reality. At the age of nineteen, Wright moved to Chicago where he became a student of *de facto* Jim Crow: the subtle norms that segregated work places and housing, restricted blacks' educational attainment opportunities, and dictated the social pecking order. This education provided Wright with a way to see the world as it was, not as it appeared to most.

Through his involvement with John Reed Clubs—clubs established in 1929 whose aim was to promote socialism through art—Wright became involved with the Communist Party, in which he found an outlet for his art; a way to reveal to the world what he had seen. The Party integrated blacks in 1925 and began actively recruiting them as a revolutionary force; they could become the proletariat. But beyond being a revolutionary force, many blacks in the Communist Party had artistic talents, and if there wasn't a Bastille to storm or a Czar to depose, there was at least art to be made. They could use art as a revolutionary force, because "art *creates* realities and worlds. People perceive and conceive in the light of narratives, pictures, and images" (Edelman 7). And up until then, the narratives, pictures, and images had been almost exclusively taken from a white lens, but now, through avenues provided by the Communist Party, people could have a chance to see them through a black lens. Wright fully understood this, for he tells us that "it seemed to me that here at last in the realm of revolutionary expression was where Negro experience could find a home, a functioning value and role" (*Black Boy* 318).

Wright felt his role was to change the established narrative about blacks through his writing. He felt that the current narrative caused "the black man . . . to hate in himself that which others hated in him" (*Black Boy* 266). A caricature of blacks had been established through writings, films, and media that depicted blacks as less intelligent, lazy, or comic foils, and it seemed to Wright that most blacks indifferently accepted the role in which they were cast. Art played a role in establishing these stereotypes; however, "Art can also emancipate the mind from stereotypes, prejudices, and narrow horizons" (Edelman 12). Wright's goal was to invoke a new emancipation. But Wright didn't strive for this new emancipation just for the benefit of blacks, for he tells us that:

> **if the Negro solved his problem, he would be solving infinitely more than his problem alone. I felt certain that the Negro could never solve his problem until the deeper prob lem of American civilization had been faced and solved. And because the Negro was the most cast-out of all the outcast people in America, I felt that no other group in America could tackle this problem of what our America lives meant so well as the Negro could. (*Black Boy* 298)**

Wright wrote for the benefit of American society, because he felt it was something that he could do, but more importantly, he felt this new emancipation he

sought could free all men and that only a Negor could facilitate it.

Wright saw an irony in how Whites treated blacks, in that by hurting blacks, whites were also hurting themselves. Whites made it clear to blacks that America was not their land, without "pausing to consider the consequences should the Negroes give up completely" (*Black Boy* 302). It made no sense to make something become so heavy that you couldn't carry it, knowing you would have to carry it once it became too heavy, but that is just what whites were doing. Like *Sisyphus* and his boulder, whites were pushing blacks up a ramp, believing they were leading them over a precipice, when that which they were pushing was ultimately destined to come rolling back down on them. Wright saw that the weight the whites were pushing would eventually be too much to bear and feared for American society once that realization took hold.

Wright was not overtly political, but his affiliation with the Communist Party made his work political by proxy. He wrote to convey his quality of experience, not to express political beliefs. Wright believed that "the artist and the politician stand at opposite poles" (*Black Boy* 345). His job was to observe and report, and then hope that those he reported to decided to act on the politicians, because "the artist's enhancement of life may emphasize, at certain times, those aspects that a politician can use" (345). Blacks had been *used* in so many ways over the years; here Wright saw a way for them to be used for a positive end. If Wright could make enough people *see* what he saw, and if enough politicians then saw or feared that so many could *see*, he could affect political change without being political. His words didn't have to be persuasive; they just had to be true.

The truth that Wright wanted known could create a new narrative, one that defined a new reality in which it is understood that you don't have to be communist to be communal. We are all of the same country and desiring the same goals: freedom, opportunity, and basic human dignity. Wright sums up his sentiments nicely by telling us that:

> **the problem of human unity [is] more important than bread, more important than physical living itself; for . . . without a common bond uniting men, without a continuous current of shared thought and feeling circulating through the social system, like blood coursing through the body, there could be no living worthy of being called human. (*Black Boy* 318)**

Wright said upon arriving in Chicago that he "had fled a known terror, and perhaps [he] could cope with this unknown terror that lay ahead" (262). While he didn't find more terror when he arrived in the North, he did find *de facto* Jim Crow, but he saw past the immediate impulse to blame whites for conditions as they were, for his educations in both the South and North had shown