

## CHAPTER V

THE ANALYSIS OF RICHARD, THE MAIN CHARACTER IN BLACK BOY

From the beginning of the novel until the end, the readers are impressed by the stubbornness and disobedience of Richard. It seems that he confronts everybody. He hates everybody, either black or white; except his mother. He hates the blacks because they are so weak in facing white's the unfair treatments. His grandmother, for example, has brutalized to prepare him to live "safely" among the white man. She forbids Richard from working thinking that Richard is not mature enough to meddle with the whites.

- " How can I ever learn enough to get a job ?"  
 I asked her, switching my tactics. I showed her my ragged stockings, my patched pants.  
 " Look, I won't go to school like this !  
 I'm not asking you for money or to do anything. I only want to work ! "  
 " I have nothing to do with whether you go to school or not ", she said. " You left the church and you are on your own. You are with the world. You are dead to me, dead to Christ ". " I am going to get a job anyway". " Then you can't live here ", she said... " ( Black Boy p : 159 )

He is also forbidden to read books, to go to public school, to eat meat, bread, milk, for these foods are considered sin according to the Christian people. They should live moderately. Otherwise, Richard should eat mush everyday. He is not allowed to go to public

school but church school. Richard was forced to enter church's life.

" In the black Protestant church I entered a new world... I liked it and I didn't like it; I longed to be among them, yet when with them I looked at them as if I were a million miles away. I had been kept out of their world too long ever to be able to become a real part of it.... A revival began at the church and my classmates at school urged me to attend. More because I liked them than from my interest in religion, I consented. "( Black Boy p:166 )

With these activities, black people seems to try to 'turn their children's attention from the case of suppression of the white people. They did it in order to avoid the growing curiosity of their children about what is actually happens between the blacks and the whites. They are afraid of being asked about the " strange " rule of segregation; which separates public places for blacks and whites in their town. So, they tried hard to feed their children with dogmas , set of belief or set of beliefs that people are expected to accept without reasoning.

This is the consequences of the child who was born black . They should respect the whites, never defied them and has to be ready to accept their right not to inhabit the same accommodation or place with the whites.

Why do black parents treat their children badly ? Actually, deep inside their heart, they don't want this happen to them. They don't like this situation. They obviously have dreams to live like the white people, where everything can be reached and got " easily", going everywhere freely, enter every place with the same right like others. They have a hope to be a person they dreamed of such as teacher, preacher, salesman, an officer, doctor, engineer, accountant, pilot, nurse, and other jobs and positions that the whites have.

They , surely, have a wish to live normally like people all over the world. They don't have to be afraid because they get a higher education than white's children or feel anxious everytime by owning a small successful cafe in town, which might cause envy feelings among the whites. Blacks have to remain silent regardless of what happen around them.

" He was silent and I knew that the he considered the matter closed. That was the way things were between whites and blacks in the South; many of the most important things were never openly said; they were understated and left to seep through to one. "

They brutalize their children, because they don't want their children to know the world's situation which is so hurtful to face. They don't want their children

to get such violent treatment from the whites. They don't want what happened to them may happen to their children. They don't want their children to be shocked by the cruel world outside their home.. The world is wicked because it is created by the white people's : segregation rule, the Ku Klux Klan organization, Jim Crow law, etc. In their opinion, it is better to brutalize their children themselves than by the whites.

To 'brutalize' here does not mean for physical treatment only, but also mentally. They tried hard to separate their children from the white's world, by the forcing them to enter church's life. Because this is the only thing allowed to do without interfering the white people. By keeping themselves in the church's life, praying, reading Bibles, and avoiding the sins the blacks are "able" to avoid themselves from too much thinking the world's business.

The blacks do not realize what they have done to their children is wrong. They are placing their disappointments and resentments their outlets to the children. Brutalizing their children for the sake of their own safety is not right; especially in order to avoid the clash with the whites. It is a big mistake to put the children in such situation. They should " kill " their own wish, desire, and child's dream in

order to isolate themselves, so that they will not interfere the white's business and the white's will not interfere their world.

It is inhuman to slap their children in their mouth, beat them, or punish them just because the children want to know what actually happens in their environment. Richard's curiosity are such. He keeps asking about why blacks should stand on the different line in the ticket window from the whites, for example. But because of that he was directly slapped in his mouth. And sometimes his aunt or uncle would beat him because of those things, for he was considered too daring to ask such 'risky' question.

