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Literature for Young Adults

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A Critical Approach to *Monster*

*Monster* by Walter Dean Myers raises several issues about how resources, power, and agency are apportioned in society. In the world of black teenager Steve Harmon, the main character, the only viable source of resources, power, and agency are through violence, most notably related to drugs and/or gangs. On pages 149-150, Steve is seen talking with James King who is planning to rob the drugstore to make money. Even though he should legally be considered innocent until proven guilty, to the jury he is just another young black man caught up in crime like every other black criminal crowding the prisons.

Steve is in many ways constrained to the social role of the poor, criminal minority. Most people in his neighborhood are either honest people who cannot afford to give their children a better life, like his parents, and those who have either embraced crime or reluctantly turned to it because they had no other choice. Prior to his incarceration, Steve actually looked up to the glamorized criminal.

Steve is eventually deemed “not guilty” by the jury, but it was certainly an up-hill battle due to his socio-economic and racial situation. The prosecution did everything possible to show that he was no different than known criminals and, as his own lawyer pointed out to him, the fact that he was young, black, and on trial did nothing to sway the jury in his favor. These issuesall raise many questionsabout how resources, power, and agency are apportioned in society.