



The Fate of Mulatto after Slavery Abolishment as seen in Black Boy by Richard Wright

Zulmardi Abidin

STBA Prayoga Padang

Received July 29, 2015. Accepted June 16, 2016. Published June 29, 2016.

Corresponding author zulmardiabidin@gmail.com

Abstract

Black Boy is a story written by Richard Wright telling about a Mulatto kid, Richard Wright, who struggled for his identity. This story began from his poor parents who lived in Mississippi. Wright had a big problem since he was a kid. He made the final decision to change his life and fate to be better up north. This study analyzed the main character, Richard Wright, his parents and relatives, and his neighbor. This study uses mimetic theory. To analyze this novel, the writer uses qualitative method. The words give big results to the writer to make a descriptive report. To support his study, he used a historical approach to find out what really happened. Fate, Mulatto, slavery abolishment is all about Wright's life to get his American dream.

Keywords: Fate; Mulatto; Slavery Abolishment

Introduction

Literature is one of creative imagination from somebody who has ability to write, inform, and retell the story in the literary works. It reflects

situations and conditions of living in the past, present and future. It also expresses about human activities and behaviors in daily basis. Literature is one of the original documents that introduce readers to explore the new

experiences. These experiences are reflection of community and environment such as politic, social, economy, behavior, religion and cultural conflicts. One of the literature experts, Hudson had opinion about literary works (1960:10) says:

“Literature works is a means through which an author can communicate or express his feeling about the social, economy, cultural environment problems. All the aspects above can be portrayed in poetry, drama and novel”.

From his statement, the writer thinks that literature is one of the sources media for the writer to express his opinion about situation and condition of life in the past. Many readers are really interested in the true condition in the old time. Literature is also one of the written media to communicate to readers who are searching about the meaning of life. The literary works are not only a creative of art but they are also sources of information that become reflection of human life. It can lead readers to find the true life. The author

can communicate and tell the readers through his/her written work. The writer usually has keen eyes to explain about someone and society conflicts. In this analysis, the writer is going to explain, inform and connect literary works to society especially in The United States. Many readers do not understand about literary works, they do not know any value that they can learn to mirror their lives. The readers can explore their story from setting, plot, character, structure, style and atmosphere. Many writers express their personal experiences from human behaviors and the universe. The main goal to analyze this novel is his curiosity about injustice in society to marginal skin color in the United States.

This analysis is going to discuss the novel *Black Boy* by Richard Wright. Wright wrote about his autobiography. He told about his childhood, relatives and people that he met in Jackson, Mississippi, Memphis, Chicago. His childhood was always beating from his own family and neighbors. All bad stories later became

unforgettable experiences that he wrote in his novel. Being color kid was not the beautiful moment. He faced his life with sadness, anger, and disappointment from his life. He was an American author who wrote some short stories such as; *Uncle Tom's Children* (1937), won first prize for magazine story contest open to Federal Writer's Project authors for the best book length manuscript, *Long black Song*, *Down by the Riverside*, and *Native Son* (1940).

The writer thinks that Wright's struggle made him become great person to see the world. Somebody can be strong and great if she or he know how to manage life. God already give us the best condition when we were born to this planet. As human being, we must do and act something. God wants us to be strong and smart to get better life.

Community never accepted Wright as Mulatto and never accepted him as black boy either. They always put Wright on the spot and blame him without any reasons. Wright thought badly about others because he always

had big problem from them. He liked to think equal about him, family and neighbors. He was angry and sad when he saw white people do negative acts to black people. He saw people in his community treated nigger with violence, abused, and sadism. The black people must be tough person if they want to survive in the white community. This study focused on the impact of racism in the United States after abolishing slavery. Therefore, the writer questions:

1. What did Richard Wright learn from his parents' life?
2. What happened in the United States after slavery era?
3. What did Richard Wright do to change his fate?

The History of Mulatto

Mulatto is a term commonly used to refer to person who is born from one white parent and one black parent, more broadly mixed ancestry. Mulatto people rarely choose to a self-identity as mulatto. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/mulatto>.

Henning Statutes of Virginia in 1705, said about Mulatto as follows:

“And for clearing all manner of doubts which hereafter may happen to arise upon the construction of this act, or any other act, who shall be accounted a mulatto, be it enacted and declared at it is hereby enacted and declared, that child on indigenous and child, grandchild of negro shall be deemed, held and taken to be a mulatto”.