" Again I was being shut out of the secret, the thing, the reality I felt somewhere beneath all the words and silences. "

" Why didn't Granny marry a white man ? " I asked. " Because she didn't want to ", my mother said peevishly. " Why don't you want to talk to me ?" I asked. She slapped me and I cried. "

Richard's curiosity was normal, every child should be like that. When seeing something 'strange' or 'different' they would ask questions. But then, the old blacks do not like this, and tried hard to stop it. They also use different ways to. Some of them were successful in 'directing' their children to become a docile, quiet kids, but there families who has failed

in making their children as they wish. This was the case in Richard's family. Richard was very stubborn, he did not like to be ordered and arranged to do this or that by his grandmother. In his opinion, this will make no future; and create a hostile and bleak situation for their children.

Richard believes that children should know what is going on around them by explaining the truth and the facts. When they grow up, let them decide what they will do when facing such situation. Let them decide what is the best for them. They know better.

If they ask about the cruel, violent treatment of the whites toward their people, it is the task of the elders to explain clearly about that, so that they will get clear understanding and will not be misled. Thus, the best solution is explaining to them, instead of hiding the facts by slapping their children. If they hate the whites because of that; it is normal. Parents should not try to dictate their behavior, set ideas, or attitude to please the whites to deny the unfair treatment.

Richard wishes that this explanation is given by his family. His curiosity and wondering mind have never stopped asking him, why should his family do that to him? Why should his people run from reality that they hate the whites; why nobody has the courage

to eliminate that unfair Jim Crow law. Why should parents treat their children roughly, push them to avoid worldly activities, just for their safety? Why should parents "kill" their children's will by dragging them to enter religion's world? These unsolved problems and unanswered questions make Richard hate his own people.

The blacks are conditioned to be afraid of the whites, so that they are willing to brutalize their own children and brutalized by their own parents.

Richard hatred toward the whites is obviously because of their inhuman treatments to his race. He has no choice but accept the fact regarding all the inconvenient conditions, unfair treatments, sufferings and living in a home with no warmth, no love, no affection, and no communication among the members of the family. He lived in this bad conditions from a child until his youth. Because the father can not stand the burden, he abandoned his family, then Richard has to live with his grandmother who was very strict in religion, so that he is almost lose his passion in life.

As a black boy, the depression comes mostly from the white people. For in the South, there is an assumption that blacks are considered less than human,

merely because they have different color . They also created the Jim Crow law ; a law which is made for blacks; that separates the blacks and whites in public places . Such as in library, washroom, park, public, vehicle; school, church, shop, and even a separate line in ticket window is made when buying tickets for train, theatre, etc.

Blacks should step back when a black man is passing a white , although the white person is still far away. Blacks should give whites chance to walk first if by accident they are walking in the same road. It is forbidden for the blacks to stare at the whites when talking with them. Blacks should never defy whatever they said. Blacks should address the whites with respect. And , they should keep quiet and do nothing if they see their friends or relatives or another black people beaten or treated inhumanly by the whites .

Richard's own experience had taught him so. His uncle was successful in running a cafe. But one night he did not return home and had never appeared ever since. He was shot dead by a white. It seems that Blacks is not permitted to succeed in business or in many other kinds of work. When a black woman was beaten till bleeding by his boss and his son, because she was caught stolen, Richard should act as if it has never



witnessed before his eyes. And when they dragged her to the street and left her there, even a white policeman did not do anything. When his friend's brother who was working in a hotel, was killed by a white man, for trying to tempt a white hooker. When his mother suffered from paralysis and should be given a better medical treatment and equipment in a bigger hospital in another town; she was refused by the hospital, because she is black.

And when he grows older, and the hunger of books became a passion, what he can do is borrow from a Jew's library card with his signature in it. Richard almost beg for it, and act as if he is in errand of the white man to borrow some of the books from the library. There are many other examples which really hurt his feelings as a human being. Because for him, blacks and whites are the same. He believes that man should be treated equally despite their colors.

In his opinion, it is totally wrong for the people who are segregated to accept those unfair law and rule and surrender to certain people who consider themselves as superior.

