

8-13-1993

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Ashley Reed Warren
Longwood University

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Madness and Hope:
Military Experience as Theme and Symbol
in Contemporary African-American Drama

Ashley Reed Warren

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English at Longwood College,
Farmville, Virginia, August, 1993.

Madness and Hope:

Military Experience as Theme and Symbol
in Contemporary African-American Drama

By

Ashley Reed Warren

Martha E. Cook

(Director of Thesis)

Kathleen Henahan

(First Reader)

Robert Lynch

(Second Reader)

August 13, 1993

Date

Acknowledgments

This thesis has been one of the most difficult, but rewarding, challenges I have ever faced, and I owe many thanks to several people who have supported me throughout this project. First, I would like to thank Dr. Barbara Smith for introducing me to Longwood College. A special thanks goes to Mr. James Earl Jones and Mr. Frankie Faison for allowing me the opportunity to interview them and for their personal insights of Fences.

Throughout the duration of this project, I have received much encouragement from a special group of friends: Candis, Becky, Joseph, Beth, Carla, Kelly, Nicole, Jennifer, and Kay. To Mom, Dad, Jenn (for putting up for my moodiness), and especially Grandma (for helping me keep my sanity), thank you.

One more group cannot go without notice. But first, to Dr. Mike Lund, your rational, methodical approach to choosing a thesis topic will always be remembered. Thanks to Dr. Bob Lynch for your motivation and for your willingness to serve on my thesis committee. To Dr. Kathleen Flanagan, thank you not only for taking time to serve on my committee but for the many years of classes and the knowledge I have gained from them. Finally, I don't think I can find enough words to thank the one person who has been the most instrumental, who went above and beyond the call of duty to guide me through this project, and who has been a source of support, encouragement, and knowledge. To Dr. Martha Cook, my thesis director, who made this seemingly overwhelming task a pleasurable one, I thank you.

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Introduction

In the introduction to Invisible Man (1947), Ralph Ellison notes his recollection of a monument to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the white commander of the 54th Massachusetts Negro Regiment during the Civil War:

I had no idea as to why it should surface, but perhaps it was to remind me that since I was writing fiction and seeking vaguely for images of black and white fraternity I would do well to recall that Henry James's brother Wilky had fought as an officer with those Negro soldiers, and that Colonel Shaw's body had been thrown into a ditch with those of his men. Perhaps it was also to remind me that war could, with art, be transformed into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence. . . . (xvii)

Through art, Ellison points out, war can "be transformed into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence." Likewise, other African-American writers have also seen literature as a way to transform war into "something deeper and more meaningful."

Many Black writers have used the Black military experience literally and metaphorically to express the historic struggle of African-Americans in racist institutions. While the military is only one of several racist institutions depicted in African-American literature, the military clearly shows the negative effects of racist attitudes, attitudes that have remained constant from the early troops of the Civil War to the recent desegregated troops in Vietnam. In every genre in African-American

literature, the importance of the Black military experience is evident.

For example, many poems emphasize that the Black soldier is unappreciated for his service in the American military. The nineteenth-century poetry of Paul Lawrence Dunbar explores the Black experience in the Civil War, in which he fought. In the poem "When Dey 'Listed Colored Soldiers," Dunbar describes one slave's decision to join the Union Army in return for his freedom. "The Unsung Heroes" praises the efforts of the Black soldiers during the Civil War; these were men "who feared the master's whip, but did not fear the fight" (197).

The unsung heroes that Dunbar praises from the Civil War would remain unsung in later poems. In her poem "A Negro In It" (c. 1902), Lena Doolin Mason focuses on the significant contributions of Blacks during the Spanish-American War: "At the battle of San Juan hill, / The rough-riders they began it; / But before victory could be won / The Negro had to be in it" (5-8). Langston Hughes's poem "Ballad of Margie Polite" (1941) develops the theme of racism using a true incident during World War Two in which a Black soldier tried to intervene in an argument between a Black woman and a white policeman; the Black soldier was shot and wounded by the policeman, and a race riot ensued:

A soldier took [Margie's] part.

He got shot in the back

By a white cop--

The soldier were black.

They killed a colored soldier!

Folks started to cry it--

The cry spread over Harlem

And turned into a riot.

.....

They didn't kill the soldier,

a race leader cried.

Somebody hollered,

Naw, But they tried! (Rampersad 2: 76-77)

Similarly, Nikki Giovanni, in her militant 1968 poem "The True Import of Present Dialogue: Black vs. Negro," speaks out about white racist attitudes toward the Black soldier in Vietnam: "We kill in Viet Nam / for [whites] / We kill for UN & NATO & SEATO & US / And everywhere for all alphabet but / BLACK" (319).

The same racist attitudes toward Black soldiers are reflected in several works of African-American fiction; however, fiction seems to focus more on the effects of racism on the Black soldier. Insanity seems to be one of the most significant effects of racism in the Black military experience. For example, in The Chaneyville Incident (1981) David Bradley describes the military experience of Moses Washington:

. . . the next time anyone heard of Moses Washington he was a noncommissioned officer in the Army of the United States, and the next time they heard of him he was in Italy, and then they heard no more until he came back from the war with medals and ribbons bearing witness to his valor and discharge papers certifying his total insanity. This, it was rumored, was because he had tried to shoot one of the white Southern officers that were invariably placed in charge of black combat units. . . . (19)

Alice Walker, in The Temple of My Familiar (1989), makes a similar point, noting that Suwelo's father "had been a soldier in World War II and he'd lost half of one arm and all of his mind" (402).

Ernest Gaines also uses the theme of madness in developing characters of Black soldiers, as can be seen in Billy Washington's son in A Gathering of Old Men (1983). Billy describes how whites beat his son "'till they beat him crazy, and we had to send him to Jackson [an insane asylum].'" When the white sheriff asks Billy when all of this happened, Billy replies, "'Years back, when he come home from that war . . . with Hitler and them Japs'" (80). Whether Billy's son's insanity was a direct result of being a Black soldier in the army is not explained. What is clear, however, is that Billy's son suffered at the hands of whites, despite--perhaps because of--his loyal service to the American armed forces.

