted to blot himself out" (Wright 49). Bigger's shyness stems from his feelings of inferiority when faced with Mr. Dalton, a white man. This leads him to develop an inferiority complex, as described by Freud, igniting a sense of rebellion within him.

According to Tuhkanen, Bigger's ability to disappear from and manipulate the visible world—"the whole blind world" (Wright 115)—reveals what the text refers to as his "queer sense of power" (Tuhkanen 203). This peculiar empowerment arises from a Black man's capacity to remain hidden in plain sight from white investigators and journalists. Bigger begins to appreciate the freedom that comes with queerness and the act of crossing boundaries; he learns the art of passing (619).

Bigger Thomas embodies a deep distrust of society, often concealing his insecurities with aggressive behavior. He grapples with feelings of invisibility and a lack of control over his life. Driven by a desire to reclaim some control in a world that denies him agency, his crime against Mary Dalton is not solely personal but serves as a symbol of rebellion against systemic oppression. Although motivated by survival instincts, Bigger often makes destructive choices. Richard Wright uses the character of Bigger Thomas to demonstrate how racism dehumanizes Black men, ultimately pushing them toward violence and despair as a distorted means of self-assertion.

4.3 Bigger Thomas and Rex Fishbelly Tucker: Leaders of the Black community

The paper analyzes the leadership of Richard Wright's protagonists within their communities. In simple terms, leadership can be defined as the ability to inspire, guide, and influence individuals or groups to achieve common goals while fostering trust, respect, and growth. This understanding of leadership is closely related to the concept of empowerment, which is defined as "the capacity of individuals, groups, or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power, and achieve their goals, as well as the process by which they can help themselves and others maximize the quality of their lives" (Adams 7). However, leadership encompasses more than just authority;

it also involves responsibility, vision, and a commitment to serving others.

Leadership research indicates that effective leaders often share key qualities such as courage, vision, resilience, and self-awareness, which can be observed in the protagonists created by Richard Wright. Both Bigger Thomas from *Native Son* and Rex Fishbelly Tucker from *The Long Dream* are complex characters who embody different aspects of Black leadership, resistance, and struggle in oppressive societies. Figures like Patrice E. Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, and Thomas Sankara, are all regarded today as revolutionary leaders (Bouamama 3).

Bigger Thomas symbolizes the anger and desperation of Black men trapped in systemic poverty and racism in 1930s Chicago. This is captured in *Native Son* the passage: “The Bigger Thomases were the only Negroes I know of who consistently violated the Jim Crow laws of the South and got away with it, at least for a sweet brief spell” (Wright v). His violent actions may not reflect traditional leadership; rather, they symbolize rebellion against a society that denies him dignity. Wright notes, “His rebellious spirit made him violate all the taboos, and consequently he always oscillated between moods of intense elation and depression” (iv). Bigger Thomas is portrayed as a tragic anti-hero, compelling society to confront its own injustices.

Rex Tucker, known as “Fishbelly,” is a young Black man living in segregated Mississippi, grappling with issues of identity and self-worth. His father, Tyree Tucker, is a community leader who navigates his position by making compromises with white authority, which creates tension between him and Fishbelly. The following passage describes Tyree’s compromises and the discouragement they bring to Fishbelly:

Instead of Tyree’s efforts divesting the white world of its allure, rendering that world paltry, those efforts lent that world more seductive power than ever in Fishbelly’s mind; for, upon what kind of model could Fishbelly elect to build his life if not upon the negative image of a father whom he loved but loathed, and upon vague, distorted conceptions of a surrealistic white world drifting to him through racial walls? (Wright 164)

Fishbelly’s journey explores the psychological conflict between resistance and adaptation to his circumstances. Specifically, his feelings toward his father are ambivalent, fluctuating between love and hatred. At times, his father shows kindness, while at other moments, he becomes menacing. This inconsistency

leaves Fishbelly unsure of which image to emulate.

In Fishbelly's view, Tyree's corrupt actions enhance the power of the white queer world around him. He is disappointed by his father's behavior and feels he cannot look to him as a role model for building his own life. By compromising with white authorities, such as Cantley, the chief of police, Tyree effectively enslaves himself.

Therefore, it can be argued that Bigger Thomas and Rex Fishbelly Tucker represent different forms of leadership. Both protagonists illustrate the complex strategies of Black resistance: one through explosive defiance and the other through a conflicted approach to survival. Richard Wright employs Bigger Thomas and Rex Fishbelly Tucker to demonstrate that Black leadership is not monolithic; instead, it is shaped by generational, psychological, and social pressures. Tyree embodies a pragmatic and survivalist form of leadership. While he maintains stability within the community, he simultaneously reinforces white dominance.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we have observed that Richard Wright's writings do not explicitly present LGBTQ+ narratives. However, queer theory reveals hidden layers of ambiguity, dissemblance, and challenges to heteronormativity within his work. His exploration of identity, privacy, and gender politics offers rich opportunities for queer readings, particularly in *A Father's Law*, *The Long Dream*, and *Native Son*. Both Bigger Thomas and Rex Fishbelly illustrate the complexity of Black leadership under oppression.

In conclusion, Wright suggests that leadership within the Black community is not monolithic; rather, it is shaped by historical context, generational conflict, and the tension between survival and resistance. We argue that Wright's characters remain relevant today, symbolizing the ongoing struggle for dignity, justice, and empowerment.

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