Based on Henning Statutes, the writer concludes that it is very important to give a new name for a new race of mixture. Henning did not want to have big problem for this generation in the future. The writer thinks that the new name is going to be the real name for mixed races in the world. By giving the new name, the mulatto is going to be welcome to any races without ambiguity for the new children.

The black people came to the United States as trade slaves (1500-1870). There were about 10 million slaves came to British, Caribbean, United States and South America.

According to American Census in 1790, there were 700.000 African American slaves. By 1820, there were 1.5 million slaves in America. Slaves in the United States had low death rates and high birthrates. Many slaves spread of in North Carolina, Maryland, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware. The owner of farm designed chattel slavery that was a system for the ownership of labors in the northern territory. Many negro families were victims of this system. This system gave bad impact to color societies. As a result from this system, they fought and ran from the bad situation. The chattel slavery did not only own one person but the whole family. The owner could separate family, load them with chains, forget to feed them, hunt them like animals, curse and cuff them. Many white people think that the black people are not fully human. Slaves were not educated, and they rarely had been anywhere except on the plantation where they were born. The owner treated them like trading

and selling livestock. The black people could not easily run away from their owner to be free because their lives belong to the master. The owners usually make their slaves like children. They keep them ignorant and stupid for the rest of their lives. The owner takes a lot of advantages from their slaves at that time. The workers did not only work for farming but they also push to work for special interest of their boss. Many negro women had been abused from raping and then having mixed kids.

Clearing land and performing heavy construction jobs without modern machinery was extremely hard labor, especially in the hot, humid climate of the south. The owner drove slaves crazy at the farm. If they had a lot of profit they drive mercilessly to plant but if they failed for their farm, they are going to sell the farm area and slaves to the new owner. A successful owner often forced workers to work beyond endurance. Plantation master argued about slaves because they like to buy slaves and breed by themselves. This breeding is cheaper and saver for

labor at the farm. One half of all Southerners in 1860 were either slaves themselves or member of slaves holding families. These elite families shaped political stance of the South, which reflected their common concern. Foremost among these were controlling slaves and assuring an adequate supply of slave labor. Many Southerns in 1860 were slaves members of slaves of holding families. The elite families shaped political of the South, which reflected their common concerns. These people usually control and adequate supply of slave labor. The legislature of the Southern states passed laws designed to protect the masters right to their human chattel. They used "slaves codes," which in their way were grudging admissions that slaves were. These people attempted to regulate the system so as to minimize the possibility of slave rebellion. In all states the codes made it illegal for slaves to read and write, to attend the church without the presence of a white person, or to testify in court against a white person. Slaves were forbidden to

leave the house without written pass from their masters.

Additional laws tried to secure slavery by restricting the possibility of man mission (freeing slaves). Free slaves were dangerous because they could inspire slaves to rebel. The master made consequences for free slaves to leave the state within thirty days. To enforce the slaves code, authorities established "slaves patrols." These usually organized bands of young white men, both slaves owner and yeomen farmers, who rode about at night checking slaves. The patrolmen abused slaves who had been given permission to travel.

The Black People' Fate after the Slavery Abolishment

After the slavery abolishment, many slaves had been legalized as citizens after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. The negro should be free from the owner's intimidation but the most Americans found another way out of this contradiction. They did not treat black people as human as instead treated

them like animals. After the slavery was over, many of them had suffered to survive because they did not have a boss who can give the job and shelter.

In Southern region, many slaves fight for economy, socialism and life. They moved to the place where the location did not give bad impact to the color skin. There are some reasons which make people change their lives such as human conflict, business, politics and races. People are not easy to change their lives if they do not get any trouble. The writer thinks that the condition of life in one group of society is going to be bad if the condition of neighborhood did not open their window to accept it to their society.

The black power started to shine in 1955 when a young black Baptist minister in Montgomery Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, led a boycott to end segregation in bus seating. Beginning in 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina, where four black college students insisted upon being served lunch at variety store counter reserved for whites, young blacks

conducted non violent "sit-ins" in restaurants and lunch counters throughout the South. In 1961, black and white youths began "freedom rides" to test segregation on interstate buses. The white people were shooting, beating and bombing in Alabama and Mississippi until their actions finally forced the Interstate Commerce Commission to enforce its decrees prohibiting racial. The decline in the profitability of slavery appears to have led to a more relaxed and open regime for some slaves to work under the task system.

The Impact of Slavery on American Politics

The government recruited 5,000 black soldiers to fight on the patriot side during the revolutionary war. The exact number would not be known because eighteenth century muster rolls usually did not indicate race. Many black soldiers had participated for this war. It is assumed that a quarter of the American Army are Negroes who were very confident and sturdy.

