

## Experiences of African-Americans as Reflected in Richard Wright's *Native Son* 1940

**Fatchul Mu'in**

English Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education  
Lambung Mangkurat University  
Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, Indonesia

The historical fact shows African-Americans lived under white domination. In the past time, they were enslaved by White Americans. When the slavery was abolished after the Civil War, the black people were regarded as inferior citizens; they have still been treated unfairly by the white people. The spirit of independence has been marred by Americans enslaving the black people in the era of slavery and dominating them in the following eras. This paper will discuss reflection of African-American experiences in literature. The intended experiences are those happened in the Independence Era reflected in *Native Son* 1940 by Richard Wright. This paper tries to answer the question : “ How were the black people socio-culturally dominated in *Native Son*?. The discussin shows that (1) the black man (Bigger Thomas) as the representation of Black people (African-Americans) was always in a dilemmatic condition leaving him without any options. Whatever he chose, will have negative consequences, (2) the struggle for ‘equality’ through ‘violence’ will result in a ‘tragic fate’, and (3) the novel reflected the black people who yearned for freedom from white domination and expected to have good education, good employment, and equality in political opportunity, law enforcement/law protection, and in other sociocultural life.

*Keywords:* African-American, dilemmatic condition, good life, and tragic fate

## Introduction

The history of the United States has recorded African-American experiences, especially grievances. The spirit of independence has been marred by the Americans enslaving the black people. Even after the Civil War, when the slavery was abolished, the black people were regarded as inferior citizens; they have still been treated unfairly by the white people ( Martin, et al., 1989; Franklin & Moss,1988).

Equality for all men in the United States is guaranteed in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.." (Kerber, 1991, p. 525). The quotation shows that the United States of America has proclaimed its appreciation toward the essence of humanity. According to Feagin (1982, p. xiv), most Americans, especially African-Americans, have not yet secured the full range of these basic human rights. They continue to face class domination, race discrimination, and sex discrimination.

Although the slavery was abolished after the Civil War, and slaves were proclaimed free, they were still regarded as inferiors who were discriminated and segregated by the white people. Facing this fact the black people struggled for equality, African-American writers raised those subjects in hopes of contributing to a social revolution. These writers' commitments to the political implication of their creative work are all the more apparent when we note that several of them maintained simultaneously as activists and as literary figures (Smith, et al.,1993, p. xi). They are, among others, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright (Smith, et al.,1993). In *Native Son* Richard Wright portrays the white domination and promotes human rights through the Max's defense of Bigger Thomas who was accused of raping and killing Mary, a white woman (Wright, 1966).

This article aims at depicting the condition of the African-Americans' life in the early twentieth century up to the decade of the 1940s which Richard Wright presented in *Native Son* and it also explores the problems of white domination over the black people which is manifested in racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation and its effect on black or African-Americans, as reflected in the novel. It is hoped that this book can be a contribution to the field of knowledge of American literary and cultural studies and can be used as a preliminary research for the study on Wright's works.

In discussing Wright's *Native Son*, the writer uses several approaches: (a) expressive approach (Abrams, 1971, p.:22), (b) micro-macro approach (McDowel, 1948, p. 92), (c) mimetic approach, (Lewis, 1976, p. 46), and interdisciplinary approach (McDowel 1948, p. 71-72).

## White domination

In American life, at least in the era of Richard Wright, there were not only race system, but also class and sex systems. A class system is a system in which a large worker class is dominated by a small capitalist class; a race or caste system is a system in which non-white groups are generally dominated by white groups; and a sex system is a system in which women are generally dominated by men (Feagin, 1982, p. 25).

Blacks were taught to defer to their masters and to accept their own inferiority. When slavery was abolished, the whites established and implemented 'Jim Crow Laws' to discriminate and segregate the blacks from the whites. These laws, then, were developed to be 'separate but equal doctrine'. Though the blacks were no longer slaves, they were treated likewise. The Blacks were regarded as powerless, unskilled, and landless (Eitzen & Zinn, 1992, p. 180-185).

African-Americans are faced with several social problems. If they belong to the working class, they are dominated by capitalists; if they are positioned in a race system, they are dominated by the white group; and if they are women, they are dominated by both black and white men. This domination creates the blacks' dependency on the white people, especially white capitalists. In such condition, black people are forced either to accept job offer from the whites as chauffeurs, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or to ask the white rich-land owners or capitalists to give them jobs (Eitzen & Zinn, 1992, p. 186-187).

