

Alvaro Magel

112629

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ENG102

Professor Lux

### The Irony of Troy Maxson in Fences

In this paper, I will analyze the character of Troy Maxson from the play *Fences* by August Wilson. Troy Maxson, a 53-year-old black man who has spent fifteen years of his life in prison for a murder committed in self-defense. A man who was beaten out of the house at age fourteen. And a man who is now in charge of his own family. Even though Troy has lived a hard life and was beaten down by many, he alone is his biggest punisher and victim at the same time. It is with great irony, to read about this man, who always bursts himself to have seen it all and learned his wisdom, fail in life due to his ignorance to accept his faith.

Since Troy's release from prison he has started to live an honest life. This is what he wanted; to be safe. *"When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job . . . I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me. I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job. I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home."* (Fences, 72) Troy has built himself an honorable life, having a loving and ever-supporting wife, Rose, a loyal friend Bono, and two sons, Cory and Lyon, who seeked his proudness and approval. In his testimonials, Troy portrays his hard life like when he walked the 200 miles to Mobile just to discover that black people in the city had to live like rats. He has his own individually tailored values of which some he justifies by the bible, and

some by his life experience. Troy is a man who anticipates potential problems like the roof of the house that might not make it through the winter, to take care of his family. Looking at the frame of Troy's life one could claim that he is a decent family father who wants the best for his family. This, however, is where the problem lays.

Troy takes care of his family, but he does not necessarily want the best for him. This is where the irony starts. Even though Troy does everything that a loving father would also do, he does much more to prevent his family from being happy. For Troy, family is more of a responsibility than a loving and supportive bond. We can see this well when his son, desperate and frustrated, confronts him about why he does not like him. *'Like you? I go out of here every morning . . . bust my butt . . . putting up with them crackers every day . . . cause I like you? You about the biggest fool I ever saw. (Pause.) It's my job. It's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house . . . sleep you behind on my bedclothes . . . fill you belly up with my food . . . cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not 'cause I like you! Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you! Let's get this straight right here . . . before it go along any further . . . I ain't got to like you. Mr. Rand don't give me my money come payday cause he likes me. He gives me cause he owe me. I done give you everything I had to give you. I gave you your life! Me and your mama worked that out between us.'*(Fences, 40). This responsibility that he always talks about is one that he fulfills. And it is that fulfillment of responsibility that he justifies himself with. Even when he told Rose that he got Alberta pregnant he told his wife he cared so much for his family that he forgot to take care of himself. It is this egoism that shows how narrow Troy's view is.

The irony continues in the way he treats Cory. His son has an offer to play football for a university. A chance that Cory describes as *'the one chance I had'*(Fences, 49). Even though Troy has a past in professional baseball and is a sportsman who shows no excitement for his

son's offer. He is against it because he thinks out of the experience and with conviction that Cory will have no chance to ever make it with football because a black person cannot succeed in sports. Surely, he thinks that because he was only ever allowed to play in the Negro League despite being a spectacular baseball player. However, even after his wife told him that times have changed, he sticks on to this. One would think, if Troy would want the best for his family he would listen to his wife and let Cory, who is so desperate about it, go on and play football. But he does not. Troy's negative experience in the Negro League is the reason why he thinks that Cory will have the same struggles. He does not think about Troy being his own man like he was when he was 14. Instead, he shuts the window that leads to freedom and happiness because he once fell out of that same window because when he tried to climb out, it was too early. Troy's failure to provide his family with hopes and happiness can be associated with the failure of the American dream. (Baharvand, 72). This is the one truth he cannot accept; not everyone will share his bad luck. But since he cannot accept this, he cannot let his family be happy.

Troy Maxson is a 53-year-old man who built a fence around his family to take care of them. Little does he know that this fence holds them captive. Ironic again to see his contemplations about white people holding the blacks captive in their system while he is doing the same with his family.

*Fences* is a play portraying a family with a tough faith – some have lived through hard and unfair times only to find themselves trapped in a life of responsibilities and denial and others find themselves trapped under a man who keeps hopes confined in a cage.

Work cited

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Baharvand, Peyman Amonalahi, "The failure of the American Dream in August Wilson's  
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[The Failure of the American Dream in August Wilsons Fences](#)