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A Dream Denied: Troy Maxson's Anger in Wilson's *Fences*

Anger is a powerful emotion that can affect how a person lives. This is true of literary characters as well. Troy Maxson in August Wilson's *Fences* resents that he never had the opportunity to play professional baseball. This fury has an impact on all aspects of his life, including his relationship with his wife Rose and his son Cory. His ire is often directed at Jackie Robinson whom he feels got an unfair opportunity, one that was denied to better African American baseball players, including himself.

Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in professional baseball. Until Robinson was hired in 1947 by the Brooklyn Dodgers, baseball was segregated. All the professional teams were white. *Fences* takes place a decade later, but Troy is still obsessed with Robinson. Troy thinks that there were better African American ball players than Robinson. He says, "I know some teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make!" (Wilson 1036). Troy is angry that other African American players were not given the opportunity to play. He includes himself in this group, stating "I was hitting .432 with 37 homeruns. [at the same time] Man [was] batting .269 and playing right-field for the Yankees" (Wilson 1036) "According to Troy, "The colored guy got to be twice as good before he get on the team" (Wilson 1050). Some of Troy's anger is justified.

James Robert Saunders in his article “‘I done seen a hundred niggers play baseball better than Jackie Robinson’: Troy Maxon’s Plea in August Wilson’s *Fences*,” agrees that “Many who played with Robinson in the Negro Leagues contend that he was not even close to being the best ball player among them” (14). What Troy does not realize is that the first African American player would also need the right disposition. Branch Rickey [general manager of the Dodgers] “was in search of. . . someone who could withstand all the insults that the first black player in the majors was bound to face and turn the other cheek” (Saunders 14). Troy does not consider this quality which Robinson, a college graduate and a retired army officer (Saunders 14) possessed. Overall, Troy has justified anger that African American players were kept from playing professional ball until 1947, but his anger at Robinson’s being hired is misplaced.

Troy’s anger at being denied the chance to play professional baseball has a negative impact on how he lives. Saunders says that “Troy’s life has in some sense become a series of explosions evidenced, for example, by the manner that he responds to the mere mention of Robinson’s name” (15). There are other ways that he acts out his anger. Early in the play, it is obvious that Troy drinks too much. In fact, Rose says, “You’re gonna drink yourself to death” (Wilson 1036). Troy probably drinks too much in order to ease the pain and stress of not achieving his dream of playing professional baseball. Hanging out at a bar named Taylor’s, Troy meets Alberta, and he has an affair with her. His friend Bono tells Troy to stop this affair, reminding him “She loves you, Troy. Rose loves you” (Wilson 1066). Troy ignores Bono and continues the affair with Alberta who becomes pregnant. Troy, focused on his own disappointment, is not able to stop his behavior to keep from hurting Rose. Troy’s anger also impacts his relationship with Cory. Cory assesses Troy’s parenting in a confrontation with him, “All you ever did was try and make me scared of you. I used to tremble every time you called

my name. Everytime I heard your footsteps in the house” (Wilson 1080). Troy’s explosive anger is directed at Cory, just as it is at Jackie Robinson. Troy’s jealousy at Robinson’s opportunity (Saunders 15) bubbles to the surface frequently and ruins his relationships with his family.

Troy’s anger places limits on Cory’s future. Colleges want Cory to play football, but Troy opposes it. Troy wants Cory to work at the A&P or get a job where he can make a living. Troy believes that “The white man ain’t gonna let him get nowhere with that football. . .He ought to go and get recruited in how to fix cars or something where he can make a living” (Wilson 1035). Rose and Bono try to convince Troy that there’s more opportunity for African Americans in sports now, but Troy refuses to listen (Wilson 1035). Troy forces Cory to stop playing football and take back his job back at the A&P. Cory says that Troy kept him from his dream “Just cause you didn’t have a chance! You just scared that I’m gonna be better than you, that’s all” (Wilson 1064). This is the most negative assessment of why Troy prevents Cory from taking the scholarship. However, Saunders argues that Troy is actually trying to protect Cory, “Troy’s main concern is with Cory’s long-term survival. . . As a concerned father, he is an advocate for achieving some level of security as opposed to taking what he perceives as an unnecessary risk” (16). Whichever argument one accepts, Troy’s failure deprives Cory of his opportunity.

The impact of prejudice and segregation can be seen in August Wilson’s *Fences*. Troy did not have the opportunity to play professional baseball because he was an African American. He was really angry that he missed the opportunity. This anger has an impact on Troy’s entire life. It harms Rose and Cory and causes Troy to drink too much and cheat on his wife. Many lives are harmed because Troy did not get the opportunity he deserved.

## Works Cited

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