### **Racial Prejudice**

White domination can be maintained through racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation. Theoretically, according to McLemore (1983), prejudice is an unfavorable attitude toward people because they are of a particular racial or ethnic group (p. 108). This negative attitude can cause, support or justify discrimination (and segregation). It is generally agreed that (racial) prejudice is an irrationally based negative attitude toward a racial or ethnic group, and it is maintained through stereotype referring to a largely false belief, or set of beliefs, concerning the characteristics of the members of a racial or ethnic group; and it refers to an overgeneralization associated with a racial or ethnic category that goes beyond existing evidence (Kitano, 1985, p. 50 & 52; McLemore, 1983, p. 111). There are various reasons for racial prejudice. Prominent among these are (1) influence of tradition, (2) psychological need that individuals feel for "belonging" to a particular, identifiable group, (3) building up of the ego by cultivating a feeling of superiority, and (4) usefulness of prejudice as an economic and politic weapon (Hunt & Colander, 1987, p. 403).

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination is said to be an action of unfavorable (negative) attitudes or prejudice. McLemore (1985) defines discrimination as an unfavorable action toward people because they are members of a particular racial or ethnic group (p. 108). Another definition of discrimination is the "actions or practices carried out by members of dominant groups, or their representatives, which have a differential and harmful impact on members of subordinate groups (Feagin, 1982, p. 125). Therefore, discrimination involves actions with the actors discriminating and the victims on the receiving end.

The whites discriminated the blacks on the basis of housing, employment, law enforcement or law protection, education, economy or business, and other aspects in their social lives. White brokers implemented discrimination in housing by developing separate listings that were not available to black brokers. They discriminated black customers by directing those black areas and white ones to white areas. This subtle discrimination resulted in segregation in housing. If a certain housing area has been planned for white customers, a real estate agent would not offer it to a black client. Instead, the real estate agent would tell him that he would be

uncomfortable in an area with no black neighbors. Then he would be directed to an area that was 43 percent black. Black people could not easily settle in white areas. When they did make inquiries regarding properties for sale in all white areas, realtors advised property owners to temporarily take the properties off the market and to refrain from using "for sale" signs (Feagin, 1982, p. 133).

### **Segregation**

Segregation refers to the act of separating and isolating members of a racial group from the main body (Kitano, 1985, p. 61). After the Civil War, Southern white people were unwilling to accept the freed slaves as equals. The white people, therefore, developed a number of techniques to intimidate black people and to restore control of the Southern government to the white people. There was not, however, an extensive system of laws regulating the relations of the races. The Jim Crow system segregated black people from the whites. The development of the Jim Crow system was strongly encouraged by "separate but equal" doctrine, a decision made by the Court in 1896 in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (McLemore, 1983, p. 320-321).

The doctrine refers to Kitano's theory which states that dominated black group members' mobility and acceptance into the dominant society was hindered, delayed, and deflected by a number of barriers. These barriers included prejudice, discrimination, and segregation, and in extreme cases resulted in individuals being confined in concentration camps, expelled from the country, and even exterminated (Kitano, 1985, p. 49).

In segregating the blacks, the whites directed their dwellings to the ghetto. Black ghettos, ecologically, refer to the central or inner areas of large metropolitan centers, where the great majority of black people are concentrated. A ghetto, theoretically, is an area in which a racial or ethnic group is segregated. There are many persistent, interrelated causes for the origin and continuing expansion of segregated black neighborhoods or enclaves in large cities. These causes have ranged from legal codes or "restrictive covenants" forbidding the sale or rental of houses in white neighborhoods to black people, prevalent throughout the move out of black ghettos, or to improve conditions in them (Tompson, 1974, p. 68).

In general, segregation between black and white people, especially in the South, actually became worse after the abolition of slavery. Before the Civil War, most southern states had laws relegating all black people to the state of slavery. Thus, any black white interaction occurred on the basis of inequality was always an interaction between a free person and a slave, and was accompanied by a variety of rules to remind them of this. Sociologically, there was a social distance, no matter how close the interaction might physically be. For this reason, such interaction was not a threat to the whites. Although they had a great deal of close contact with the blacks, it was always as masters and slaves. When slavery was abolished, the social distance between the white and the blacks was also eliminated. To maintain their superiority, the whites established segregation, a system physical distance in its place. Essentially, they tried to use segregation to maintain the dominance they had enjoyed earlier under slavery. Thus, racism continued but in a new form (Farley, 1987, p.107).

