

Fences: white people and troy essay sample



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August Wilson's famous play "Fences" is a drama set in the 1950's. Being a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for the best play of the year, this play has had many positive responses to blacks and whites in this society. It is about protagonist Troy Maxson as well as his african american family that is filled with drama and excitement. In Wilson's Fences by Joseph Wessling he expresses, "Fences is about the always imperfect quest for true manhood. Troy's father was less of a "true" man than Troy, but he was a hard worker and a provider. Troy, even as a runaway, carried with him his father's virtues along with a considerable lessening of the father's harshness and promiscuity"(5). In this essay you will learn about the characters, the author's background, the meaning of the play's title, Fences, and the conflicts between the relationships in the family and life.

In this play, Troy Maxson is a bitter, aggressive fifty-three year old man who is reflecting on his life in the past. Being able to support his family by providing food, clothes, with a roof above their heads is very important to him to make sure they have everything he did not receive growing up. Troy's mother abandoned the family and was the direct result of the abusive relationship he had with his father. This affected him in several ways as an adult. His father never put his family first lacking the affection of love towards him making Troy a cold, aggressive man as an adult. Troy's abusive childhood reflects on his son Cory. Cory gets an opportunity to have a successful future by receiving a scholarship to play college football. As Troy refuses to sign Cory's scholarship acceptance letter he is letting Cory's future ruined for him just like his were.

When Troy's dreams were ruined to play in the major leagues for the national American pastime, baseball, because of the racial prejudices of his time his opportunities to a successful future for his passion were denied. Troy is scared Cory will end up getting cheated by white men if accepting the scholarship just like the white people denied him in baseball. Troy does not see that times have changed from his times having more colored men playing baseball including football. What he is scared of the most is getting surpassed by Cory. The IUP journal of english studies expresses this by saying " He cannot stand the thought of Cory getting abused by the athletic industrial complex in the same way. But he also cannot stand the thought of Cory succeeding where he failed-just because he happened to be born twenty years too early"(1).

Working as a garbage collector there are two jobs, picking up the garbage or responsible for driving. Troy being responsible for picking up the garbage, he does not understand why they have colored men picking up while the white men drive. After learning his lesson of being sent to jail one can come to realize that Troy has always wanted to be on top. First in not following his father's footsteps and being a better man and father to his kids. He took the responsibility a man is supposed to take which is to take care of their family and provide them with their needs. Secondly, in trying to play baseball in the major leagues. Even though he did not get accepted because of the racial prejudice in his time one can see that if it was not for the racial prejudice involved in his time he would have made a very recognized baseball player.

Lastly, working his way up as the first colored driver in his job as a garbage collector. Even though it was not the job of his dreams it helped him provide

his family with their needs and his responsibilities. Troy has a hatred for white people not only because he was denied his opportunities but he knows he is better than all white men playing baseball in the major leagues. “ He cannot overcome the contradiction in his life — the journey from superstar to picking up trash for nickels and dimes”(1).

In an interview by Yvonne Shafer to August Wilson he is asked about Wilson’s reasons of writing about African culture and his response was, “ I think it’s important to recognize the fact that these thirty million black people in America are Africans, that they came from America. They’ve lived here since the early part of the seventeenth century and there’s a tendency to forget that”(4). August Wilson used his own experiences and background to help write his plays. The characters, setting, and tone of his plays have caught many positive feedback. It gives possibilities to African Americans something positive to look forward to in their own lives. It also teaches the hardships one has to go through to live in America. Wilson intends to write his plays for the whites to make them realize what they go through after the cruelties of the past like slavery and racial prejudice.

The conflicts portrayed in the play are relationships, baseball, work, and just everyday life where many people can relate to. This play has the unexpected keeping one out of their seat to see what happens next. Fences is very realistic having to do with everyday situations with people. African Americans are more articulate today making it easy for readers to read and understand as they speak in a African American dialect similarly to the one spoken in today’s century. Troy’s life in this play is complex teaching the reader many themes about relationships, friendships, loyalty, as well as

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acceptance. Troy learned a good aspect of life by living in a penitentiary giving him “ the iron determination to reshape his life”(2). Finding a woman who maintains their life together, Rose Maxson, he puts their eighteen years together to a ruin when she is informed by Troy that he has been unfaithful to her. Not only is she heartbroken after devoting her life to their family, but finds out he is having a baby by Alberta as well.

Her caring love as a mother is shown when she takes the responsibility to be a mother to Raynell after finding out Alberta has died giving birth. Being now responsible for a baby that is with the woman her husband was unfaithful with does not mean she will take Troy back and forgive him. Being a strong intellectual woman she leaves Troy a womanless man due to his unfaithfulness. Bono is Troy’s friend they met in the penitentiary where they became very good friends. After thirty years both working as garbage collectors, they engage in a ritual of talk and drink every Friday night as it is payday. Bono’s “ commitment to their friendship of thirty-odd years is rooted in his admiration of Troy’s honesty, capacity for hard work, and his strength, which Bono seeks to emulate”(3). Bono knowing about Alberta from the very beginning of the play, Troy is always telling Rose how much he loves her in front of Bono making it awkward for Bono knowing the truth of his unfaithfulness.

Fences, the title of this play, may seem simple but after reading the play one comes to realize that it has a good variety of significances as well as being the central metaphor of this play. Troy builds fences between the races, his family and himself to keep people out or to keep people in. In the play, a fence is literally being built by Troy with the help of Cory. It is called Fences

being plural not singular meaning the variety of different symbolisms. Even though there is one fence being physically built throughout the play you can conclude at the end that there are many metaphorical fences in the play. In Fences we can see throughout the play that the first fence is a fence to keep people out, separating himself. For example, you can see the symbolism near the end of the play where Cory and Troy get in a big argument where Troy tells Cory he is not welcome at his house anymore. Cory tells Troy he will be back for his things but Troy responds with “ They’ll be on the other side of that fence”(3) creating a physical as well as an emotional barrier that separates Troy and Cory.

Secondly, the fence is a symbol between himself and death. Throughout the play there is a constant battle between them. You can see the symbolism after Alberta dies where he realizes that he will eventually lose the battle, except he won’t lose without fighting first. Lastly, the symbolism shown in the fences is between Troy’s life experiences. He has been through a lot, from his cruel abusive father to homelessness. Next it was the racism that kept him from the professional baseball career that he rightly deserved.

We don’t actually see that the fence is completely finished until the very end of the play. You can compare that not finishing the fence is the lack of commitment to something just like his lack of commitment with his wife Rose. As the play comes to an end and the whole family is reunited again for Troy’s funeral. We can see that even though Troy was unfaithful and bitter to his family and did not give them what they really deserved one can come to the conclusion that this family has more strength individually and as a family. In the end, the biggest fence of all opens for Troy. This occurs in the

play's final moments as described in Fences, " he finishes his dance and the gates of heaven stand open as wide as God's closet." (3) We're left with the feeling that somewhere out there Troy may just have found forgiveness and peace.

In conclusion, this play has caught many readers attention as it gives a feeling of their chaotic and troubling lives these characters went through. We learned the author's background, got to know the characters individually and how they grew stronger as a family and individually. This play gives us a second view of their lives giving us empathy for the characters and a view of the hard work families go through in today's society.