In contrast to this portrayal of madness associated with military experience, the army uniform appears as a positive symbol in Gaines's The Autobiography of Miss

Jane Pittman (1971) and A Gathering of Old Men. Miss Jane notes that Ned "used to wear his uniform everywhere he went" (99). Likewise, when Coot and the other old men decide to fight white authority, Coot wears his uniform. The uniform is a reminder to Coot of over fifty years of oppression in that when he returned from World War I, he was told by a white man not to "ever wear that uniform or that medal again" (104). However, when Coot defies white racist attitudes by wearing his uniform, the uniform suddenly becomes a symbol of change.

Although the Black soldier characters do not dominate these works of fiction, the discrimination against the Black soldiers and the effects of discrimination are very clear. When the Black soldier is the focus in a work of literature, the long-term effects that result from discrimination are much more evident. Such is the case with three African-American plays of the 1980s: George C. Wolfe's "A Soldier with a Secret," an "exhibit" in The Colored Museum (1985), August Wilson's Fences (1986), and Charles Fuller's A Soldier's Play (1981). All three playwrights show the discrimination against the Black soldier through the temporal setting and the juxtaposition of the military with other institutions; Wilson and Fuller also explore the uniform as a symbol and its thematic significance.

While Wolfe's play depicts the discrimination from the early Buffalo Soldiers in the Spanish-American War to the "Bloods" in Vietnam, Wilson's play narrows the time span to cover the military experience of the Black soldier from the segregated forces of World War Two to the desegregated units of the Korean War. Fuller's play has the narrowest focus, covering two days in a segregated World War Two unit,

with flashbacks to earlier military experiences and a glimpse into the future.

These playwrights emphasize the theme of discrimination by juxtaposing the military experience with other institutions that have discriminated against Blacks. Wolfe's "A Soldier with a Secret," one of nine "exhibits" within the play, is juxtaposed with the other exhibits that represent different institutions such as the entertainment industry, the fashion industry, and the travel industry. Interestingly, both Wilson and Fuller juxtapose the military with another segregated institution, athletics--specifically, baseball.

The temporal settings and juxtapositions with other institutions are used to show the negative long-term effects of discrimination on the Black soldier. The Black soldier characters in all three works are subjected to unjust treatment from both Black and white society, and this unjust treatment often produces mental instability, or a loss in the ability to reason.

Finally, the uniform is a significant symbol, especially in Wilson's and Fuller's works, in that the uniform represents changing white racist attitudes and predicts the future for the Black soldier. While the absence of uniform seems to signify a lack of respect for the Black soldier, the recognition of Blacks in uniform by whites and Blacks is positive.

Although all three plays show how discrimination against Blacks in the military can have adverse long-term effects, the three works are, in fact, very different. Wolfe's "A Soldier with a Secret" is only three pages long, yet the play deals with a century of the African-American military experience. Fences, on the

other hand, focuses on one man's bitterness at his failure to become a major-league baseball player; yet, through the minor soldier character Gabriel, Wilson's theme of the Black struggle in America is enhanced. Fuller's A Soldier's Play is the only one of the three that focuses on the military. Even though these plays are very different, one aspect remains constant: each play emphasizes the significance of military experience in the continuing transformation of African-American life into art.

Chapter One

"Time warp!" Miss Pat, stewardess of the Savannah-bound Celebrity Slaveship, exclaims in "Git on Board," from George C. Wolfe's The Colored Museum (1985). Miss Pat continues, "On your right you will see the American Revolution. . . . And on your left, the Civil War. . . . That was World War I, which is not to be confused with World War II. . . . Which is not to be confused with the Korean War or the Vietnam War, all of which you will play a major role in" (4-5). In "Git on Board," Wolfe satirically portrays the African-American in different phases in history, and it is in this first "exhibit" that Wolfe establishes the importance of the African-American military experience. Although Wolfe only mentions these past wars in "Git on Board," the mere mention of the wars prepares the audience for the fourth exhibit, "A Soldier with a Secret." In this exhibit, Wolfe shows Junie Robinson, a Black American soldier in Vietnam who has just been caught in an explosion. As Junie recalls the explosion that has taken his life, Wolfe uses a slide montage to convey a one-hundred-year history of the Black military experience. Moreover, Wolfe shows how being Black and in the military is accompanied by madness and unjust treatment from both Blacks and whites in society.

Perhaps a possible influence on Wolfe's "A Soldier with a Secret" is the novel Captain Blackman (1972), where John A. Williams writes about a Black soldier in Vietnam who, like Junie, is caught in an explosion. Readers are able to follow the history of the Black military experience as Captain Abraham Blackman lapses into a coma and finds himself transported into the past, where he fights in the American

Revolution, the Battle of New Orleans, the Civil War, the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, and World Wars One and Two. In a similar use of history, the stage directions in "A Soldier with a Secret" call for images of Black soldiers to be projected onto the stage: "Projected onto the museum walls are the faces of black soldiers--from the Spanish American thru to the Vietnam War. Lights slowly reveal JUNIE ROBINSON, a black combat soldier, posed on an onyx plinth" (11). The slide montage depicts the history of the African-American soldier, a history filled with discrimination and injustice; this discrimination is responsible for Junie's violence toward his fellow Black soldiers. And through the one-hundred-year span shown in the slide montage, Wolfe suggests that Junie's experience in Vietnam is only one instance of discrimination in the Black military experience. Junie, on stage, surrounded by slides of Black soldiers, reinforces the idea that the treatment of Blacks in the military has not improved even after one hundred years.

Although Blacks served in the American military during the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, the slide montage omits images of Black soldiers during these two wars. The historical emphasis is on wars where Blacks were, by law, free; however, the treatment these free Black soldiers received hardly reflected their freedom. Why, then, did so many Blacks continue to fight for a nation that refused to treat them as equals? According to James Marten in "The Ambiguous Legacy of Blacks in Wartime America," "when the U.S. needed them, blacks flocked to the colors and somehow made themselves believe that their service in this war would change the attitudes of the government or even of whites in general" (82).

Unfortunately, from the Spanish-American War through Vietnam, these attitudes would not change.