On the basis of the white people's view on the "separate but equal" doctrine, segregation between white and black people were not considered violate the constitution if the segregated accommodations were "equal". Termstrom and Termstrom (1997) state that the implementation of the doctrine showed "inequality" and the doctrine itself showed black's inferiority (p. 32).

### **Black-White Relationship in *Native Son***

White domination can be seen from the pattern of black-white relationship as reflected in *Native Son*. How the whites treated the blacks, and how the blacks responded to or behaved toward the white, and how white domination occurred can be observed from the-white relationship.

*Native Son*, a novel written by Richard Wright, tells us about the relationship of the blacks and whites in America. Represented by Bigger Thomas and the Dalton family. Bigger Thomas is a representation of black people; Mr. And Mrs. Dalton are that of white Capitalists; and Jan Erlone and Mary Dalton, the important supporting characters who oppose the biased attitude of the white capitalists toward black people. They struggled to attain equality for the blacks.

Bigger Thomas' family is a poor black family who live in oneroom apartment with a rat-infested kitchenette. The family home environment contrasts sharply with the well- built home environment of the Daltons, the rich white family. The contrasting home environment of both different families are described in *Native Son* as follows:

There was no rug on the floor and the plastering on the walls and ceiling hung loose in many places. There were two worn iron beds, four chairs, and old dresser, and a drop- leaf table on which they ate. This was much different from Dalton's home. Here all slept in one room; here he would have a room for himself alone. He smelt food cooking and remembered that one could not smell food cooking in Dalton's home. The Families described by Richard Wright are not only those of Bigger and Dalton. He describes other families of black and white families. "Why did he and his folks have to live like this? (Wright, 1966, p. 100).

Aside from the different home environment, the blacks also encountered problems in obtaining a job in a white environment as depicted in *Native Son*. Realizing this problem, Bigger's mother suggests Bigger should accept the relief's offer to work for the Daltons as a chauffeur. "You know, Bigger, "his mother said, " if you don't take the job the relief'll cut us off. We don't have any food." (Wright, 1966, p. 16). This implies that the blacks were dependent on the whites.

Bigger wanted the whites to acknowledge the blacks' existence because they could not see the blacks as human beings. In such condition, Bigger blinded the whites, especially those who were liberal capitalistic philanthropic ones. After killing-Mary-Dalton, Bigger saw how blind the whites were. Based on his view, they could not see blacks' humanity or existence. They could not see the blacks as sensitive and intelligent people. In this case, Bigger took advantage of the whites' blindness to avoid from accusations of being a murderer. The whites considered that

Bigger was not courageous to commit such crime. When they received a note demanding money; they suspected the communists of kidnapping Mary Dalton.

It was a taboo for the blacks to agitate the whites. They had to respect them. Committing a crime against white people was an ultimate violation resulting in severe punishment. This makes it obvious that law protection between the black and white people was different. "They had never held up a white man before. They had always robbed Negroes. They felt that it was much easier and safer to rob their own people, for they knew that white policemen never really searched diligently for Negroes who committed crimes against other Negroes. For months they talked of robbing Blum's, but had not been able to bring themselves to do it (Wright, 1966, p. 17). This implies that the blacks were fearful of disturbing or committing a crime against white people.

As indicated in *Native Son*, black people felt unsafe living or passing through the white neighborhood. Being fearful of sudden attacks launched by the whites, Bigger always brought a knife or a gun whenever and wherever he goes. "Inside his shirt he felt the cold metal of the gun resting against his naked skin; he ought to put it back between the mattresses. No! He would keep it. He would take it with him to the Dalton place. He felt that he would be safer if he took it. He was not planning to use it. There was in him an uneasiness and distrust that made him feel that he ought to have it along. He was going among white people, so he would take his knife and his gun; it would make him feel that he was the equal of them, give him a sense of completeness (Wright, 1966, p. 44).

