

Critical Insights: Richard Wright

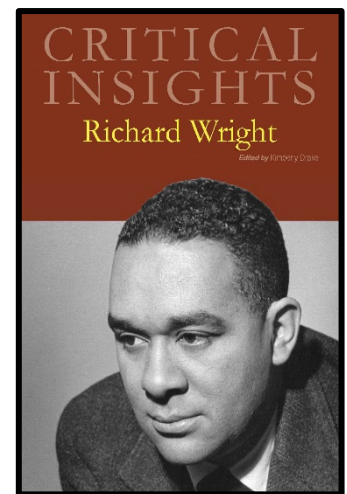
FULL
TEXT
REVIEW

The *Critical Insights* series explores popular and complex works of literature and its author that provide students new ways of approaching the subject matter. *Critical Insights: Richard Wright* provides an introduction to the author's life and writing in the traditional *Critical Insights* format including an outline by the editor on the focus of each essay followed by the editor's own discussion on Richard Wright. This volume includes four essays on the critical context of Wright's work, with the bulk of the volume being critical readings of Wright's work. Included at the end is a chronological outline of Wright's life and his literary work followed with the bibliography and suggested further readings.

Many of the included essay's focus on Wright's two most well-known writings, *Native Son* (1940) and his autobiographical novel *Black Boy* published in 1945. Volume editor Kimberly Drake, chair of the Writing and Rhetoric major at Scripps College (Claremont, California) contributes essays around Wright's early work and his focus on social justice as the FBI was creating their composite of the author. She also discusses *Native Son* and *Black Boy* using interpretations of feminist theory and psychoanalysis. Students of Wright's work will appreciate the introduction to the author through this lens as a way of further understanding his interest in Freud's writings and what he saw as the activist Wright to partner with psychiatrist Frederick Wertham to open a clinic in Harlem (New York City) in 1946..."

-Against the Grain

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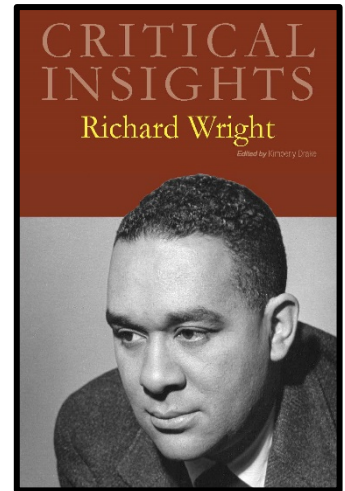
Another focus throughout the volume is his interest in Communism from 1933 through 1942, shortly after the FBI began investigating Wright. In 1944, Wright wrote an essay for the *Atlantic Monthly* titled "I Tried To be a Communist" in which he describes his early interest in Communism and his eventual disillusionment with the movement. Readers of the Critical Insights series will recognize the author of two essays written around this article, Robert C. Evans. Evans is a Distinguished Teaching Professor at Auburn University at Montgomery' and editor of several volumes in the *Critical Insights* series. In this volume, Evans offers a Critical Contexts essay and Critical Readings essay discussing the context and critical responses to 'I Tried To be a Communist-' **The complexity of an African American male embracing Communism, and later rejecting its authoritarian thinking is addressed in these essays In such a way that students looking for clarification or context will find the writings and references in this volume helpful**

This collection of essays begins with Drake quoting from a "Synopsis of Facts" as compiled in the FBI file on Richard Wright in 1943, and points out the inaccuracies of the "facts." What follows are discussions of Wright in the context of a writer finding their voice through experimenting with the scientific and literary developments of their time, establishing a following among other significant writers, including Ralph Ellison, and animosity among others, including James Baldwin. Drake's concluding essay addresses the split created by Baldwin when he published *Voices of a Native Son* (1955). In Notes. Baldwin criticizes Wright's stereotypes in *Native Son* involving the violent, black male charter Bigger Thomas, who murders two female characters. **The diverse viewpoints taken up in the essays makes it an important addition to the undergraduate library in particular, but this would be a welcome volume in any academic research library.**

ATG Reviewer Rating: I need this in my library. I want to be able to get up from my desk and grab this book off the shelf, if it's not checked out)- *Against The Grain*

Continued on Page Three

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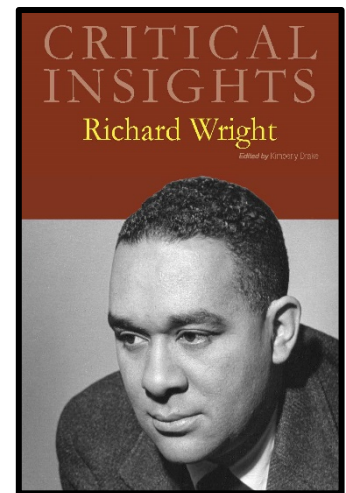
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“With the publication of his best-selling novel *Native Son*, Richard Wright (1908–60), who had until then worked for the Chicago post office after he’d moved north and then for the Federal Writers’ Project, made his name as one of the most influential African American writers of the 20th century. In 1945, the first half of his autobiography, *Black Boy*, was published. Essays, short stories, plays, a radio play, and a film completed his oeuvre before his untimely death at 53. In this volume, edited by Drake, **nine literary scholars present 12 perceptive essays that take a close look at the biographical, sociopolitical, and historical contexts informing Wright’s work, offering a keen, critical examination of some of his key works.** Drake explores “The Meaning of Rape” in *Native Son*, while Beth Bennett analyzes the film adaptation. Other contributors explore Wright’s book *Uncle Tom’s Children*, his short story “Man of All Work,” and his novel *A Father’s Law*. **VERDICT: High school and college students will get a strong sense of Wright’s life, motivations, and creative output. Readers new to the author, as well as devotees, will take away valuable insights.**”

-Library Journal

“Under the editorship of Kimberly Drake, this volume in the Critical Insights series provides users with an understanding of important American author Richard Wright. The volume starts with two chapters by Drake that discuss critical views of Wright’s work and his early life and work. The next section, Critical Contexts, contains four essays and is arranged chronologically. Other chapters in this section are: “The Meaning of Rape in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*”; “Richard Wright’s Readers”; and “Heidegger and *The Outsider*, *Savage Holiday*, and *The Long Dream*.” This last chapter deals with Wright’s efforts to translate Sartre’s French existentialism into his understanding of black existentialism. The Critical Readings section, also arranged chronologically, begins with an analysis of Wright’s 1938 *Uncle Tom’s Children* in light of literary naturalism, followed by chapters that examine *Native Son* as a protest novel and *Black Boy* in terms of black consciousness, artistic expression, and social justice. The last three chapters in this section examine Wright’s career after his move to Paris. All chapters include a works cited section. The remainder of the book is divided into a Resources section that includes a chronology of Wright’s life, a list of his works, a bibliography, further reading suggestions, information about the editor and contributors, and an index. **Recommended for academic libraries.**”-ARBA

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