During the Spanish-American War, Black soldiers--earlier named "Buffalo Soldiers" by Indians because of their fierce fighting skills and buffalo skin coats they wore--fought for the American cause, according to Herbert Aptheker in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, because of a "sense of patriotism, a feeling that participation in battle might result in improved conditions at home and a keen interest in the welfare of the Negro people in Cuba as well as the Filipino people" (821). However, at the same time the Jim Crow laws were constant reminders to Blacks of the unfair treatment they received. As a result, several Blacks challenged President McKinley's promises to Filipinos of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as can be seen in the following letter by Lewis H. Douglass, Frederick Douglass's son, condemning U.S. expansionist policies:

The question will be asked: How is it that such promises are made to Filipinos thousands of miles away while the action of the administration in protecting dark citizens at home does not even extend to a promise of any attempt to rebuke the outlawry which kills American citizens of African descent for the purpose of gratifying blood-thirstiness and race hatred? (825)

Although Black soldiers were aware of this unfair treatment they received from the white society, James Marten points out that Blacks continued to "believe that their struggle for civil rights in America was connected somehow to their bravery, loyalty,

and willingness to spill their blood on foreign soil" (82).

Likewise, World Wars I and II saw no significant changes in the treatment of Black soldiers. Marten goes on to note that "their high hopes never materialized during or after either of those wars. Not only did black soldiers and sailors have to deal with segregated units and functions, they also had to . . . live near southern towns not known for their friendliness to blacks in or out of uniform" (82).

Then, one of the most significant events in the history of the Black military experience occurred in 1948 when President Harry Truman issued an Executive Order that called for the integration of the armed forces. However, full compliance did not occur until the Korean War, when the remaining 385 all-Black units disappeared (Marten 83); but the disappearance of discrimination in the now integrated armed forces was not soon to follow.

The Vietnam War was the first war where the armed forces were fully integrated, yet discrimination persisted. Wallace Terry, in Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans, points out that many of the Black soldiers in Vietnam, who came to call themselves "Bloods," had to face prejudice from their fellow white soldiers, prejudice that came in the forms of cross burnings, Confederate flags, and racial insults. Moreover, many Blacks believed that the United States government was engaged in a form of "covert genocide," in that a higher percentage of Blacks were drafted, and Black fatalities were much higher than those suffered by any other race (Marten 83). These Bloods were fighting two wars: they were fighting Communism abroad and racism in both the armed forces and at home, where

the Civil Rights Movement was in full force. Thus, the Black soldier in Vietnam was faced with added pressures; after decades of fighting racism in the armed forces, the Black soldier in Vietnam still found himself in a racist institution.

Through his slide montage in "A Soldier with a Secret," Wolfe carries the reader through almost a century of discrimination in the armed forces, and the effects of this long-term discrimination can be seen in Junie's violent tendencies, specifically murder, toward his fellow Black soldiers. Although Wolfe does not give a detailed account of Junie's military experience, if the experiences of other Black Vietnam veterans are any indication of Junie's experience, then it is not surprising that Junie takes drastic actions to "save" his fellow Black soldiers.

Not only were American soldiers killed by "friendly fire," but many soldiers felt that death was the only escape from the horrors of Vietnam. In Bloods, Arthur E. Woodley, Jr., recalls an encounter with a wounded white American soldier:

. . . he had been peeled from his upper part of chest to down to his waist. Skinned.

. . . You can actually see in the open wounds parts of his intestines and parts of his inner workings bein' exposed to the weather. You can see the flesh holes that the animals--wild dogs, rats, field mice, anything--and insects had eaten through his body. . . .

He kept saying, ". . . Please kill me. I'm in pain. I'm in agony. Kill me."

. . . Killing someone wasn't the issue. It was killing another

American citizen, another GI. (Terry 289-291)

Woodley goes on to say, "The only thing that I could see that had to be done is that the man's sufferin' had to be ended" (Terry 291). Woodley ended the GI's suffering when he put his M-16 to the soldier's temple and pulled the trigger.

Junie, like Woodley, feels that by killing his fellow soldiers he can help them escape, yet he is not helping them escape the horrors of Vietnam. Since Junie's fellow soldiers are Black, he feels that he is helping them escape the horrors of racism they will encounter when they return home from the war. According to Wallace Terry, "what can be said about the dysfunction of Vietnam veterans in general can be doubled in its impact upon most blacks: they hoped to come home to more than they had before; they came home to less" (xvii). Thus, Wolfe includes, as part of the temporal setting, the future of the Black Vietnam veteran. Junie, who is depicted by Wolfe as returned from the dead, realizes the future of the Black Vietnam veteran. That Junie is resurrected with the realization of the futures of his fellow Black soldiers is a fantastic, not realistic, situation which suggests a distortion of reality in wartime, whether the wars are between countries or races:

. . . as sure as they was wearin' green and holdin' guns, they was each wearin' a piece of the future on their faces. Yeah. All the hurt that was gonna get done to them and they was gonna do to folks was right there clear as day. . . . Each and everyone of 'em had pain in his future and blood in his path. And God or the Devil one spoke to me and said, "Junie, these colored boys ain't gonna be the same after this

war. They ain't gonna have no kind of happiness."

Junie goes on to describe the futures of specific Black soldiers: for example, "I saw how Hubert was gonna start beatin' up on his old lady which I didn't understand, 'cause all he could do was talk on and on about how much he loved her" (12).

These violent tendencies toward family members were not uncommon for the Vietnam veteran. In a similar incident, Charles Strong, in Bloods, recalls his violent actions toward his wife: "I got real mad at my wife one day. I put on my fatigues, and put this ice pick at my side. When I couldn't find her, I just totally demolished the house" (Terry 73). Although this scenario pertains to Vietnam veterans of any race, the added pressures of being Black probably contributed to the violent tendencies of the Black veterans in that along with fighting against Communism and racism, the Black veteran's chances of finding economic stability after Vietnam were much lower than those of white veterans. Junie recognized this pain-to-come of the Black Vietnam veteran; like Hubert, who used violence on his wife as a release from the pressures of Vietnam, Junie also sees violence against Blacks as the escape from the pressures of war and societal discrimination.

