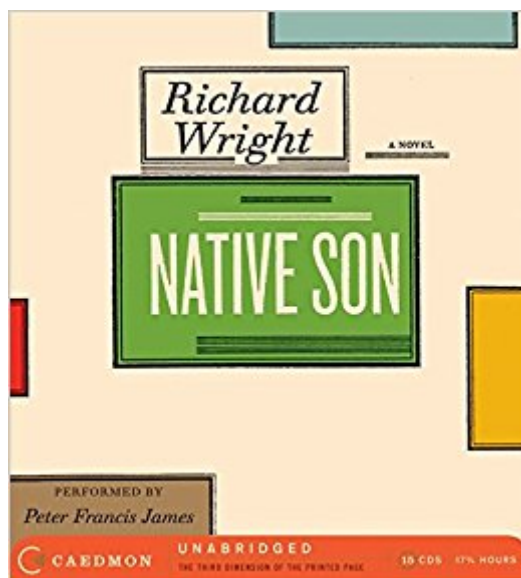


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## Native Son CD



## Synopsis

Right from the start, Bigger Thomas had been headed for jail. It could have been for assault or petty larceny; by chance, it was for murder and rape. *Native Son* tells the story of this young black man caught in a downward spiral after he kills a young white woman in a brief moment of panic. Set in Chicago in the 1930s, Wright's powerful novel is an unsparing reflection on the poverty and feelings of hopelessness experienced by people in inner cities across the country and of what it means to be black in America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Bigger Thomas is doomed, trapped in a downward spiral that will lead to arrest, prison, or death, driven by despair, frustration, poverty, and incomprehension. As a young black man in the Chicago of the '30s, he has no way out of the walls of poverty and racism that surround him, and after he murders a young white woman in a moment of panic, these walls begin to close in. There is no help for him--not from his hapless family; not from liberal do-gooders or from his well-meaning yet naive friend Jan; certainly not from the police, prosecutors, or judges. Bigger is debased, aggressive, dangerous, and a violent criminal. As such, he has no claim upon our compassion or sympathy. And yet... A more compelling story than *Native Son* has not been written in the 20th century by an American writer. That is not to say that Richard Wright created a novel free of flaws, but that he wrote the first novel that successfully told the most painful and unvarnished truth about American social and class relations. As Irving Howe asserted in 1963, "The day *Native Son* appeared, American culture was changed forever. It made impossible a repetition of the old lies [and] brought

out into the open, as no one ever had before, the hatred, fear and violence that have crippled and may yet destroy our culture." Other books had focused on the experience of growing up black in America--including Wright's own highly successful *Uncle Tom's Children*, a collection of five stories that focused on the victimization of blacks who transgressed the code of racial segregation. But they suffered from what he saw as a kind of lyrical idealism, setting up sympathetic black characters in oppressive situations and evoking the reader's pity. In *Native Son*, Wright was aiming at something more. In *Bigger*, he created a character so damaged by racism and poverty, with dreams so perverted, and with human sensibilities so eroded, that he has no claim on the reader's compassion: "I didn't want to kill," Bigger shouted. "But what I killed for, I am! It must've been pretty deep in me to make me kill! I must have felt it awful hard to murder.... What I killed for must've been good!" Bigger's voice was full of frenzied anguish. "It must have been good! When a man kills, it's for something... I didn't know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for 'em. It's the truth..." Wright's genius was that, in preventing us from feeling pity for Bigger, he forced us to confront the hopelessness, misery, and injustice of the society that gave birth to him. --Andrew Himes --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Starred Review. Wright's classic 1940 novel about a young African-American man who murders a white woman in 1930s Chicago is a truly remarkable literary accomplishment. Peter Francis James has never been better, bringing the character of Bigger Thomas to life in a profound and moving performance that is as touching as it is truthful. James's powerful baritone demands to be heard, captivating listeners with Wright's realistic portrayal of life in the inner city, capturing the mood of each and every scene. With moderate yet believable variations in tone and dialect for each of the characters, James ignites the collective imagination of his audience. Wright's novel is real, raw and brutally honest and James's reading follows suit. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Richard Wright excellently exposes the stark racial divisions of the 1930s Chicago Black Belt in his period piece *Native Son*. Following the misfortune of the young protagonist Bigger Thomas, Wright seeks to convey a coming of age initiated by tragic conflict. Not only is the reader enveloped by racial conflict behind the words of Wright, but by general conflict between all men. Through this composition, Wright aims to reveal the darkness often covered up during the period of writing, seen through the eyes of the racially suppressed. The best thing one can take away from this story is an appreciation for empathy and feelings other than our own. Though it is easy to jump to the

