



DREAMS AND HOPE IN 'FENCES' BY AUGUST WILSON

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ABSTRACT

A huge number of African-Americans migrated from south to the northern states in early nineties in search of employment in upcoming industries there. American constitution had laid it down to be land of equality promising each of its citizens irrespective of cast, colour and creed to earn a livelihood in order to advance from rags to riches. The racism was still persistent in southern states notwithstanding the elimination of slavery, and hence they dislocated to the North for accomplishing the dreams they had been promised. The promoters of the American Dream asserted that firm diligence and persisting astuteness would guide a person to prosperity. Nevertheless, this paper attempts to reveal that because of African-Americans considered to be "others" in the white dominated culture prevalent in US, economic improvement and other facets of the American Dream remain impractical dreams for them.

KEYWORDS:

The American Dream, Baseball, Negro, Racism, Slave, Fences

August Wilson (1945-2005) was a renowned African-American dramatist who wrote 15 plays for which he won many awards. To put forward only few of the prizes Wilson achieved, one can speak of Pulitzer Prize and a Tony Award for his play Fences, in addition to, a second Pulitzer Prize for The Piano Lesson. Wilson is generally discussed as a dramatist who focussed on the miseries of African-Americans in his plays. He aimed to depict the miserable life of a neglected race in the United States, so to derive the attention of social reformers all through the world to these miserable people. Fences, Wilson's work of genius is a composition in which the author emphasizes on the plights of an African-American family who is unable to complete its dream of accomplishment and contentment in spite of the determination and persistent struggles of Troy Maxon, head of the family.

The Congress of the United States forbade slavery in 1808, but no southern state followed this law. This law gave escalation to more and more objector movements. Many authors



served as social reformers and attempted to enlighten their audiences through the portrayal of sympathetic black characters. The election of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) in 1861 bridged the gap between the North and the South, as he was completely against the slave trade and stubbornly argued against it. Also, the economic, social and political differences between the North and the South backed to the increase of this gap. The American Civil War (1861-1865) was one of the most ghastly wars in the history of the United States. The war was tremendously damaging but black people were content with the end result, because the North won the battle. Consequently, slavery was formally abolished as the 13th Amendment to the U.S. constitution was enacted in 1865. However, there was yet a long distance to be taken before attainment of full citizenship in a country in which lots of white people were still unreceptive towards blacks.

Afro-Americans like Troy Maxson's father predicted a plethora of options; but, their expectations were unsatisfied. They obtained the right to attend schools and the right to vote but white domination was excessively strong to fade away in a few decades. Wilson specifies the silenced voices of African Americans in his book *Fences*. He effectively defines the misery and marginalization of black characters in *Fences*. He depicts Troy Maxson's life in *Fences* (1985) as a contender and wishful African-American who fails due to the racial biases forced upon black people by the society.

Troy's father works for a white landlord to receive a small share of the crop. Having ten children, he finds it difficult to support his family in such an unfair situation. He is unable to provide even food to his children. Harshness of life and absolute poverty turn him into a "devil" whose ruthless behavior leads to the breakdown of his family. Troy's mother glides to rid herself from the ferocity of a wicked husband. Another escape takes place six years later while Troy is fourteen years old. Troy deserts the family out of misery. He plans to migrate to northern states in order to find more opportunities in the industrial North. Troy expects to be granted full citizenship in the North, where black people were supposed to have a satisfactory life. The burden of blackness worsens his poverty even in the industrial areas of the United States. However, all his hopes are frustrated upon his arrival to the new settlement. Troy realizes that regardless of being in the North or the South, he is doomed to fail since he is a "Negro". The so-called liability of blackness brings about all types of



restraints for Troy. He comes across different kinds of constraints that affect his ability to earn wages. The rate of being without a job among Negroes was highly perceptible. Though who were in employment could find no better occupations than serving as porters, helps or laundresses. Other than unemployment, subnormal residence was a foremost problem for African-Americans. They had to live in slum areas as colored individuals lived separated from white people . The Failure forced them to reconsider the moral values they had studied from the Bible. Which resulted into higher rates of illegal activities and dishonesty. Poor Negroes, like Troy Maxson, who had come to the North with good intentions, turned to theft to escape hunger. Therefore, prisons were filled with Negroes. Meanwhile, Troy kills a white man in one of his attempts to steal money. Troy and Bono are imprisoned as the outcome of the crimes they did not readily commit .Being jobless and finding difficult to survive without food and shelter they begin to steal. They live in a nation that was thought to be the land of equal prospects; nonetheless they have to bear racial discrimination. Regardless of the claim that America is the land of equivalent opportunities, but it is not applicable to Troy Maxon and his sons as they are believed to be inferior members of the American society. Troy and other black people in August Wilson"s Fences even do not have the chance to work as low-paid labourers in a society . Troy and his sons, Lyons and Cory, strive always in the seemingly promising society and the promising slogan of economic security. Troy is finally disillusioned with the American Dream when racial discrimination hampers his progress. The burden of blackness worsens the financial problems of already penniless Troy Maxon. Troy comes to believe that success does not necessarily results from hard work in a society in which blacks are down with discriminatory racism. All of these characters have the wounds of slavery on their bodies.