Not only is Hubert's unhappy future predicted, but Junie also points out that J.F., "once he got back to Chicago, was gonna get shot dead by this po-lice" (12). Although the exact dates of J.F.'s release from the military are unknown, the fact that he will be killed in Chicago is very important in that Chicago was the site of an antiwar protest during the 1968 Democratic convention. Local police, in what The National Experience calls "a frenzy of violence," clubbed hundreds of protesters

(Blum et al. 862). Perhaps J. F. was destined to be one of these protesters. If, in fact, J. F. was present at the demonstration, perhaps he was also protesting Nixon's Attorney General John Mitchell, who discharged the official in charge of enforcing integration regulations "because of that official's zeal for the job"; Mitchell was aptly referred to by a NAACP spokesperson as "anti-Negro" (Link et al. 880). Whether or not J.F. was in Chicago during this time is not made clear in the play; what is clear, however, is that America was divided by the war in Vietnam and by the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, the Black Vietnam veteran left an unstable country only to return to more instability in America; Junie recognizes the plight of the Black Vietnam veteran, and he sees only one route of escape for his fellow Black soldiers: death.

After Junie sees the futures of the Black soldiers, he says, "Well right then and there it come to me. The secret to their pain" (12). Junie goes on to shoot air into the veins of his fellow Black soldiers, and, as he says of Hubert, "The second he died, all the hurtin-to-come just left his face." But why does Junie feel that death will be better than life? Junie thinks that he is like Jesus, and "just like Jesus who went around healin' the sick," he is "supposed to go around healin' the hurtin' all these colored boys wearin' from the war" (13). However, Junie is not really "healing" the soldiers; he is killing them. Moreover, Junie has experienced death, and he has found not peace, but madness.

A number of Vietnam veterans experienced mental dislocation, and while this mental instability is a trait found in all races of Vietnam veterans, the madness in "A

"Soldier with a Secret" is a direct result of discrimination. Furthermore, "A Soldier with A Secret" is only one of many exhibits in The Colored Museum that show madness connected with or directly caused by discrimination. In the first exhibit, "Git on Board," the "time warp" predicts the madness, or warped time, that is apparent in the slide montage, Junie's return from the dead, and Junie's predictions for the future in "A Soldier with A Secret." Moreover, Wolfe reinforces the idea of madness by juxtaposing "A Soldier with A Secret" with other exhibits that reflect the madness caused by discrimination in other institutions as well.

In "Git on Board," Miss Pat says, "All right, so you're gonna have to suffer for a few hundred years, but from your pain will come a culture so complex" (3). The pain in this complex African-American culture can be seen in each of the ten exhibits, and the pain mixed with madness in each exhibit complements the pain and madness in "A Soldier with a Secret." The horrors of the slave trade are depicted in the madness in "Git on Board," where, on the slave-transporting aircraft "The Celebrity Slaveship," slaves are warned to heed the "Fasten Your Shackles" signs and to "refrain from call-and-response singing between cabins, as that sort of thing can lead to rebellion" (2). In "Cookin' with Aunt Ethel," a stereotypical Aunt-Jemimah-like cook demonstrates how to cook a "BATCH OF NEGROES": "NOW YA ADD A HEAP OF SURVIVAL / AND HUMILITY . . . SALTY LANGUAGE MIXED WITH SADNESS / THEN THROW IN A BOX OF BLUES / AND SIMMER TO MADNESS" (7-8). Thus, in this exhibit, when all of these ingredients that suggest pain are combined and simmered to madness, these result in the conditions that

African-Americans experience.

A different kind of pain and madness can be seen in "The Photo Session," "Symbiosis," "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play," and "Lala's Opening." "The Photo Session," a satirical account of Ebony magazine, deals with "the kind of pain that comes from feeling no pain at all" (10), or refusal to recognize the suffering in the past African-American experience. The madness lies in the idea of magazine advertisements coming to life. This same pain in discarding heritage can be found in "Symbiosis," where a middle-age Black man tries to escape his "blackness" by throwing away belongings that connect him to his African-American heritage: his first dashiki, his Afro-sheen and curl relaxer, and his record albums of Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone, the Jackson Five, and the Temptations. To the Black "MAN," as he is called, his heritage is his madness. He says, "I have no history. I have no past. I can't. It's too much. It's much too much. I must be able to smile on cue. And watch the news with an impersonal eye. I have no stake in the madness. . . . Being black is too emotionally taxing" (36). Likewise, "The Last Mama-on-the-Couch Play" shows characters who are also trying to escape their "Blackness"; the madness can be seen through the characters speaking in metaphors or relating everyday events to Greek tragedy. "Lala's Opening" similarly depicts a famous Black woman who refuses to come to terms with her African-American heritage. In her madness to forget her past, she goes on a violent rampage, shouting profanities at her white lover and stabbing him.

Not only do these exhibits deal with the pain that results in the refusal of

African-Americans to recognize their heritage, but the exhibits also touch on other painful experiences; again, this pain is accompanied by madness. "The Hairpiece" and "Permutations" deal with pain and madness in romantic relationships; "The Hairpiece" focuses on the battle between two wigs who try to advise their owner how to handle a crumbling relationship, while "Permutations" addresses the problem of single parenthood by depicting not a pregnant woman, but a woman hatching an egg. "The Gospel According to Miss Roj" addresses homosexuality and transvestism, and Miss Roj seems sarcastically to "snap," or applaud, suicide and murder as a way to escape the oppression of being Black, just as Junie tries to help his fellow soldiers escape the future discrimination when they return from Vietnam.

Whereas Wolfe uses much humor and sarcasm to show the pain and madness in the other exhibits, "A Soldier with a Secret" lacks these elements; there is nothing humorous in Junie's war experience. Although Junie is caught "smack dead in the middle" of an explosion (11), he experiences no physical pain; the pain Junie feels is the same kind of pain experienced by the "Girl" and "Guy" in "The Photo Session": "The kind of pain that comes from feeling no pain at all." However, Junie's pain does not stem from his refusal to recognize his African-American heritage, as can be seen in the following passage:

But then I says to myself, "Junie, if yo' flesh is on fire, how come you don't feel no pain!" And I didn't. I swear as I'm standin' here, I felt nuthin'. That's when I sort of put two and two together and realized I didn't feel no whole lot of hurtin' cause I done died. (11)

Junie does not feel the physical pain from the explosion because he has died; however, when he comes back to life, he feels emotional pain, not for himself but for his fellow Black soldiers. Again, this is not pain they will experience from trying to forget their heritage; it is pain they will experience from other people recognizing their roots. According to Frank Rich in "'Colored Museum': Satire by George C. Wolfe," the characters are "torn between the cultural legacy of oppression and revolt and the exigencies of living in the present" (C17). Junie, who, through death, has already escaped "the exigencies of living in the present," realizes his fellow soldiers' pain to come, and he realizes that they, too, can escape this pain through death. Junie says, "Pst. Pst. Guess what? I know the secret. The secret to your pain. 'Course I didn't always know. First I had to die, then come back to life, 'fore I had the gift" (11). This gift, the secret to eliminating the pain of these soldiers, is madness in that Junie believes that only through death can these soldiers escape.