Many black people also helped America to fight for freedom from the invader. They fought very bravely and strongly to stand together for the country. However after this war had gone, they would go back to the bad treatment like foreigner, not citizen.

Thomas Jefferson owned slaves but denied the doctrine that he made. This is a big mistake for the owner, because they did not follow the rule. Many black people became frustrated and disillusioned with the slowness of any progress. American dealt with the national politic conflict between democratic values and racism by rejecting racism. Puritan as a rooted of British colonialism supported the grass root for the abolitionist movement to outbreak of the Civil War and culminated in Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. But most Americans found another way out of this contradiction. White people did not regard human slavery as proper, but they also did not consider African Americans fully human. The doctrine "All men are created equal" was not fully applied. It seems that intelligent

people become convinced that just because people have dark skin, they are not human. As white Southerners saw it, the urban environment exposed slaves to dangerous ideas about freedom. Most Southern cities were port that provided access to the outside world where slavery was generally outlawed. Free black sailors and sympathetic white ship captains were known to help slaves escape aboard their vessels.

The Impact of Slavery Abolishment on American Economy

Economy in the United States has different goals because the owner has a lot of properties to open new businesses. There are two positions, the owner or worker. The writer thinks these positions always give bad impact such as prejudice and intimidation to black people.

If two groups do not have equal status, they will not have good relationship. By 1940 African American made up a slightly smaller percentage of Mississippi's population and a larger population of New York's.

Big depression not yet fully abated. Many of them did not have job. As a result, the family had a very low income. That year the Northern states already had radio but at South could not listen to Jack Benny or "The Lone Ranger." By 1960 the poverty gap between Mississippi citizen became narrowed some. But still, most of nation watched football and old movies on TV. By 2000 dropout rates had fallen dramatically in all three states, and Mississippi students were not far behind in terms of access to computers. The decline in the African population of Mississippi and the increase in proportion of African American living in New York reflect the massive northward migration of southern African American in the past few decades.

The South failed to develop a varied economy even within the agricultural realm. All the most fertile land in the South owned the slaveholders who chose to grow high-profit staple crops, cotton, sugar. They left only marginal land for the vast majority of white farmers. This

problem was compounded by the dominance of the planters image as the social ideal. They used their land to grow food for their family's consumption and devoted the rest to cash crops like cotton. Their hope was to produce enough to save, buy a few slaves, produces yet more. As a result, most white yeomen were left without access to education. A few lucky ones near towns or cities could sometimes send their children to free school or charity schools.

Findings and Discussions

Richard Wright Learned to Live from his Parents

Moving to Memphis is a great decision to move forward for Wright's parents because the condition in Pennsylvania didn't give this family a good hope. They live in a small apartment where many people can walk at the back side of kitchen. The kid also can play at this area. As a four-year old kid Wright still has trouble with his stomach, one day he has a stomach problem that he can't

hold it. He talked to himself when he was starving in Memphis.

"Hunger stole upon me so slowly that at first I was not aware of that hunger really meant. Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, standing at my bedside, staring at gauntly. The hunger I had known before this had been no grim, hostile stranger: it had been a normal hunger that made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate at crust or two I was satisfied. But this new hunger baffled me, scared me, made me angry and insistent. Whenever I begged for food now my mother would pour me a cup of tea which would still the clamor in my stomach for moment or two: but a little later I would feel hunger nudging my ribs, twisting my empty gut until they ached-----I became less active in my play and for the first time in my life I had to pause and think of what was happening to me.(p.21)

Based on this quotation, Wright as a kid had to stay hungry because the condition in Memphis does not change the condition for his parents. He thought the new place is worst than before. The economic problem for

color does not change the condition to be better. This family tried to make a move by moving to the new state, The writer thinks many families had the same problem as Wright's family.

Another statement mentioned about Richard's mother who works so many hours. She should only work for 8 hours every day if she works more than regular hours, she should get extra money. Wright's statement about his mother worked so many hours every day,

My mother finally went to work as a cook and left me and my brother alone in the apartment each day with a loaf of bread and a pot of tea. When she returned at evening she would be tired and dispirited and would cry a lot. (p.23)

From this statement, the writer realized that the restaurant treats worker like slaves. They take a lot of benefit from Wright's mother. Working for private company has a crazy hour but less money. If the labor complaint about the bad treatment, the worker are going to lose their chance to work.

The Condition of Black after Slavery Abolishment

The condition of African citizens was not in the good position because they got use to work for one owner. After they set free, many of them lost their job because the owner did not want to give a job for the free people. Some of them tried to get back to the old boss for job.

