

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the theme through the portrayal of the protagonist in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, in this chapter I am going to draw a conclusion regarding the negative effect of segregation based on the life of the protagonist from each novel.

Richard Wright's *Native Son* depicts the life of a male African-American, Bigger Thomas, who is struggling to live in segregated society. Bigger lives all his life while bearing fear of the whites. Bigger assumes that the whites are superior beings that control his whole life. At the same time, he also feels hatred toward the whites because he thinks that the whites have everything while as a black he has nothing. The novel shows that the segregation system brings out the worst of Bigger Thomas because he eventually becomes a pessimistic, bitter, prejudiced, pretentious and apprehensive person. The novel also shows that segregation system not only negatively affects Bigger as an individual but also brings negative impact to the people around him, both the black and the white.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* tells a story of the life of a young nameless African-American who also struggles to find his place in segregated society. The nameless protagonist starts out as an ambitious, optimistic and intelligent person. He wants to be successful in life and he believes that even in segregated society he can achieve this through hard work and humility. However, due to the segregation system he has to face the reality that there is a certain limit to which a black can do in such society. He realizes that in segregated society no matter what a black man does he will always be invisible. Thus at the end, he becomes a cunning, pessimistic and passive person, which shows that the segregation system can change a person's characteristics from positive to negative.

There are several significant similarities between the protagonists of the two novels which I have analyzed. Both Bigger Thomas and the nameless protagonist are young male African-American in their twenties. They both live in the United States, during the period when segregation is still in practice. Both of them come from the low-class society and both of them live in poverty. They experience difficulties in finding their place in segregated society. Both of them have to experience the act of racism in the form of segregation because they are African-American. Both Bigger and the nameless protagonist have pessimistic point of view about life in segregated society. In the end, both of them become social outcasts. Bigger accidentally murders a white woman and is executed on the electric chair while the nameless protagonist abandons his dream and withdraws himself from the society by living underground.

On the other hand, there are also some significant differences between the two protagonists. Bigger Thomas is born in the South but he grows up in the northern part

of the United States, Chicago, while the nameless protagonist is born and raised in the southern part of the United States. Thus each protagonist has a different perspective about the North. The nameless protagonist thinks of the North as the land of hope and opportunity for he assumes that there will be no segregation there as in his hometown in the South. On the contrary, Bigger Thomas, who grows up in the North, knows that the situation in the North is not much different from the South where segregation is still in practice. Moreover, Bigger Thomas's education is only as far as the eighth grade because he does not have the financial support and he has to work for his family instead. Meanwhile, the nameless protagonist manages to obtain a scholarship so that he can get college education in a segregated college even though in order to get that scholarship he has to go through an inhuman way. He has to participate in the battle royal, a gladiator-like competition, where he has to fight his fellow African-Americans like animals for the amusement of the whites higher up in his town. Lastly, both protagonists show different responses as they face the similar experience of racism in form of segregation in the society. Bigger Thomas gives a really negative response toward segregation. He thinks that things are not supposed to be this way for the whites and the blacks. He despises the unfair situation where the blacks cannot get equal opportunities as the whites. He thinks that the whites are responsible for all the suffering and problems in his life and this triggers fear, hatred and anger within him. On the contrary, unlike Bigger who shows strong hatred and anger toward the society that treats him unfairly, the nameless protagonist in *Invisible Man* shows a different attitude regarding segregation. In the beginning, the protagonist has an optimistic attitude in life even though he lives in segregated society. He thinks that even in

segregation era, there is still a chance for him to be successful in life through education and hard work. He assumes that by obeying the whites while taking whatever advantages he can get from them, he will be able to gain a successful life and lead the African-American out of segregation to achieve equality.

The themes of both novels which are obtained through the portrayal of the protagonist show the negative impacts of the segregation system against an individual's life and how the two protagonists from the novel cope with the situation. In *Native Son* it can be seen how the segregation system brings out the negative characteristics of Bigger Thomas while in *Invisible Man* it is show how segregated society affects the protagonist to a point where his positive characteristics change into negative in order to cope with the segregation system. Both novels show the authors' concern regarding the situation between the blacks and the whites at that time.

In my opinion, both novels have successfully managed to deliver the authors criticism regarding the practice of segregation in the United States. These two novels show different responses of African-American in segregated society. Richard Wright creates Bigger Thomas as the representation of the low-class African-American who finds it difficult to cope with segregation. From the portrayal of Bigger it can be seen how segregation makes him desperate which eventually gives negative influence not only to himself but also to the society. On the other hand, Ralph Ellison portrays his nameless protagonist as an African-American who obtains the opportunity to get education and has optimistic attitude in life. The protagonist has the potential to be successful, but the segregation system renders him impossible to have a successful life because he is an African-American. Thus both portrayals show that in segregated

society, the African-American will always be put in disadvantageous position no matter who they are or what they do.

Basically, all human being are created equal no matter what race or skin color one is born with. Thus for whatever reason there is, the practice of racism in any form cannot be justified. Since the institution of slavery has been abolished, the African-Americans are supposed to have equal position like other citizens of the United States. However with the segregation system, which is an attempt to separate the life of the black from the white, equality in the United States society still cannot be realized. Thus, it is impossible to expect equality in society if there is still separation and limitation for any of its members. Both novels show that segregation system gives more damage than benefit to the African-Americans. In the end, the only way one can live together in harmony with his fellow human beings is by acknowledging and respecting one another as an equal being without being restrained or limited merely by race.