Bigger always hated and disturbed the whites. His hatred toward them was based on his opinion that the whiteness was evil and this made him to refuse the whites' offer to solve his people's problems. Wright depicts this hatred in *Native Son*. Jan Erlone and Mary Dalton; both who are white Communists, wanted to befriend Bigger, a new worker of the Daltons. They regarded the blacks as equals to the whites. But, Bigger hated them because they were white and feared them. His hatred toward the whites aroused his anger which caused him to commit violence.

Like a rat, a black man is regarded as an inferior creature. His existence in this world is regarded as a nuisance to white people. Thus, he must be destroyed or killed. Aware of his existence as an inferior and oppressed creature, a black man represented as Bigger, felt fearful when interacting with white people. It is implied in *Native Son* that a black man is a creature motivated by fear and acted instinctively as Bigger had toward white people, such as, killing Mary Dalton.

Bigger's attitude toward Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone, a white woman and a white man indicates black inferiority. Aware of being a black man and a chauffeur of the Daltons, Bigger had to respect the Daltons and Jan Erlone, the white people. He was obliged to address Dalton and Jan as "Mr" or "Sir", Mary as "Miss" and Dalton's wife as "Mrs". He ignored Mary and Jan's offer of a relationship. Both Mary and Jan regarded black people as human beings (Wright, 1966: 50-70). Bigger felt uneasy when white people like Mary and Jan regard him as their equal.

Because of white domination, oppression and superiority, black people were scared of the whites. "'Cause he's white, every-body's scared' (Wright, 1966, p. 26).

Bigger hated the whites represented by Dalton and his wife because they were blind to the sufferings of black people. The Daltons were white philanthropic people. Their acts of charity were intended to eradicate the blacks' feelings of shame, fear, and suspicion. Bigger hated them because they gave millions of dollars to Black Colleges and welfare organizations but at the same time they supported the racial system. Dalton and his wife were both philanthropists and oppressors. Bigger "had heard that Mr. Dalton owned the South Side Real Estate Company, and the South Side Real Estate Company owned the house in which he lived. He paid eight dollars a week for one rat-infested room. His mother always took the rent to the real estate office. Mr. Dalton was somewhere for away, high up, distant, like a god. He owned property all over the Black Belt, and he owned property where white folks lived, too. ... Even though Mr. Dalton gave millions of dollars for Negro Education, he would rent houses to Negroes in this prescribed era, this corner of the city tumbling down from rot" (Wright, 1966, p. 164).

White people are pictured as those who always obstructed the blacks from improving their lives. "They don't let us do nothings." (Wright, 1966, p. 22). They discriminate, segregate and oppress black people. "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, 1966, p. 23). They dominated the nonwhite people including blacks. "They got everything". "They own the world" (Wright, 1966, p. 25).

For some white people, such as Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone, Bigger was the symbol of a man exploited by other white people, such as Mr. and Mrs. Dalton, who were capitalists. Mary and Jan who were both Communists, disliked white capitalists and they wanted to help the oppressed black people in solving their problems. Thus, the relationship between white capitalists and white Communists was not a favorable one. They hated one and another.

Bigger's hatred was not only aimed at the white people, but also at his own people. His hatred toward his own people was based on his conception that they seemed to be submissive. Bigger's family, for instance, had many expectations toward a better life, but they did not work hard to face the challenge of living. When Bigger looked at his family, he realized they were as blind as the other black people he had seen. He understood what it meant to be a black man. Buddy, his brother, was blind because he wanted to work but he did not try to get a job. He went round and round in a groove and did not see things; he seemed aimless; lost, with no sharp or hard edges; and in Buddy he saw a certain stillness, an isolation and meaningless (Wright, 1966, p. 103). His mother was very soft and shapeless in his sight; she moved about slowly. In other words, she was a lazy woman (Wright, 1966, p. 103). And, his sister, Vera, "seemed to be shrinking from life in every gesture she made. The very manner in which she sat showed a fear so deep as to be an organic part of her (Wright, 1966, p. 104). He hated his family because he knew they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them. He knew that the moment he allowed himself to feel to its fullness how they lived, the shame and misery of their lives, he would be swept out of himself with fear and despair (Wright, 1966, p. 13). Bigger hated black

people who were helpless, submissive, and dependent as those represented in the members of Bigger's family.

Bigger also criticized black people who were apathetic; namely, those who did not accept the whites' attitude and at the same time did not have the determination to oppose them. This attitude was represented by Bigger's friend, Gus, and his lover, Bessie. Bigger showed his courage by challenging the white supremacy and he was proud of it.

