

David Santos

ELA - Native Son

1/20/16

### **Native Son**

If you have ever been forced to relocate because of financial difficulties or other complications, then you grasp that at the simplest level coping with your new environment is not an easy task. Meeting new people, going new places is compellingly stressful for people who are not adept at adapting. Bigger, a character from *Native Son*, embodies double consciousness because he is conflicted with the ideals and impositions of white society while Bigger is unable to find consistency within himself. In a similar fashion, Bigger experiences conflict akin to moving because he has met some level of difficulty when attempting to adjust his behavior around whites. “*Native Son* is a book by Richard Wright that entails the narrative of Bigger, a twenty two year old colored man who resides in the ruins of a Chicago neighborhood ridden with poverty and destitution. Bigger’s mother struggles to raise a family of three all the while Bigger is burdened with priorities exacerbated by lack of financial support from his father, whose whereabouts are unknown. At certain points throughout the book, double consciousness is demonstrated through the persona of Bigger” (Santos, 1). W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the most iconic figures in all of the African-American history, whose ideas strived to resolve the struggles African-Americans faced, especially men. Double consciousness is the unique feeling that your identity has been made divergent by societal impositions. Many African-Americans, like Bigger, were unsure as to where they stood in society and therefore experienced a behavioral crisis. These feelings were almost exclusive to African-Americans because they were the ones most

affected by double consciousness. Throughout certain segments of the book, Bigger's persona can be viewed through the theory of double consciousness.

Bigger and Gus demonstrate their knowledge of double-consciousness when they engage in a game called 'white.' Specifically in this part of the book, Bigger is posted up against the wall, smoking cigarettes with one of his best friend, Gus. In a natural and relaxed state, Bigger and Gus pensively observe cars as they pass by. To amuse Gus and pass time, Bigger mock the mannerisms of whites through behavior and speech. Wright writes, "The silence irked Bigger; he was anxious to do something to evade looking so squarely at this problem. Let's play 'white,' Bigger said, referring to a game of play-acting in which he and his friends imitated the ways and manners of white folks." (Pg. 17). When Bigger says "Let's play 'white'," he is mocking the condescending speech of white people. Bigger believes that it is typical of white people to deploy elaborate words to achieve a certain image or status. Instead of concerning himself with the interests of others, Bigger should worry about himself because by engaging in the game of 'white,' he is only further perpetuating stereotypes about the white community. The fact that Bigger imitates white society proves that Bigger acknowledges the ways in which white people speak compared to black people. Important questions arise from Bigger's double consciousness, such as "Why would it seem rational for Bigger to try to eliminate or hide certain things about himself unless there was a significant compelling reason for him to do so?" In truth, Bigger restrains himself from giving his honest opinion as to how he truly feels. In conclusion, Bigger unknowingly perpetuates stereotypes and in doing so acknowledges double consciousness.

Another time Bigger displays double consciousness is when he murders Mary. According to Santos, *Native Son* reaches its climax when Bigger, after accompanying Mary (the daughter of

Mr. Dolton, his boss) and Jan (Mary's boyfriend) to places of interests, unintentionally suffocates Mary in hopes of stifling her cries..After Bigger regains his consciousness and composure, he realizes he must devise an elaborate strategy to conceal any traces of evidence, essentially avoiding any affiliation or relation to the crime. Wright says "She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman. He had to get away from there" (Pg.87). The quote, "He had to get away from there," shows that Bigger does not want to be accused of the crime. People of color who were seen together with people who were white were suspected of rape, owing to the fact that society looked upon interracial couples with contempt. As a result, Bigger desperately wishes to hide any form of evidence because he knows that a murderer who is black will only contribute to the misrepresentation of the black community. Essentially Bigger's inner turmoil is caused by the realization that his skin color exacerbates the situation.

Bigger demonstrates double consciousness when he realizes how his skin color impedes him from progression. More specifically, when he and Gus discuss dreams and aspirations, Bigger reveals that he would like to pursue a career in flying: "I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance, Bigger said. If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane, Gus said.... It's funny how the white folks treat us, ain't it?" (Pg.17) This quote exemplifies double consciousness because it is only at that moment that Bigger realizes how whites suppress blacks from achieving a state of progression. He additionally realizes that he is unable to benefit from white privilege. He is aware that if he ever wished to strive for that career choice, he would be met with criticism from people who believe that it is too unconventional and unusual for a African American to fly a plane. In conclusion,

Bigger demonstrates double consciousness because he is aware of the difficulties present when choosing to pursue certain careers.