For him, his fear to the whites are as much as his hatred to them. He is afraid of them because from his own experience and also from the other blacks

experience, he learns that some of the white people really hate them. Killing blacks are legalized, according to the white man's law. Only a few, took pity on them, and use their feeling of humanity in treating black people.

He hates white people because indirectly they have ruined his life. Because of them, his people have no will to struggle and are frightened all the time. Consequently they use a hard way to educate their children and forbid their children do except religion activities. This is done to avoid the suspect of the whites concerning the blacks. The result is, their children are less educated, become cowardice, and tend to become sneaky.

Besides his bright thought, Richard's distinctive characters are shown on the way how he handles problems. He views everything clerly . He uses his common sense, although sometimes it is a little bit too logic and tend to manure his stubbornness. How he interprets the social problem of his race by showing his wisdom. His attitude toward race discrimination is also different from the other blacks . It is more or less influenced by the sufferings and unhappy condition, he had had since he was young.

However, we also see in the beginning of the novel that he likes reading; and his fond of reading

made him always in hunger for books. His wit also supports this. He understands life better than other people; he has a strong principle which can not be broken either by his family, friends, or the other blacks .

Richard's strong will is to defend his principle, has becomes his principle personality . Although sometimes it is results in suffering, he does not care about it, as long as he can hold his principle firmly and in the right way.

As I have written in the previous pages. I took interest much in the character of Richard, the main character in this story, not because he has a different point of view from the other black people, but mostly because he has a strong dignity about himself. He appreciates this dignity. He is proud of himself as a human being although his basic right is deprived by the whites.

He is different because he knows how " to put something in its proper place ", because he is able to see things from many sides. Richard's distinctive character is taken as a tool for the author to express the important message to the readers .

Before going on in discussing Richard's distinctive character, the readers should know what

things give the greatest influences in his life, how it effects his personality as well. I have separate them into three things. They are :

- Books
- The bigotry of his family
- The segregation rule made by the whites

The first thing that influence him much are books. For him, books are the most important thing in his life, for he likes to study. He likes learning everything in his surrounding, and even in his own life. It is proved when he got troubles in finding books, for it is forbidden for black people to read except in the Bible or religious books, he tries hard in many ways to get it and never loose his expedience in finding the way out.

He never thinks of the risk, because he is always looking for truth, knowledge, and justice. All of these can be fulfilled by reading books.

He wants to be a writer. For him there's nothing wrong to be a writer, to write a story from his imagination, for people are free to have this. Other people will read it, baffled by the story, cried for its touching scene, laughed for the funny things they found in its dialogue, etc.

In Richard's opinion, it is amazing to be a writer, it gives people another thing to think of or even provide events that happen in their daily life. Books are his best friends, his best place to find a blushing dream, a kind of life that he will never get in real life. Through books he also finds out that the world is open before his eyes. Through books, one can learn a lot of things that one does not know.

Books help people to learn the essence of the world. And through books, he learns that people can't destroy other's life. People can not take other's human right, people can not treat others brutally as well. Through books he knows that people can raise a question, suggest an idea, give the view point, give suggestion, make their own decision, which is good to his life, to criticize, etc.

He recognizes the character of people from books. The most important thing is that he knows the character of the white people, people that for years have controlled his and the other black's life. These people have messed up his life, created tense situations, made everything hard to do, made everything impossible to reach, cut his wishes and hopes, which is normally possessed by human beings, and kill their feelings.

Richard learns to understand people, to learn who he was, what he might be from books. Thus he know what living in the South really means to him.

The second is the bigot of his family. Richard's family's bigotry effects him much in his personality; and in his naturality as a black man. This brings bad effect on him.

Richard can not accept those humiliations from the white people. He can not accept the idea of his people in the way they educate their children that the world would recognize him only as a black boy.

Given the Jim Crow way of life, Blacks must, in order to acculturate themselves, deny their own honesty and passion and brutalize their children. This method of brutalizing their children is illogic in Richard's opinion. How can they live in secure if their own family can't give security and has treated him as a criminal, merely because he refuses to enter religion's life too deep. Was not it cruel to cut a child's happiness by cutting his will to choose whatever he likes in life, such things as going to school, studying, reading, writing, drawing, etc.

Was not it too hard to push him going to church and pray almost everyday instead of going to school and play with another children of the same age. Would not it be cheerful to join their variety of games, be

busied by books of tales, by celebrating their birthday, Christmas, etc. ?