Thus, in describing the blacks, it can be deduced that some of them are hopeless, uneducated, submissive and loyal to the powerful white people. Some others show their apathy but do not have the determination to refuse the powerful white people. While others are conscious of their existence as being oppressed people and as those facing multiple social problems.

Black people who are submissive, dependent on rich white people tend to hate rebellious black men like Bigger. When Bigger committed a crime, the whites grew angry toward black men. A working black man says: "Yuh, see, tha' goddamn nigger Bigger Thomas made me lose mah job He made the white folks think we's all jus' like him! (Wright, 1966, p. 235).

White communists have different views from these of the non-Communists. The former regard blacks as their equals and oppose the unjust treatment of the blacks. They fight for the blacks' equal rights as citizens of the United States of America. While the latter attempt to maintain their superiority and black inferiority and do not desire equality for the blacks. The non-Communists detest the Communists (Wright, 1966, 184 & 188-189).

In short, patterns of relationship or interaction of black and white people, black and black people are reflected in *Native Son* can be described as follows:

1. The blacks are fearful of and hate the whites. They feel uneasy in their presence; also commit violence against the whites; and regard them 'blind'.
2. White Communists try to befriend the blacks; while white Capitalists give donations and at the same time oppress and predominate the blacks, and regard them as inferior.
3. Some other blacks regard other blacks as helpless, powerless, submissive, apathetic, "blind", and fearful of and dependent on the whites.
4. Whites Communists and white Capitalists dislike one another.

### **Some Effects of White Dominations**

In general the white's domination over black people as implied in *Native Son* can be deduced from the following quotations: "They got things and we ain't", "They do things and we can't" (Wright, 1966, p. 23), "They got everything," and "They own the world" (Wright, 1966, p. 25).

The above quotations reveal that the whites have privileges that are desired to the blacks and that the whites can establish laws to regulate black people, to protect their own interests, and to maintain their superiority over black's inferiority. Such condition results in racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation which lead to the sufferings of the blacks. In other words, white



domination brings about negative effects on black people in American life. These negative effects can affect the cultural, social, occupational, educational and political aspects, and also law protection or law enforcement.

### **Cultural Effect**

The first effect of white domination on black Americans is cultural. White domination can be traced back to black American history in America. Thompson (1974) explains that initially black people were indentured servants in 1619, but eventually they were forced into legal slavery in 1661. They were emancipated for more than 200 years later (in 1863) and have lived ever since in a biracial society established on the doctrine of 'White Supremacy' (p. 3).

When slavery was abolished, laws or rules were created by white people such as 'Jim Crow laws', 'separate but equal', and some other means to restrict the civil rights of black people such as racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. Thus, the black people were regarded as inferior creature and do not have the right to obtain 'equality', in the cases of protection of the law, economic opportunity, political participation, educational opportunity, access to health facilities and housing (Thompson, 1974, p. 4).

Inequality as well as inferiority have been formed from the early beginning of the existence of black people in America. As inferior, they were forced to be indentured servants; then enslaved; and when the slavery period ended they were renounced the rights of becoming full citizens with equal rights as the whites. Black inferiority and inequality are consequences of cultural effect of white domination. This is because black inferiority and inequality are created by white people, and are then passed on from one generation to the other. One old generation of white people, for instance, regarded the blacks as inferiors and this opinion is then passed on to the next generation. Another example is, a child born to an African couple is made aware of his inferiority by his parents and social environment. This attitude is then maintained by the following generation. The feeling of inferiority and inequality are imposed on them.

Black people are alienated physically and socially from the mainstream of American life. Physical alienation can be seen from the fact that there is segregation, for instance, in education, housing, and business. Whereas, social alienation can be observed from the fact that the black people are restricted in their interaction with the whites.

Black people suffer from their dependency on the whites. They are socially, educationally, and politically dependent on them. They are also considered as meaningless people. This is caused by in the biracial society. Based on White Supremacy whose principle is what is 'good' for black people is not necessarily 'good' for the whites. Sometimes, the blacks are always wrong. Thompson (1974, p. 55) insists that the white people's evaluation of the black ones is biased because the former are motivated to maintain and perpetuate the illusion that they are superior and the latter inferior.

