

Mia Espinoza

Professor Lux

College Writing

13 February 2023

Fences Around Hearts

In August Wilson's play *Fences*, the author portrays racism within a society through a story focused on a mundane workplace, and an American sport. Wilson writes about the black experience in different decades and the struggle that many African Americans faced. He shows this through the metaphor of "Fences" which represents two different generations portrayed in Troy and Cory experiencing the same maltreatment. This affects the main character Troy's aspirations and hopes for his and his family's future. He constantly faces adversity and racism that is accepted in the eyes of many, especially when he plays in the Negro major Baseball League. Through these experiences he decides he needs to protect his son Cory from those same challenges he went through. In the end, although Troy is always trying to set a good example for Cory, he too surrenders to the notions of racism because those racist ideologies are simply too hard for him to overcome.

In the play *Fences* the outlook on racism has trickled down from generation to generation. First, before Troy even knew what racism was, his father was a heavy influence in his life. Troy's father suffered deeply from slavery during his lifetime. Troy's father only wanted them to learn to walk so they could start working. This quote "All my father cared about was getting those cotton balls to Mr. Lubin" just shows how slavery and racism completely overtook Troy's father's mind. Because of this outlook and obsession with work he wasn't a good father to Troy and his

siblings and treated them poorly. This also grew in Troy a hatred and animosity towards white people as Troy believed they were the reason his father treated him so awfully.

We know that racism is not learned, it is taught. And through Troy's experiences with his father he had associated his community as being lesser than. The discrimination that Troy faced while playing baseball and the torment he endures as a child shape him into one of the most complex characters in this play. In this quote we see his ideas shown more clearly. He states "Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting," this clearly shows the conflict Troy holds towards white people. Troy views him and his friends unequally to the white people in the society during the time period. Troy is aware of this lack of equality within society he withstands as opposed to white people. His ideals then affect him and his own son Cory's relationship. The two of them have conflicting views about Cory's future and, as the play goes on, this rocky relationship crumbles as Troy's affair is found out and his mother becomes less stable.

In *Walking Around the fences: Troy Maxon, and the ideology of "Going down, swinging"* by David Letzler examines the reasoning behind the baseball trope that encapsulates this very personal play. The author goes on to explain how Troy as a player was nothing like Jackie Robinson and the other greats that are mentioned in the story and instead his degradation of these great players shows his inner turmoil and affliction. He states "while Troy's criticism seems partly motivated by jealousy toward Robinson and other baseball players, who now have opportunities he was denied, they still yield to his overall claim that had Troy been given a chance in the major leagues, he would have not only played better than a journeyman". A bold statement from an author comparing a fictional character such as Troy to a very real baseball hall of famer. This article interested me because it examined Troy's character in such depth as to how he even speaks of this sport he so loved in such an indifferent tone. I also found it interesting that

he who had a dream himself to become a great baseball player is holding his son Cory back from doing the very thing he himself wanted to do. Become great, just like Jackie Robinson.

In the end of the play we see a breakthrough in Troy's character. He speaks honestly about himself and his faults, stating truthfully about his father that the only difference between him and his father is that he does not beat his children. This is proven wrong as we see Troy providing for his family. And even though he was very tough on Cory, he admitted that he was responsible for taking care of him and the rest of the family. In his own way that was the best way he could show his care for them, by simply taking care. A breakthrough scene between Troy and Cory shows just how complex and emotionally detached Troy is. Cory asks, "How come you ain't never liked me?" (1346). Troy cannot admit to liking his own son, so instead he points out that he doesn't have to like him in order to provide for him "Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you! I ain't got to like you" (1347). Deep deep down, somewhere in this man's heart and soul he truly cares for his son and his family. He just does not have the means to show it. This goes back to the fences title as we see fences around Troy's heart put there by people in his past that prohibited him from expressing his emotions and taught him that it equaled weakness. It does not.

Works Cited

Letzler, David. "Walking Around the Fences: Troy Maxson and the Ideology of 'Going Down Swinging.'" *African American Review*, vol. 47, no. 2/3, Summer/Fall 2014, pp. 301–

12. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.nyack.edu/10.1353/afa.2014.0049>.

Wilson, August. *Fences*. *Literature: A Portable Anthology*, edited by Janet E. Gardner et al., 4th ed., Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2017, pp. 1030-1088.