Another thing that showing the bigotry of his family is that he never eat enough food, not in the meaning of its quantity, but in its quality. He has lost his appetite before he starts eating his meal because what is provided in the dining table were just mush, lard, water and other dishes which is obviously not provided with nutrition. Foods like eggs, breads, meats, chicken, are not consumed in the house. His grandmother insists that eating those 'worldly food' is considered sin. Such food are prepared everyday without thinking that children need much more than that.

This bigotry made Richard become inconfident boy. He thought, his condition was different from the other boys. The others are able to live in harmony with their family. He just has a few friends, from church's ; Since his friends in school don't dare to approach him, due to his family's bigotry, and isolation. Besides that, he is always suffering from hunger, for he never got enough food at home, so that he can't make a friend with those harmonious-family friends, who have enough food and enough clothes, while he has nothing. He doesn't like to be pitied; since insults him.

He became a sensitive boy as a result of those inconveniences in his family . He never talk much. The conversations only pass and by in his mind. It is not surprising because he is alone in the world; in his family no one ever greets the others when they are passing each other . It is strange to discuss anything else than religion. He feels he did not live normally like other families when treated a little bit different, moreover if it hurts his feeling, Richard would rather back up or totally quit from that activity..

Let me give the example of this case. When Richard works in a white family; he was asked by the white woman what would he be. Richard said he wanted to be a writer. " You'll never be a writer" she said, " Who on earth put such ideas into your nigger head? ". " Nobody," I said. " I didn't think anybody ever would," she declared indignantly. As he walked around her house to the street, he knew that he would not go back.

This bigotry also results from his harsh character; because he never got warmth, love, and affection in his family. He never know what love is. He never recognize what the meaning of the family is. For his own family was full of resented, tension, and rage, as depicted in Black Boy p: 235

" I learned the full degree to which my life at home had cut me off, not only from white people but from Negroes as well "



.....

" I had come from a home where feelings were never expressed, except in rage or religious dread, where each member of the household lived locked in his own dark world.... " ( p 230 ):

The other thing, which I feel has the influence on the form of Richard's character is, the segregation of blacks and whites in his town; the kind of regulation connected directly with the Jim Crow law. This law is made by the whites to separate all the activities and public places from the blacks.

This separation is reflected in the tense situation at that time between blacks and whites. In reality, blacks do not have a chance at all. They can not do anything, and indeed they are considered foolish and worthless. Because they are black, they are thought as the lowest race in the world. And because of these thoughts, the white people felt they have the right to treat any blacks as they pleased.

Richard sees and hears all the brutalities of the whites to his people since he was young. This build traumatic feelings in his mind, which he reveals :

" Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew. The actual experience would have let me see the realistic outlines of what was really happening, but as long as it remained something terrible and yet remote, something whose horror and blood might descend upon me at any moment. I was

compelled to give my entire imagination over to it, an act which blocked the springs of thought and feeling in me, creating a sense of distance between me and the world in which I lived. " ( p : 190 )

Deep inside his mind it form a kind of mental terror. He is always careful when facing white people, if necessary he would rather avoid them. That he hates them is obvious. However, he can not make himself pretending to be humble and weak in front of the white people; as what his friends did to make the whites happy, by showing their agreement to whatever the white's did. Richard can not do such thing.

The other blacks are living in the "false" world. They only keep quiet when they see nything, that show rudeness, brutality, disdain, of the whites toward their people. They can talk and laugh while their friend is tortured by the whites . Richard can not accept this. Therefore, he always move from one job to another. A conversation between Richard and one of his friend show their attitude toward white people :

- " Do you want to get killed?" he asked me.
- " Hell, no!"
- " Then, for God's sake, learn how to live in the South!"
- " What do you mean?" I demanded, " Let white people tell me that. Why should you?"
- " See?" he said triumphantly, pointing his finger at me. " There is now! It's in your face. You won't let people tell you things. You rush too much." " Dick, look you are black, black, black, black, see?"