The blacks are also powerless. This is based on the fact that the white people possess many ways or means to maintain their supremacy or superiority, such as racial prejudice,

discrimination, and segregation, by oppressing the blacks through violence such as beating and lynching.

When Richard Wright was still young, he saw the inferiority of the blacks and their problems in living in the environment of the white society. As reflected in *Black Boy* 1945, Richard Wright's family lived in hunger, poverty, fear, and violence under white domination (Wright, 1966, p. 112 & 144-145). The blacks face difficulties in many domination influencing the behavior of the blacks in many aspects of their lives. These aspects will be discussed in the following sub-chapters.

### **Social Effect**

The second effect brought about by white domination over the blacks is social effect. This made Bigger Thomas, a black man, to face difficulties in his social life. There was a social distance between him and all the members of the Dalton family for whom he worked. He also had to obey the etiquette on how he should communicate and interact with them.

"Sit down. You needn't stand. And I won't be long."

"Yessuh."

"Now, you have a mother, a brother, and a sister?"

"Yessuh."

"There are four of you?"

"Yessuh, there's four of us," he stammered, trying to show that he was not as stupid as he might appear. He felt a need to speak aspects of life such as in their social relationship with the whites, in finding jobs, and in education.

In portraying the hardships faced by the blacks, Richard Wright introduces Bigger Thomas, a black man who felt inferior in the environment of white people. When Bigger worked in the Daltons, he was aware of his status as a black man. So he ignored Jan's and Mary Daltons' offer of befriending him. He behaved and acted in accordance with his status as a dominated man in both class and racial systems. He found difficulties in getting a good job, and felt powerless and was always in wrong.

The feelings of inferiority and inequality in Bigger Thomas were in fact passed on to him by the older generation. Thus, it can be inferred that Bigger Thomas' and other black men's awareness of inferior was culturally formed. Bigger Thomas chose to be cautious in facing or interacting with white people because of his fear of violating rules stipulated in both racial and class systems.

'Culture' influences human behavior. Inferiority and inequality of black people are cultural effect of white more, for he felt that may be Mr. Dalton expected. And suddenly he remembered the many times his mother had told him not to look at when talking with white folks or asking for a job (Wright, 1966, p. 51).

In *Native Son* Richard Wright describes Bigger's fear when Jan and Mary offered him friendship. Bigger did not want to lose his job because of this. "The only thing he hoped was

that she [Mary] would not make him lose his job" (Wright, 1966, p. 65). And, as a black man, Bigger, in fact, is afraid of if he is befriended by white persons (Wright, 1966, p. 70).

Richard Wright also writes about the domination of white capitalists over black workers. This is portrayed by Bigger's mother, Bigger himself and a black worker, Jack. Bigger's mother is depicted as a threat to Bigger's manhood and she is considered as part of the forces that prevented a black person from liberating himself of the social constraints. Bigger's mother is introduced in the opening scene of *Native Son*, when she mercilessly underestimated or looked down on her eldest son, scolding him and questioning his manhood.

"Bigger, something I wonder why I birthed you," she said bitterly.

"We wouldn't have to live in the garbage dump if you had any manhood in you" (Wright, 1966, p. 11-12).

"If you get that job, I can fix a nice place for you children. You could be comfortable and not have to live like pigs," his mother said (Wright, 1966: 15).

"You know, Bigger," his mother said, "If you don't take that job, the relief'll cut us off. We won't have any food then (Wright, 1966, p. 16).

Bigger's mother was to be dependent on Bigger. She forced and encouraged him to be involved in the white working world, the world which he feared and hated. However, his feeling of responsibility for his family made him decide to work for the Daltons, a white family.

Another black man, Jack, is characterized as a man who is too submissive, dependent on his white capitalist employer. He said that he lost his job because of Bigger's crime toward a white woman (Wright, 1966, p. 235).

In short, it can be concluded that the white domination over the blacks in reference to employment as introduced by Richard Wright in *Native Son* creates the blacks' dependency on the white employers and at the same time are opposed by the white workers. They are exploited by the white capitalists and oppressed by the white workers. The white domination over black people, that places the whites as superiors, is not only found in the employment aspect but also in other aspects of life.