One of unfair condition in American society is one group has happy life and the others don't. The writer can see from Wright's statement about situation that telling the bad condition for colors. They must work hard to make money for long hours but white people are only working a little time for more money. Wright's idea about rich people:

Watching the white people eat would make my empty stomach churn and I would grow vaguely angry always have to wait until others were through? I could not understand why some people had enough money but others did not (p.26)

From Wright's statement above, the writer thinks that the minimum

wages for salary is not the same between white workers and black workers. Many workers don't have skill to work at certain place, the company tried to use their trick to jeopardize the skill for an excuse. Many African American suffered from the economic and social deprivations that marked life in the rural South until recent times. Wright felt something wrong about the economy that gave impact to his family. He knew that his mom worked an extra hour but she still earned less money.

One of conversation between Wright and his mother,

“We did not understand what had happened between our father and our mother and the most that these long talks did to us was to make us feel a vague dread. Whenever we asked why father had left, she would tell us that we were too young to know.” (p.23)

The writer thinks from this statement, Wright came from a mixed family. This family has two races black mother and white father. White

has power to disobey law. His father should raised him as human being not like a dog. Wright's mother does not know about her right to her husband. Wright's father never told to the child about his dirty secret. What happened to the past gave impact to Wright and his mom. Life is not fair for this family and other who have the same problem in this country. Father must act like father not others. If he has another person such as affair or another wife, he still has responsibility to support his children. This small family was already created dilemma in American society and sooner it becomes chaos and disaster for neighbor. The law and role don't work for color family. Wright statement about his white relative did violent to him and others:

“My relatives were “white”-looking people. My grandmother, who was white as any “white” person, had never looked “white” to me. And when word circulated among the black people of neighborhood that a “black” boy had been severely beaten by a “white” man, I felt that the “white” man had had a

right to beat the “black” boy, for I naively assumed that the “white” man must have been the “black” boy’s father.”(p.31)

It means that Wright was disappointed about the violent that he saw in his life coming from his races. The mixed relatives seemed arrogant to join the white family. They beat the innocent black kid without knowing that their fathers or relatives were black. The mixed family did not treat their boy nicely because they think that the kid bring them down and give bad image to others. They should take care their relatives and neighbors to make them save from violent act.

Another unfair judgment when Wright’s mother was crying to hear the decision from the judge about her husband:

“It has been painful to sit and watch my mother crying and father laughing and I was glad when we were outside in the sunny streets. Back at home my mother wept again and talked complainingly about the unfairness of the judge who had accepted my father’s word.”(p.35)

This statement was really humiliating black people. The government seems standing for white people without thinking the consequence of the poor families. The government supposed to be standing in the middle not one side. Being unfair and humiliated always stays at Wright’s family and others in South. He didn’t give up to his fate, he kept on trying to search his good life.

Richard Effort to Change His Fate

World War II propelled a great wave African American liked to move up North, after the war movement north continued, eventually million people as result today many of them lives in cities. Many African American live in Chicago and more live in New York City. Wright’s statement about his new idea to change his fate by moving to up North:

“I would know that the South too could overcome its fear, its hate, its cowardice, its heritage of guilt and blood, its burden of anxiety and compulsive cruelty. With ever watchful eyes and bearing scars,

visible and invisible, I headed North, full of a hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity, that person laities of others should not be violated, that men be able to confront other men without fear or shame, and that if men were lucky in their living on earth they might be win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered here beneath the stars.”(p.285)

It means that Wright changed his fate by making up his mind to move up north. He was really sad and mad from white people in South. He tried to teach white people to be great person not to be a coward. If you are a great person, you did not do violent act to treat black because that against the law and moral. He called white people to be a great people by doing the good thing not criminal act. The bad condition and treatment made African Americans move to up north such as Washington, New York, Chicago. They believed these places are giving the big opportunity for better life. Many African American worked at Northern industries, defense industries.

Now many colors have good position at work, many of them worked for northern industries. African Americans crossed national border when they journeyed from Tupelo to Chicago or from Macon to New York because the condition of life at up north is going to give opportunity for colors. Wright was happy after moving to up north because he can catch his American dream to be the best American author. He tried not to select his job because he needed to get money to fulfill his life. He worked at the post office but the economy crisis, the company let him off for good.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusions

Life does not always run smoothly and cozy. Sometimes the terrible things come easily to our lives. The writer learns the human value from Richard Wright's as a "Black boy" and also as "white boy". He tried to deal with his problem by questioning himself until he find the perfect answer. His parents give

impact give to himself. The writer thinks that Wright had courage to live in the bad location. He was mad when he saw violent done to color all the time in the south.