conclusion that Bigger is an evil man, if you take the time to think and really read between the lines you actually can actively understand the actions which he takes throughout the story and feel a connection with him until the very end. This gift of empathy is what I would argue is Wright's most amazing result from this story. All in all there is a lot to be learned from reading *Native Son* and not only does it teach about a historical period of time, but it wraps the piece of historical fiction nicely into a novel, a medium accessible to a wide variety of audiences. I highly recommend this thrilling expose.

This book is a great book that shows how hard prejudiced was back in the day before civil rights. This story has a few eye opening and a bit graphic twists but expresses a great deal of oppression. The story has a great build and has an ending where enlightenment is reached. I think that this book should be read with an open mind and the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes to think what they are thinking. Also it should be remembered while reading this book that skin color made a great deal in a person's life and if you were not white you were treated differently and sometimes even disrespected.

This classic cautionary tale is a tense, graphic read that gives insights into the race issue in the US in the 1930s and the damage it does to both whites and blacks. It also gives important context to the ongoing race issues in that country: a historically toxic, inequitable, violent and oppressive society produces toxic, paranoid, violent people, whatever the basis for the oppression, be it race, class, ethnicity, religion or anything else. Quite apart from all the sociological and psychological insights, the novel itself is a gripping ride that just does not let up on the tension until the court scene, the long speeches and the epiphanies of the protagonist near the end that slow things down somewhat. Overall, a worthy read.

Obviously a momentous book in history for black authors. Writing style is easily digestible and not obtuse in any way; it's very well written. The story and imagery are also good. I imagine that the persecution the protagonist goes through is familiar to many people during that time, and some might argue during this time as well. The only reason I knocked off a star is that I find it painful to enjoy any story (book, show, movie, game) that sets up a very dramatic misunderstanding that will lead to a lot of pain and suffering, like a train crash happening in slow motion. You know what's coming very early on, and ultimately you pay for the protagonist's mistake. I understand that that is the whole point of this story, but that doesn't make it any easier to swallow. This happens far too often

in modern story telling (I know this was published in 1940), especially in daily television shows, where there would essentially be no episode if not for some fake drama inserted to string the viewer along. Few and far between are the stories that are still enticing without the forced, easily avoidable misunderstanding that leads to everything going wrong. Again, it's a good book, and worth the read. In the end though there are many other good (better?) books to read (imho).

More than a decade ago, I was supposed to read this novel for an African American Lit course. After Bigger's incident with Mary, I stopped reading the text. I was livid! I thought, why would Richard Wright do such a thing?! There was just no hope for Bigger after that. My coworker invited me to read it this year, and I can appreciate the text now. I understand that a point is being made about the dire economic and racial landscape of the early 20th century. That said, Max's speech ran 35 screens on my Kindle. I had to take a break. I think that with better editing the novel could have been better, but it's point is still clear. Decades later, we can still connect to it and evaluate ourselves in its pages.

A well-written account of a black youth in 1940's Chicago. This young man grew up oppressed by the arrogance and fear of a white majority who has set the rules whereby blacks must 'live', if that's what the struggle to survive can be called. He's a protagonist that is difficult to accept in that role in this novel. For me, reading this book was very uncomfortable, as it allowed me to feel what this character feels. I spent 14 years in South Carolina, where the spirit of Jim Crow still survives. That was hard enough. This book brought it home to me just how difficult it was to live in the white society of that era. Somehow, by the end of the book, I found myself wanting a different outcome for Bigger. I will read other offerings from this author.

It's a masterpiece and one fixed in time and place. Wright was a communist, which was a utopian experiment with it's own horrible outcome. I was glad to read of the generalizations towards oppressed people at large that he had come to in the essay at the end. Racism is still with us but not like in Chicago in the 30s. Bigger Thomas had one of many reactions to his life within the oppression of his people. He is a study in the complicated human condition. Wright comes close to making him a hero or maybe a justified victim. I wanted nobility. Wright grants none in the South Side of Chicago. There are other, more redemptive stories coming from that very place. Wright condemns them in his collectivist orthodoxy. Classism had two sides. Neither is right. But the reader will never forget Bigger Thomas. I won't either.

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