But is this really madness? Many Blacks felt that death was an escape from slavery, as writers from Harriet Beecher Stowe to David Bradley and Toni Morrison have shown; many soldiers in Vietnam felt that death was an escape from the horrors of war. So is there really anything mad about Junie trying to save his friends from discrimination or a gruesome death? When "A Soldier with a Secret" is juxtaposed with the other exhibits, it is clear that pain and madness dominate many areas of the Black experience, as can be seen most clearly in the last section of The Colored Museum, "The Party."

The following stage directions for "The Party" show the madness that

surrounds not only Junie, but all of the characters in the play:

All of a sudden, madness erupts on the stage. The sculptures begin to speak all at once. Images of black/Negro/colored Americans begin to flash--images of them dancing past the madness, caught up in the madness, being lynched, rioting, partying, surviving. Mixed in with these images are all the characters from the exhibits. (52)

There is pandemonium on stage as all of the characters are speaking at once. Topsy Washington sings repeatedly, "THERE'S A MADNESS IN ME / AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE / My power is in my . . ." and all of the exhibits reply, "Madness!" (53). All of the characters are involved in the madness on stage, and with all of the images of African-Americans flashing on the stage, the stage becomes symbolic of the madness in the African-American experience. On a smaller scale, "A Soldier with a Secret" is one area of the African-American experience, an experience where discrimination persisted for over a century and produced negative effects, both physical and mental, for the Black soldier.

Chapter Two

August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play Fences (1986) lacks the satirical tone found in George C. Wolfe's The Colored Museum; however, Wilson and Wolfe use similar techniques--temporal setting and juxtaposition of the military with other institutions--to show the negative effects of discrimination on the Black soldier. Although Wilson's play spans the eight years from 1957 to 1965, World War II plays an important part in the portrayal of character. Wilson juxtaposes the military with one major institution--athletics, specifically baseball, the institution that receives little attention from Wolfe. Like the Black soldiers in Wolfe's "A Soldier with a Secret," Wilson's soldier character, Gabriel, experiences negative effects both as a result of physical injuries in the war and of discrimination from both the white and Black society. Gabriel, like Junie, experiences madness as a result of his military experience. While Wilson uses the temporal setting and the juxtaposition of the military with baseball to show injustices to and mental effects of discrimination on the African-American, he introduces another element that predicts the future for the Black soldier: the military uniform becomes a symbol of change in the Black military experience.

Although the temporal setting of Fences is 1957-1965, the Black military experience in World War II is an important factor in the play in showing injustices against the Black soldier from white and Black society. In the prologue to the play, August Wilson gives a brief overview of the struggles of African-Americans to establish identities in their own country:

Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprang on the city with tenacious claws and an honest solid dream. . . . The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true.

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. . . . The city rejected them. . . . They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes . . . and lived in pursuit of their own dream. That they could breathe free, finally, and stand to meet life with the force of dignity and whatever eloquence the heart could call upon.

(xvii)

While America welcomed European immigrants, it rejected its own Black citizens, so it is not surprising that Blacks felt that sacrificing their lives for America during wartime would gain them respect from the white society. However, as James Marten points out, "blacks found out during World War II just how little their sacrifices meant" (82).

Like the Black American soldiers in Vietnam, Black soldiers during World War II faced discrimination at home in the United States and abroad in allied territory. According to Kay Saunders in "Conflict Over the Introduction of Black American Servicemen into Australia in 1942," published in the Negro History Bulletin, when Australia needed support from American troops during World War II,

much controversy arose when the U.S. intended to send Black troops to Australia. The "White Australia Policy" aimed at exclusion of Blacks from the military, while the U.S. practiced "containment" of Blacks through the segregated troops. Although after much debate the U.S. finally sent Black troops to Australia, the United States' argument for sending the troops shows racist views within the military:

"The Negro units all belong to the U.S. Army. They are all enlisted personnel and are trained and disciplined men. The intention is to use them in Darwin for heavy labor in connection with installation of aircraft defenses and aerodromes for which they are peculiarly fitted." (Memo from Dept. of External Affairs to Sect. of Dept. Interior, 19 January 1942; qtd. in Saunders 35)

Saunders points out that this "stereotypical racist statement which stressed Blacks' physical prowess, reinforced dominant racial ideologies in Australia" (35). Thus, Black soldiers who served in a racially segregated institution were sent from their own racist country into another racist country; there was no means of escape from racism as there had been in World War I, when Black troops were readily accepted in France and praised by the French for their wartime efforts.

The idea of unrewarded sacrifice on the part of the Black soldier is clearly depicted through August Wilson's character Gabriel. Troy, Gabriel's brother, recognizes this unrewarded sacrifice when he exclaims, "The man done had his life ruined fighting for what?" (65). Troy realizes that Gabe's involvement in the U.S. military did not produce positive effects in that Gabe's fighting did not make whites

more readily accept Blacks as equals in society. Furthermore, Troy would be quick to realize that the segregated military could have no positive effects on Blacks since he, too, was part of a segregated institution--athletics; by juxtaposing Troy's baseball career with Gabe's military career, Wilson shows that there were no escapes from discrimination for Blacks.

President Truman's 1948 Executive Order ended segregation in the armed forces; in 1947, major-league baseball had finally admitted Blacks into the league. The discrimination that Troy faced as a baseball player parallels the discrimination that Blacks faced in the military. In act one, scene one, when Troy and his friend, Bono, reflect on Troy's baseball career, the discrimination Troy faced is apparent:

BONO: . . . Ain't but two men ever played baseball as good as you.

That's Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson. Them's the only two men ever hit more home runs than you.

