

The Burden of baseball in August Wilson's Fences.

August Wilson utilizes baseball philosophy to create the mind of his main character, Troy Maxson, in his 1983 play Fences. Troy's objectivity and beliefs are motivated by baseball's symbolic and practical meaning. Troy uses baseball analogies to explain life to others around him. Baseball serves as a symbol for a variety of concepts throughout the play, including freedom, racial discrimination, and inequity, all of which grew to become a burden for Troy.

The game presented him with the chance to allow himself to be pulled up from a life of hopelessness and criminality. Troy relocated from the South to the North in search of work opportunities in order to provide for himself, his first wife, and their child. Since he was unable to find work, he turned to a life of crime and became a thief to support himself. Soon, he was apprehended and placed behind bars for a period of fifteen years. During his time in prison, Troy learned how to play baseball, and as soon as he was released, he joined the Negro Leagues. In the Negro Leagues, he received the recognition that he had never received before which gave purpose to his life. This "fulfilling" experience only serves to increase his anger, and bitterness about having been denied the best possible opportunity to play baseball because of his skin color. The game of baseball represents Troy's shattered dreams and dashed hopes, while its rules serve as the framework for how Troy perceives his own life and the world around him. Troy Maxson thrived in the Negro Leagues but despite being a good baseball player, he was not permitted to play for the white teams. Wilson utilizes baseball as a means of examining the social, and historical context of America at the time by cleverly showing through Troy, how a black man feels about being an outsider in a white society. At the same time, this approach contradicts the conventional conception of the American dream.

In the article, Baseball as History and Myth in August Wilson's Fences written by Susan Koprince, she began by describing baseball as the American dream or as a symbol of the positive aspects of the American society. She uses her article to demonstrate how Fences tests the realism of the American dream by using the history and myth of baseball (Koprince 349). Wilson's Main character in Fences, Troy Maxson, is used to image what life for a black individual was, at the time. In Fences Wilson uses Troy's experience in the Negro Leagues to demonstrate that the American dream remained out of reach for people of African descent. When Troy's friend Jim Bono remarks that Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson were the only players to hit more home runs than

Troy, Troy answers, "What it ever get me? Ain't got a pot to piss in or a window throw it out of" (9)"(Koprince 350).

Troy's frustrations and bitterness resulting from the racial discrimination and injustice he suffered became a burden that eventually cost Troy his family. His obsession with baseball and inability to let the past go, frame the view of life he had and the world around him. Like in baseball, he seemed to always have an opponent he was contending with. Resentful of the opportunities he was denied, Troy's frustration has an impact on his entire family, especially his 18-year-old son Cory. He tries to safeguard Cory by denying him a football scholarship, and a shot at the American dream based on his out-of-date belief that discrimination continues in sports despite societal improvements. "Bitter about his own exclusion from major-league baseball, Troy is resistant when Cory wants to attend college on a football scholarship, telling his son that black athletes have to be twice as talented to make the team and that "the white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway" (35). But Cory, who seems to believe in the promise of the American dream- particularly for black athletes in the 1950s-insists that Troy is selfishly holding him back from success: "You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all" (58)" (Koprince 354). Troy's refusal to support his son Cory because of his disappointments causes the relationship between father and son to deteriorate beyond restoration: "The intergenerational Conflict reaches a climax in act 2,when Troy and Cory engage in an ironic version of the all-American father-and-son game of catch (Birdwell 91)."Get your black ass out of my yard!"(87), Troy warns Cory, after which the two combatants fight furiously over Troy's bat/weapon until Cory is expelled from his father's playing field."(Koprince 354).

Troy's interpersonal conflict is not just with his son, Cory, alone but also with his wife, Rose. Troy confessed to Rose about his affair with Alberta and tried to justify his extramarital affair using baseball analogies: "Using the game of baseball as an analogue for his own experience, Troy tells Rose that when he married her, he fooled every-one by bunting: "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" (70). Frustrated after a life of hard work and no visible reward (or "[standing] on first base," as he puts it), Troy engages in an extramarital affair- a behavior that he compares to a base runner's impulse to steal second: "Then when I saw that gal . . . she firmed up my backbone. And I got to thinking that if I tried ... I just might be able to steal second. Do you

understand after eighteen years I wanted to steal second" (70)"(Koprince 352). Rose is dissatisfied about this and responded: "We're not talking about baseball! She says. "We're talking about you going off to lay in bed with another woman . . . and then bring it home to me. That's what we're talking about. We ain't talking about no baseball" (70). Troy's marriage after this point degenerates rapidly and although Rose agrees to adopt his illegitimate child with Alberta, he loses his marriage. . . "After the conflict between Rose and Troy escalates into a cold war- the two of them rarely speaking to one another- it is the wounded Rose, rather than Troy, who eventually dominates the battle, taking in his motherless daughter and telling Troy: "From right now . . . this child got a mother. But you a womanless man"(79)." (Koprince 355).

In conclusion Troy used his experiences in baseball as the lenses for which he viewed, and judged the world around him. This costed him his relationship with family, and ultimately left him lonely and dissatisfied.

Works Cited

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