A gifted baseball player with a well-built body, Troy Maxon assumes to fulfill his promised dream in baseball but it turns out to be a pointless dream. Altogether his hopes are obstructed as he comes to know that unlike what had been promised, this dream is not achievable for everyone. Troy is the example of a failed African-American black people who are deprived of their social rights. He finds it difficult to break the color barriers and turns out to be a thief who commits murder. As an alternative of playing in the professional baseball league as a great star, that he certainly deserves, Troy becomes a trash collector. Further twenty-five years have passed since Troy's disappointment to play in the white



league and now black players are permitted to play in the professional league. Furthermore, owning a splendid house includes a major Dream, but Troy is embarrassed of the house in which he lives during the play which is shabby and impoverished. Cory, Troy's teenage son, demands a television often; but his father retells him that mending the damaged roof of their house is more important to buying a TV.

It seems apt, however, to emphasize that the society is unable to arrange for Troy and all other blacks with any opening, in contrast to the whites, with respect to their growth. As argued above, the color of skin is a major influence in Troy's social life. Despite the fact that he endeavours to excel his white colleagues, the procedures and resolutions of the prejudiced society ruin his talent as a basketball player. Fences is Wilson's perfect representation of the despair of black people. So Wilson successfully manages to raise public consciousness throughout the world concerning the dejection of black people's lives under stark racism.

The title of the play is used characteristically to highlight the limitation from which the different generations in the Maxson family and the rest of blacks in America agonise. For instance, to Cory, the literal fence stated in the play represents his inability to unshackle himself from the dominance of his father. It fences him out of his aspiration for liberation and self-confidence. Yet again, the fence can be seen as a representation for the several restrictions put upon Troy in the white American society. This is the reason he is perhaps unwilling to finish a wooden border around his plot. The fence may also suggest Troy's custodial time when he is fenced off from his clan and the rest of the society. Due to his skin-colour Troy is also fenced out of his ambition as an athletic champion. With the exposure of his relationship with Alberta, Troy is fenced out of his devoted wife, Rose. Furthermore, the fence can stand for death, as after the completion of this wooden border Troy expires.

August Wilson depicts the struggle of African-Americans to live and survive amongst white racists. He intends to show that there is no opportunity for the involvement of black people in the society. Aspiring and capable "Negros" like Troy Maxson are let down in their expectations to fulfill their dreams due to their blackness. Troy and Bono symbolise all those



African-Americans whose lives were full of missed prospects despite their unquestionable capabilities. The blacks trust the probability of the American Dream to upsurge them from rags to riches, but the racial inequality vetoed their progress and demoted them to lower positions. Hence, *Fences* might be measured as a critique of the American Dream. Being a young man, Troy look for to be a professional athlete in the Major League as he has always heard about the opportunity of progression in a country that is so to speak the land of equivalent opportunities. But the type of social atmosphere of ill-treatment blanked him from any prospect of whites giving chances to the blacks, Troy's revolt and defeat set the tone of the complete play. In his old age, he is beholding for his rights and his life span is a story of lost opportunities. This shows the type of life the Blacks are living in America. Due to the absence of formal education, blacks find it tough to go for a job reserved for the whites. The total social structure centered on racism is accountable for it. The blemish of bondage is not alleviated even after its abolition. The shade of his black skin keeps him away from the attainment of his dream in a society which pronounces the deceitful philosophy of the American Dream.

This play can be seen as a best of certain past incidents in the lives of black Americans all through the twentieth century, therefore, Wilson endeavor to find a firm link between blacks and their past. He attempts to link the different generations that have been expurgated off from their roots through his drama. Wilson's drama aims at portraying and record of the cultural identity of the "other" in white America. Wilson does not disquiet himself in his plays with the black image that has been at the core of political and social sight, rather he is concerned in depicting the common folk involved in their everyday life.

To sum up, *Fences* offers an insight into life of many black people who are deprived of amenities and openings for the improvement of their existence. It portrays uneducated blacks as they have a very limited scope of and are unprepared for overcoming the difficulties of daily existence. The captivity of few blacks inside the domain of their inadequate knowledge is also striking. The institutionalization of some of the characters in the end of the play depicts an astounding miserable image. In contrast, Raynell the innocent and liberated female represents a optimism for the improved civilization in the near future.

This play "Fences" is an example of how African American families struggled during the



1950's and shows us how many families broke apart because of infidelity and insecurity amongst the families. Many families existed without fathers during this time and many African American mothers raised their children on their own. The fact that Troy experienced prejudices affected his future and because of these prejudices he believed his son should seek a more practical route,; obtaining a regular job. If the color of his skin would have been different, his career may have been more successful .

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