

The street



A women's role in society can differ based on the environment they live in, whether it be an expectation to resort to prostitution, or developing a high social status, each atmosphere varies. In *The Street*, by Ann Petry, like Lutie Johnson, in addition to being a minority, the women living there are trapped by their surroundings because they are vulnerable and at risk. Lutie Johnson changed the roles of women in society because she is a dominant successful intellectual that was not allowing herself become a victim.

In the past, women's roles were basically centered around cooking and cleaning, while the men went to work. The man was always seen as superior, powerful, and contained maximum control. Women were never expected to be able to obtain a job, " It's best that the man do the work when the babies are young... Not good for the woman to work when she's young" (Petry 33). In the society that Lutie is living in, women are expected to be housewives and always be lower than the higher male status. Because Lutie, on the other hand, was the " bread-winner" of the family, she developed dominance and authority over their household.

She became a wife with power and leadership which led her to become a strong independent woman. Lutie proved to society that she can become a successful and independent woman supporting a family, while facing racial discrimination, and sexist assumptions. Especially in Harlem, wherever one turns, it is very rare to seek a perception of a flourishing sovereign black woman, but Lutie was aspiring to make it possible. Lutie is an exception to the social normality and repetition of the expectation that African- American women will resort to prostitution as a savior to their collapsing lives.

Like the other women in Harlem, Lutie struggled to overcome poverty and become financially stable to support her household, while being a single mother. Lutie is unlike the other women in their environment, because she does not resort to prostitution to make a living. Lutie changed the expectations and aspects of women because she preferred to earn money with a career instead of being intruded and victimized by other men. She strived to succeed and work her way through to earn a living, " and she went on thinking, that if Benjamin Franklin could live on a little bit of money... then so could she"(Petry 64).

The fact that Lutie is comparing herself to Benjamin Franklin, shows that she is developing a higher status and struggling to achieve her goals. Also, Lutie compared herself to an extremely successful male that obtained a high standing in American society, attempting to prove that there is no difference between the two individuals. Lutie wanted to support her family in a proper way so that she can gain respect and dignity. Lutie used her talent to pursue a career"... preposterous bowing was their way of telling her they were accepting her on merit as a singer, not because she was Boots' new girlfriend. (Petry 222). For once, the people of Harlem respected a woman, Lutie, for her talent instead of her latest " partner". Lutie was an optimist, and because of that , she would endeavor to achieve the many goals and dreams that she has in store for her and her son. Lutie also attempted to solve her problems slowly and took one step at a time, " having solved one problem, there was always a new one cropping up to take its place" (Petry 59). to put her life back together. From the perceptions of the novel, one is

ultimately led to believe that the victimization and the barriers that black women face are because of race.

Race is clearly the main impediment for Lutie. The color of her skin is what prevented her from being able to progress the way she wished to. Racism affects the way that people glance at you and perceive you. Men may also take advantage of a woman because of her color, " Mom', he said Why do white people want colored people shining shoes"(Petty 71). Many women on the streets of Harlem that are taken advantage of are African-American. The fact that Lutie is a black woman contributes to her struggle, making it more difficult and challenging.

Women in this society have to deal with the fact that male dominance is overpowering their minority putting them at a much higher risk of victimization. Through out the book, Lutie attempts to break free from the label that women are weak and oppressed because of their such low position in social status. Lutie Johnson changed the roles of women , not only in the streets of Harlem, but in the society as a whole. She converted their role from being enclosed and reliable, to a much more secure, vigorous, and striving one. Lutie broke the mold of African- American women and the continuous pattern of victimization and male supremacy.