TROY: What it ever get me? Ain't got a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of. . . .

ROSE: They got lots of colored boys playing ball now. Baseball and football.

BONO: You right about that, Rose. Times have changed, Troy. You just come along too early.

TROY: There ought not never have been no time called too early! . . .

ROSE: They got a lot of colored baseball players now. Jackie

Robinson was the first. Folks had to wait for Jackie Robinson.

TROY: I done seen a hundred niggers play baseball better than Jackie Robinson. . . . Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody. I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play. Don't care what color you were. Come telling me I come along too early. If you could play . . . then they ought to have let you play. (9-10)

The preceding passage is important in showing the juxtaposition of the military and baseball in several ways. First, Troy remarks that because of the segregation in baseball, he "Ain't got a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of"; later, in act one, scene two, Troy says, "That's the only way I got a roof over my head . . . cause of that metal plate" (28). The "metal plate" that Troy refers to is the plate in Gabe's head that resulted from an injury during World War II; Troy is able to afford his down payment on his house because of the small pension that Gabe receives from being a wounded veteran. Thus, ironically, because of Gabe's involvement in the segregated armed forces, Troy owns a house, something that he could not do because he was a victim of segregation in the baseball league.

Another way in which Wilson juxtaposes the military with baseball is through references to Jackie Robinson. While Troy seems to be angry at Robinson for having the advantages that Troy never had, Robinson was a victim of segregation in both the military and baseball. In his autobiography I Never Had It Made, Jackie Robinson recalls a particular incident when he was court-martialed for refusing to move to the rear of a military bus. Robinson points out that because of the previous publicity that resulted when Joe Louis, also in the military, refused to sit in the back of a military

bus, the Army enforced regulations prohibiting discrimination on vehicles operating in Army posts. Although Robinson acted in accordance to these regulations, he was court-martialed, was acquitted, and asked for an honorable discharge from the military, which he quickly received. Robinson remarks that he "was naive about the elaborate lengths to which racists in the Armed Forces would go to put a vocal black man in his place" (30-31). In 1946, while waiting for his discharge, Robinson began playing baseball for the all-Black Kansas City Monarchs, and Robinson admits that "although there were spirited campaigns to break down the racial barriers in 1944, it appeared that it would be years before segregation in baseball was eliminated" (36). When Robinson became the first Black baseball player admitted into the major leagues in 1947, just after the end of World War II, Blacks finally started to earn the respect of the white society. Interestingly, Branch Rickey, the white Brooklyn Dodgers owner who is credited with breaking the "color line" by hiring Robinson, actually never "paid a nickel" for the contract of Robinson, "who had been nurtured by the [Black] owners of the Negro League" (Holway C3). Whereas Troy experienced segregation from only one institution, Robinson was a victim of double segregation from the military and baseball. Troy should actually feel proud that a Black man has been successful in baseball, yet he is embittered and frustrated; and Troy's past inability to escape segregation as a younger athlete results in his unjust treatment of the Black soldier, Gabriel, and his own son Cory, who finally has the chance to be the successful Black athlete that Troy could never be.

Like George C. Wolfe's soldiers, Gabriel is a victim of discrimination from

white society and from fellow Blacks. The most obvious form of unjust treatment Gabe receives from white society is his involvement in the segregated armed forces of World War II; even though the actual plot time of the play takes place when the armed forces had, by then, been integrated, the treatment that Gabe, as an ex-soldier, receives from the white society proves to be no better than the treatment he received when the military was segregated.

The first sign of unjust treatment that Gabe receives as a result of being a Black soldier is the compensation he receives for his injury. Troy says, "Man go over there and fight the war . . . messin' around with them Japs, get half his head blown off . . . and they give him a lousy three thousand dollars" (28). Just as Black soldiers in the Civil War received lower wages than white soldiers and, in some cases, had to protest to receive wages, Gabe is unfairly compensated by the government for his injury. Gabe, as an injured Black soldier, is an easy target for the white-controlled society. For example, Gabe is repeatedly arrested for disturbing the peace. Troy remarks, "All they want is the money. That makes six or seven times I done went down there and got him. See me coming they stick out their hands" (60). Troy's remarks suggest that the police arrest Gabe simply to collect his money in that what the police consider "disturbing the peace" is merely Gabe's reaction to public taunts. Troy explains that some "kids was teasing him and he run them off home. Say he was howling and carrying on. Some folks seen him and called the police" (65). The teasing and taunting from the public are further injustices to Gabe, who risked his life to protect these same citizens who take his money and who tease him.

Wilson never makes it clear whether the police are white or Black, nor does he suggest the races of the children who tease him. That Wilson never states the races of the people who mistreat Gabe suggests that Gabe may have been a victim of both the white and Black society.

However, Wilson's emphasis on the unjust treatment of the Black soldier seems to be the mistreatment of Gabriel by other Blacks, particularly his own brother. August Wilson's Troy and George Wolfe's Junie are, in a sense, the same character in that both have been victims of discrimination, and both feel that preventing other Blacks from certain social freedoms will prevent future discrimination. Whereas Junie tried to prevent discrimination against his fellow soldiers by killing them, Troy tries to "fence" in Gabriel from society by overprotecting him. Ironically, while Troy feels that he is trying to keep Gabriel from being "locked up," Troy is actually trying to do just that--confine Gabe for Troy's own benefit. Troy realizes that it is because of Gabriel's war injury that he is able to have a roof over his head, and, when authorities threaten to take Gabe away, Troy says, "The man done had his life ruined fighting for what? And they wanna take and lock him up. Let him be free. He don't bother nobody" (65). Troy is indebted to Gabriel and seems genuinely concerned about letting Gabriel live his life free from mental institutions, but it seems that Troy is so "fenced" in by his own past experience with discrimination that he must build fences around those characters who can now escape the segregation that prevented him from having a successful career.