Another aspect of social effect of white domination is racial prejudice. In *Native Son*, the whites' assessment of the blacks depicts their racial prejudice. In this novel, Richard Wright portrays the blacks' inferiority through Bigger, and the Daltons. Aware of being inferior, Bigger felt uncomfortable in the white family's house. He addressed Dalton and his wife using 'Mr.' And 'Mrs.', 'Sir' and 'Mare, Mary Dalton as 'Miss.' And Jan as 'Mr.' Or 'Sir'. The Daltons except Mary addressed Bigger as 'boy' or calling his first name. Other terms symbolizing the blacks' inferiority are 'sonofabitch' [son of a bitch] (Wright, 1966: 253 and 289), 'black ape' (Wright, 1966: 312), 'apelike animal' (Wright, 1966, p. 256), and 'dog' (Wright, 1966, p. 235). Bigger had to behave in such a way that he could be accepted by the whites.

"He had not raised his eyes to the level of Mr. Dalton's face once since he had had been in the house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly

open, his shoulders stooped, and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things. That this the way white folks want him to be (Wright, 1966, p. 50).

### **Effect in Employment**

White domination brought about another effect which was in employment. Bigger's experience as reflected in *Native Son* depicts the difficulties faced by the blacks in acquiring a job. Bigger was accepted to work for a white family after the relief recommended or guaranteed him. In other words, the relief practiced "employment screening".

Black workers can easily lose their jobs when they do wrong. Bigger was afraid of losing his job when he was befriended Mary and Jan. Whereas, Jack, a black worker, stated that he lost his job because Bigger killed Mary. This implies that if black man does wrong, another black man also endure the effects. The whites consider that he would commit the same crime against other white woman (Wright, 1966, p. 244).

The industrial capitalists and managers were so powerful that Richard Wright in his *Native Son* states that "nobody can commit a crime against a family like the Daltons and sneak out of it (Wright, 1966, p. 272).

### **Effect in Law Protection or Law Enforcement**

White domination leads another effect that is unjust law protection or law enforcement. The law protection for high-income white groups is too excessive, while that for the poor and nonwhite groups is too insufficient. With this type of protection the former feels safe, while the latter feels oppressed. The murder committed by Bigger in *Native Son* expose racial discrimination in law enforcement or law protection. When a black man like Bigger, committed a murder, protection. When a black man like Bigger, committed a murder, "It means a wiping out of his life even before he is captured; it means death before death, for the white men who know or hear will at once kill him in their hearts" (Wright, 1966, p. 228).

The authorities in Bigger's case implied that a sex crime was committed and that the sentence was death. Excessive reactions were aimed at other blacks. The police were dropped to besiege Black Belt. Every streetcar, bus, train and auto was stopped and searched. All abandoned buildings which were said to be hideouts for black criminals were searched.

A delegation of white parents begged that all schools be closed until the black rapist and murderer was captured. Several hundred blacks resembling Bigger Thomas were rounded up from South Side "hot spots", and were held for investigation. Several hundred black employees throughout the city were dismissed from their jobs. There was also a white woman who dismissed the cook for fear that she might poison the children (Wright, 1966, p. 229). Thus, besides using mechanisms of racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation to maintain the white's domination, the white people or citizens, informally and spontaneously, use a method of violence. Lynching is one of the most popular (Kitano, 1985, p. 110).

### **Educational Effect**

White domination also causes unfair treatments in education which Richard Wright (1966) portrays in his *Native Son*. He writes:

“If you wasn't black and you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane.” “I could fly a plane if I had a chance” (p. 20). “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 to it but those who lived within the line. That kept all the colored boys out.” (p. 327).

The statements imply that Richard Wright wants to indicate that there is discrimination in education. A black man, like Bigger Thomas, is exempted from a certain school because he is black. The whites consider blacks as inferiors who do not have the right for equality in education. As stated above, the obstructions to maintain black people's inferiority through education can be in the educational fund, facilities, programs, opportunities.

### **Political Effect**

White domination manifested in racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation created the whites has political effects on both whites and blacks. The whites wish to maintain the dichotomy of superiority-inferiority and to politically control the blacks from being equals.

On the basis of the Constitution of the United States of America, the basic rule is that 'all men are created equal'. In fact, 'equality' especially in political rights has been a problem in American political development. The history has been colored by the denial of political rights for Americans with non-white European background. This doctrine brought about racial discrimination and segregation. There was also an effort to disfranchise the blacks' right to vote through intimidation and violence. Several political advantages of white domination were obtained by white people by means of racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. A political advantage of racial prejudice is that they can manage the blacks in accordance with their interest.