Wright was coming from mixed races. This Mulatto gave bad influence to his life. The white refused him to join this society and black side did not treat him like a member. This situation did not make him collapse or give up. He tried to see north area to get his dream. He collected every penny to make his dream happened and finally he realized that changing his fate was the best solution. Going away or running from the bad situations, sometimes the good thing is coming at the end. Wright as Mulatto boys was raised and lived with black community who had difficult problem to adjust his life because the situation of people who do not stand for his position. As a young boy, he did not know about the history of his family. He has to pay what his parents were done in the past. The writer suggests to readers, do not judge people with color of skin, social and religion. He suggested to readers

to leave them alone or try to make connection.

Historical background brought the difficult situation to his life. He tried to stand up for his fate by doing a lot of things and finally he made a big step to his future by changing the fate to move up North. God created us as the honor human being not to be weak or disappointed about our lives. Fate decisions depend on the planning of life. If we want to be rich, we must work harder than others.

The writer does not mean to judge or dictate the readers lives but he invited to reader to develop good action and earned good result afterward. Living on the earth like the farmer on the plant field, planting corn in two month or more, and one day he is going to get the big and fresh corn at the farm not potatoes.

The writer tried to do his best to make simple analysis from the novel *Black Boy*. He knew many mistakes for analysis but he tried to invite people to be nice and respect to others. Many things that writer learns from history such as culture, people,

economy, social and politic. He likes the way Wright to make decision because he had courage to change his fate by moving to the new place to up North. He believed one day, he can change his life to be better. The mulatto condition is not making him give up but the mulatto condition is making him strong.

After analyzing this novel, the writer has three conclusions:

First, Wright learned some important things in his life, he tried to follow his brain and heart to move to the next life. He did not care about Mulatto anymore because that's only the skin, race. He kept learning from his struggle by questioning his life. The parents were central media for him to learn about unjust society. He had to stand up for his right because if he did not do it, for the rest of he is going to be the same like his parents'. One important thing that the writer saw from Wright. He always thinks ahead and tries to improve his life.

Second, the United States is a multicultural and independent country. Some laws and institutions were

violated by white people. They seem outstanding from the outside but from the inside of this country did some mistakes and disobey human rights and peace. The white collars have big power to make decision, the color must learn and educate themselves if they want to sit side by side with others. Education is the key to open the unjust treatment from others.

Third, Wright worked so hard to stand up for his own dreams without hurting others. He tried to learn about himself, parents, society. Parents and society are the big help for him to change his fate in order to get better life. He puts all his talents and ability to prove that he could do like white do for better life.

Suggestions

After concluding about struggle life of Richard Wright, the writer can learn about Wright's life who was coming from both side black and white but he seems standing for poor people (color). He had a courage, intellectual and dignity but he just act like a regular person. He never gave up to his

life but he believes to himself. The parents and society did not always give good respond to others. To improve his life, he must change his fate until he got his own dream.

The writer suggests to reader to treat people fairly. The title, race, social and wealthy do not make us difference from others but all of them were borrowing from God. People did not carry their clothing from the womb but they were born naked. The writer invites reader to treat and think positive to others because we are all the human being not human with old fashion and ignorant. The writer did not see others form races, religions, position, but in his eyes, he is one of the members from big communities who settled for a while on this planet.

References

- Abrams, M.H. (1985). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Forth Worth: Harcourt Brace. Jovanovich College Publishers
- Bahr, Lauren S et all. (1995). *Encyclopedia Collier's*. New York: P.F. Collier & Son limited
- Guerin et all. (2005). *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. New York Oxford University Press
- Neil, Smelser. (2006). *Theory Sosiological: Formal and Historical*. Mornstown, New York : General Learning Press. 210 James Street.
- Princ, Haviland and McBride Wairath. (2008). *Anthropology Cultural and The Human Challenge 13th Edition*, Canada: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Rodney, Stark. (2007). *Sociology Tenth Edition*. United States Of America: Thomson Learning, Inc
- Wright, Richard. (1968). *Biography*. New York: Constante Webb
- Wright, Richard. (1966). *Black Boy. Youth and A Record Childhood*. New York: Constante Webb
- [Http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/mulatto](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/mulatto)
- [Http://w.w.w.freetheslaves.Net/sslpage.aspxpid=303](http://w.w.w.freetheslaves.Net/sslpage.aspxpid=303)