Ironically, Gabe's mental condition that is a result of his war injury allows

him to escape the reality of the after-effects of segregation. Cory, Troy's son, also has the chance to be free from the segregation that Troy experienced. However, Troy's refusal to conform to an integrated society causes him to commit the same unjust actions that he blames the white society for committing against him. In other words, Troy tries to segregate Gabe and Cory from the reality of change. And although Troy's actions are not as drastic as Junie's actions against his fellow soldiers, in that Troy does not murder Gabriel, Troy does, however, take away Gabriel's freedom--freedom that, earlier in the play, Troy tried to preserve. Furthermore, as the play progresses, Troy realizes that his son, Cory, can have the chance that he never had to excel in athletics, yet Troy cannot put his own past experience with discrimination behind him. As Troy fences in his own past, he unjustly treats Gabe and Cory by trying to fence them in too.

Ultimately, Troy does succeed in confining Gabe. Troy's wife is quick to notice Troy's actions against Gabe when, in act two, scene two, she says to him, "Say the government send part of his check to the hospital and the other part to you. . . . You did Gabe just like you did Cory. You wouldn't sign the paper for Cory . . . but you signed for Gabe. You signed that paper" (75). Although Troy argues that he did not know that he was signing papers to commit Gabriel, it is obvious that Troy is interested in Gabriel's pension, as Rose--and Cory--realize. During an argument with Cory, two scenes later, Troy says, "Go on . . . get the hell out of my yard"; Cory replies, "It ain't your yard. You took Uncle Gabe's money he got from the army to buy this house and then you put him out" (87). Fortunately, Cory breaks

out of the fence with which Troy has surrounded him when he leaves home, and Gabe, although in the hospital, has already broken out of Troy's fence by escaping reality through his mental illness. Thus, only Troy remains confined within his own fences of the past.

More important, and in fact ironic, however, is that Cory joins the Marines when he leaves home. That Cory would choose to join the armed forces after witnessing the insanity of his Uncle Gabe is particularly significant. Whereas in Wolfe's "A Soldier with a Secret" Junie's war wound produced a madness that was harmful to fellow Blacks, Gabe's war injury produces what Lloyd Richards, in an introduction to *Fences*, calls a "disoriented and confused beautiful man" (viii).

Gabe's disorientation in reality can be seen in the following stage directions to act one, scene two, when Gabe makes his first appearance:

TROY starts into the house and sees GABRIEL. GABRIEL starts singing. TROY'S brother, he is seven years younger than TROY. Injured in World War II, he has a metal plate in his head. He carries an old trumpet tied around his waist and believes with every fiber of his being that he is the Archangel Gabriel. He carries a chipped basket with an assortment of discarded fruits and vegetables he has picked up in the strip district and which he attempts to sell. (24)

This first description of Gabe clearly shows his madness. Leo Sauvage, in "Worlds Apart," refers to Gabriel's character as a "strangely significant part" (20); this strange significance is that through his own mental instability, Gabe, unlike Junie, is a source

of stability.

Interestingly, the mentally unstable Gabe is both protector and provider to the Maxson family. As previously mentioned, it is Gabriel's pension money from his war injury that pays for Troy's house. Thus, for Troy and his family, Gabe provides financial stability. Yet Gabe is not only a financial provider for the Maxsons; he provides emotional stability as well. When action in the play seems most intense, Gabe, through his own instability, provides stability. As Troy recounts his own painful existence as an adolescent, which consisted of both physical and emotional abuse from his father, it is Gabriel's entrance onto the stage that provides stability for Troy. When Troy tells Lyons, his older son by a previous marriage, and Bono how he left his home at age fourteen after a brutal beating from his father, Gabe enters the stage, and Troy says, "I don't know what happened to him [his father]. I done lost touch with everybody except Gabriel" (53). Gabriel becomes representative of the stability that Troy never had from his father, and, interestingly, Gabriel also provides a similar stability for Lyons and Rose.

Troy's own experiences with discrimination have caused him to have a hard time expressing emotion toward his family members. What Troy cannot express, Gabriel does. Troy constantly condescends to Lyons for wanting to be a musician; he tells Lyons that he can get him a job "on the rubbish." However, Lyons, like Cory, wants to be happy with his life, and being a musician is what makes him happy. When Troy rebukes Lyons for his lifestyle, Lyons's reply clearly shows his frustration at his father's lack of interest in his life:

You and me is two different people, Pop. . . . You got your way of dealing with the world . . . I got mine. The only thing that matters to me is the music. . . . I need something that gonna help me to get out of the bed in the morning. Make me feel like I belong in the world. . . . You can't change me, Pop. I'm thirty-four years old. If you wanted to change me, you should have been there when I was growing up. (18)

Troy, like his own father, ignores the emotional needs of his son in that he gives Lyons no emotional support in his life. And when Lyons asks Troy to come hear him play his music, Troy replies, "I ain't going down there" (55). Since Troy will not support his son's lifestyle, Gabriel does. When Troy refuses to go hear Lyons perform, Gabriel interjects, "Lyons! King of the Jungle!" (56). Although these words may seem insignificant, Gabriel's reference to Lyons as "King of the Jungle" suggests that Lyons does have a meaningful life, despite what Troy may think. Therefore, through the simple gesture of a few words, Gabriel lends emotional support to Lyons, and these same simple gestures are important in establishing emotional stability for Rose when Troy creates instability in their marriage.

When Troy confesses to Rose his extra-marital affair, Gabriel, again through simple, innocent actions, brings stability to the very intense scene. As soon as Rose finds out that Troy is going to be the father of another woman's child, Gabe enters and says, "Hey, Rose . . . I got a flower for you. That's a rose. (He hands it to her) Same rose like you is" (66). Gabe goes on to ask Troy if he is mad at him for being

arrested and then to show Troy and Rose the quarter he has received from selling fruit. Before Gabe exits into the house, he says to Rose, "you know I was chasing hellhounds and them bad mens come and get me and take me away. Troy helped me. He come down there and told them they better let me go before he beat them up. Yeah, he did!" (67). Gabriel's simple actions and words lend stability in several ways. First, Gabe shows emotional support toward Rose by giving her a flower in the midst of a marital crisis. Second, Gabriel's simple conversation about his quarter diverts the couple's attention from arguing and directs their attention toward him. Gabriel's final words before he leaves the stage are words of praise about Troy for protecting him from the "bad mens" who tried to take him away. It seems that these words are to serve as reminders to Rose of Troy's potential to show emotional concern for his family. Perhaps Gabe hopes that these final words will alleviate the tension in the marriage; they seem to do so since Rose does not leave Troy and ultimately raises the child of Troy's lover.