In this case, the black stereotype as Bigger Thomas, for instance, could be manipulated by the whites to state that he was always wrong. This can be seen from the fact that Bigger Thomas felt that it was inappropriate for him to help the drunken Mary Dalton. He was faced with dilemmatic options, each of which brought a bad impact. For instance, if he did not help the drunken Mary Dalton he would be accused of being irresponsible for not saving his boss' daughter; but, on the other hand, if he helped he might be accused of wrongdoing because of his presence in her room and of their friendship. Such relationship would arouse accusations that Bigger Thomas raped Mary. Bigger Thomas decided to help the drunken Mary Dalton and accidentally he killed her.

### **Conclusion**

The history of the United States of America shows that black Americans or African-Americans and the other minority groups are positioned as the second class citizens. In the past,

most African Americans were brought, sold, and then enslaved to work on plantations. As slaves, they were badly treated and severely punished whenever they did wrong. When they did something wrong, they were severely punished. When slavery was abolished, the freed blacks did not automatically obtain equal rights as the whites. In every aspect of life, they were predominated by the whites. Such condition continued until the appearance of Richard Wright's *Native Son* in 1940.

Through *Native Son*, Richard Wright pictures white domination upon black people manifested in the ways of racial prejudice, discrimination and segregation. These manifestations result in the ill treatment of the blacks by the whites. White domination can destroy all aspects of life such as cultural, social, educational, occupational, and political aspects, and in law protection or law enforcement between black and white people. As a result, white domination brings about injustice in all aspects of life.

The blacks' social protest toward social injustice caused by white domination is related to their difficulties in achieving their rights in education, employment, and political participation, and in other aspects of social life. The blacks must strive for equality but *Native Son* portrays that the struggle for 'equality' through 'violence' will result in a 'tragic fate'.

Thus, if there is still injustice toward the black people, democracy in America has not been completely developed. Democracy is based on equal rights in all aspects of life. The black people's social protest toward social injustice caused by white domination is related to their difficulties in achieving their rights in education, employment, and political participation, and in other aspects of social life.

#### **About the Author:**

**Fatchul Mu'in** is a Lecturer in Literature/ Linguistics at Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. He earned his Master of Humanities from Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia and Doctor degree from Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

#### References

- Abrams, M.H. (1971). *The Mirror and the Lamb*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Eitzen, D. Stanley & Zinn, Maxine Baca. (1992). *Social Problems*. Boston : Allyn Bacon, A division of Simon and Schuster, Inc.
- Farley, John E. (1987). *American Social Problems : An Institutional Analysis*. Englewood, New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, Inc
- Feagin, Joe R. (1982). *Social Problems: A Critical Power-Conflict Perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prince- Hall, Inc.
- Franklin, John Hope & Moss, Alfred A.(1988). *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*. Sixth Edition. New York : McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Henretta, James, et al. (1993). *America's History*. Vol.2, Second Edition. New York : Worth Publishers Inc., 1993.

- Karenga, Maulana. (1993). *Introduction to Black Studies*. Second Edition. Los Angeles, California : The University of Sanhore Press.
- Hunt, Elgin F. & David C. Colander. (1987). *An Introduction to the Study of Society*. New York : Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Kerber, Linda K., & Jane Sherron De Hart. (1991). *Women's America. Refocusing the Past*. Third Edition. New York : Oxford University Press.
- Kitano, Harry H.L. (1985). *Race Relations*. Third Edition. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Lewis, Leary. (1976). *American Literature: A Study and Research Guide*. New York : St. Martin's Press.
- Martin, James Kirby, et al. (1989). *America and Its People*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- McDowell, Tremaine. (1948). *American Studies*. Menneapolis : The University of Minnesota Press
- McLemore, S. Dale. (1983). *Racial Ethnic Relations in America*. Second Edition. Boston : Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Smith, Valerie, et al. (1993). *African American Writers*. New York : Collier Books Macmillan Publishing Company
- Termstrom, Stephan & Termstrom, Abigail (1997). *America in Black and White*. New York : Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Thompson, Daniel C. (1974). *Sociology of the Black Experince*. Westport, Connecticut : Greenwood Press.
- Wright, Richard. (1966). *Native Son*. New York : Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.
- Wright, Richard. (1966). *Black Boy*. New York : Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.