- Can't you understand that?"
- " Sure, I understand it," I said.
- " You don't act like a damn bit like it," he spat.
- " ... I'm teaching you how to get out of the white's people's way," he said  
I looked at the people who had come out of the store; yes , they were white, but I had not notice it.
- " Do you see what I mean? " he asked .  
" White people want you to out of their way, " He pronounced the words slowly so that they would sink into my mind.
- " I know what you mean, " I breathed.
- " You act around white people as if you didn't know that they were white. And they see it,"
- " Oh, Christ, I can't be a slave," I said hopelessly.... " ( p : 202-204 )

The segregation rule in the South of America, make Richard grows silent, tend to be closed, tough and sensitive man. Actually he is a smart boy, full of curiosity and his fond of reading which leads him to have a broad view and brilliant ideas. But all of these are cut by the rule of the white man's game. The idea is, basically to put the blacks in the subordinate class. Blacks are the race whose fate is to be controlled by the whites.

These things are most influencing in shaping Richard's distinctive characters. The ideas and feelings of Richard are kept hidden and will never end until he found the right and satisfaction answer.

From these facts I found Richard's characters above, very distinctive.

Richard is a smart boy. It is clear, for he is able to pass his grade fast with bright marks.

" Luckily the studies in the ninth- my last year at school were light; and during a part of the term the teacher turned over the class to my supervision, an honor that helped me emotionally and made me hope faintly. It was even hinted, that, if I kept my grades high, it would be possible for me to teach in the city school system. " ( p : 192 )

Richard is one who always study hard. In his opinion, knowledge was never end, so that he should learn everything to get a harmony life.

" For the first time in my life I became aware of the life of the modern world, of vast cities, and I was claimed by it; I loved it. Though they were merely stories, I accepted them as true because I wanted to believe them, because I hungered for a different life, for something new. The cheap pulp tales enlarged my knowledge of the world more than anything I had encountered so far. To me, with my roundhouse , saloon door, and river-levee background, they were revolutionary, my gateway to the world. " ( p : 142 )

He is one who has a principle; he will not let people crush his right, moreover by the white people. As an example of this character I quote the following paragraphs :

" ...The school term was ended. I was selected as valedictorian of my class and assigned to write a paper to be delivered at one of the public auditoriums. But the principal then give him a dictation paper to be read in the program.

" But, professor, I've written my speech already," I said.

- He laughed confidently, indulgently.
- " Listen boy, you're going to speak to both white and colored people that night. What can you alone think of saying to them? You have no experience..."
- I burned. " I know that I'm not educated, professor," I said. " But the people are coming to hear the students, and I won't make a speech that you've written. "
- " Suppose you don't graduate?"
- " But I passed my examinations," I said.
- " Look, mister," he shot at me, " I am the man who says who passes at this school." I was so astonished that my body jerked.
- " Then In don't graduate," I said flatly.  
( p : 193-194 )

Richard has a broad view and a deep way of thinking about life; because hi is fond of reading, so that he has a view far ahead and able to evaluate the situation happens at that time.

- " And the problem of living as a Negro was cold and hard. What was it that made the hate of whites for blacks so steady, seemingly so woven into the texture of things? What kind of life was possible under that hate? How had this hate come to be ?"
- .....

- " Was I really as bad as my uncles and aunts and Granny repeatedly said ? Why was it considered wrong to ask questions ? Was I right when I resisted punishment ? It was inconceivable to me that one should surrender to what seemed wrong, and most of the people I had met seemed wrong. Ought one to surrender to authority even if one believed that the authority was wrong ? If the answer was yes, then I knew that I would always be wrong, because I could never do it. " ( p :181 )

We will see the other distinctive character of Richard, when indicating that he is an independent boy.

When he was young, he was taught how to struggle for life by his mother, despite the lack of attention and affection from his family. When he needs money he determines to look for a job to support his study, buying books, clothes, trousers, and all his needs, for he become a teenager whose need for things began to be a must. While his grandmother refused to support him, he was decided to work in order to earn money for his own.

He did many things. He worked in many different places; not because he is not able to keep a good work, but mostly because of the argument or quarrels he had with the people where he worked; for they had hurt his feelings and even offend his dignity. Richard can not take it for granted; he would rather quit the job than let himself being scorned by the white people.

We have know about Richard's distinctive characters. These are the most important thing in analyzing this novel, Black Boy, for Richard is the main character. The story is told by using the first person point of view, and all the events are mostly told from his view point and witnesses. To get the deep interpretation of this novel, I think the best way is to know Richard's characters as the main character in this novel first, before learning about the other elements. which is also important to understand this novel better.

## **CHAPTER VI**

## **CONCLUSION**