Gabriel not only lends stability to Troy by helping him save his marriage, but Gabriel also serves as a spiritual stabilizing force. As mentioned earlier, Gabriel "believes with every fiber of his being that he is the Archangel Gabriel," and as the archangel, Gabriel becomes Troy's personal guardian angel. Throughout the play, Troy recounts certain battles with Death:

I looked up one day and Death was marching straight at me. . . . I say . . . What you want, Mr. Death? You be wanting me? . . . Death standing there staring at me . . . carrying that sickle in his hand . . .

and me and him commenced to wrestling. . . . I wrestled with Death for three days and three nights and I'm standing here to tell you about it. . . . Death ain't nothing to play with. And I know he's gonna get me. I know I got to join his army . . . his camp followers. But as long as I keep my strength and see him coming . . . as long as I keep up my vigilance . . . he's gonna have to fight to get me. I ain't going easy. (11-12)

In act one, scene two, when Gabriel first appears, he stops suddenly and says, "Hear that? That's the hellhounds. I got to chase them out of here" (27). When Gabriel reappears in act one, scene four, Lyons asks him where he has been, and Gabe replies, "Oh, I been chasing hellhounds . . ." (47). Again, in act two, scene one, Gabriel has been chasing "hellhounds." These "hellhounds" that Gabriel has been chasing throughout the play seem to be the same "hellhounds" that have been chasing Troy, and as long as Gabriel is chasing the "hellhounds," Troy is free from Death. However, Troy signs the papers for Gabriel to be hospitalized in a mental institution, and, with Gabriel locked away, Death finally takes Troy. Thus, Gabriel's mental instability allows him to be a spiritual protector for Troy until Troy tries to control Gabe's behavior by committing him; when Gabe is locked away, Troy's guardian angel is locked away, and there is no one to protect Troy from the "hellhounds" of Death.

Even though Gabriel cannot save Troy from Death, he does, however, symbolize spiritual hope for Troy and his family. According to Frankie Faison, who

portrayed Gabriel in the 46th Street Theatre production of Fences, Gabriel is "unwarped because of his injury. He sees everything simply and with an open eye. He's an antithesis of everything going on in the play. His hope is what is needed" (Interview). Gabriel is definitely the antithesis of Troy, who sees no hope for the future. Troy feels that every white person is evil; in reference to the man who sold him his furniture, he remarks, "Now you tell me who else that could have been but the devil?" (15). When Cory tells Troy that the Pirates won the baseball game, Troy says, "I ain't thinking about the Pirates. Got an all-white team" (33). About the possibility of Cory being recruited to play football, Troy says, "The white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway" (35). Troy's pessimism about the future of Blacks ultimately causes him to lose his whole family; Cory leaves, Lyons is incarcerated, and Gabriel is sent to a mental hospital. Furthermore, Troy's affair with Alberta causes him to be a "womanless man," according to Rose (79).

Gabriel, on the other hand, makes no derogatory remarks about the white society, and he shows no hatred to anyone. His only concern is protecting people from the "hellhounds." Furthermore, Gabriel is the only representation of religion found in the play, and all of the characters treat Gabe with kindness and respect. That none of the characters admonishes Gabe for thinking that he is the Archangel Gabriel suggests some respect for religion. Frankie Faison further points out that Gabriel is trying to "cleanse the characters" by showing that "'through me you can manage to rid yourselves of all of the complications'" (Interview). By foreshadowing Troy's death, Gabriel seems to try to rid Troy of his complications--his preoccupation

with the devil and death. In act one, scene one, Gabriel sings:

Better get ready for the judgment

Better get ready for the judgment

My Lord is coming down . . .

Better get ready for the judgment

Better get ready for the judgment morning

Better get ready for the judgment

My God is coming down. (27)

Gabriel's religious songs are significant in that the songs serve as religious hope for Troy. Troy is concerned about battling the devil, but Gabe is sure that Troy is going to heaven. Furthermore, Gabe tells Troy, "Troy . . . St. Peter got your name in the book. I seen it. . . . He got a great big book. Got everybody's name what was ever been born. That's what he told me. But I seen your name. Seen it with my own eyes" (26). Thus, although Troy is guilty of sin, Gabe provides Troy with the knowledge that he will be forgiven for his sins, escape the devil, and go to heaven.

Gabriel's predictions that Troy will be admitted into heaven finally come true in the final scene of the play, when all of the characters have gathered for Troy's funeral. Gabe says, "Hey, Rose. It's time. It's time to tell St. Peter to open the gates. Troy, you ready? You ready, Troy. I'm gonna tell St. Peter to open the gates. You get ready now" (100). In a final display of madness and confusion, Gabriel's function as a symbol of spiritual hope is fulfilled, as can be seen in the following final stage directions to the play:

Gabriel, with great fanfare, braces himself to blow. The trumpet is without a mouthpiece. He puts the end of it into his mouth and blows with great force, like a man who has been waiting some twenty-odd years for this single moment. No sound comes out of the trumpet. He braces himself and blows again with the same result. A third time he blows. There is a weight of impossible description that falls away and leaves him bare and exposed to a frightful realization. It is a trauma that a sane and normal mind would be unable to withstand. He begins to dance. A slow, strange dance, eerie and life-giving. A dance of atavistic signature and ritual. . . . He begins to howl in what is an attempt at song, or perhaps a song turning back into itself in an attempt at speech. He finishes his dance and the gates of heaven stand open as wide as God's closet. (101)

Frankie Faison suggests that this scene displays a "total giving up of yourself to vindicate all of the others--the supreme sacrifice. He [Gabe] allows an explosion to happen to free all of the wrongs, and he feels he achieves that moment. He touches a spirit" (Interview). Wilson points out that this moment is a trauma that only an insane mind can understand; therefore, only the mentally unstable Gabe can touch the spirit of Troy as he ascends to heaven. Although the intended interpretation of this final display is vague, perhaps Gabe comes to the "frightful realization" that maybe his brother's sins are too harsh to allow his admittance into heaven. However, when Gabe performs the dance and song ritual, it seems that this is the giving up of

himself, as Faison suggests, that allows his brother to enter the gates of heaven.

Because of Gabe's spiritual protection, Troy is forgiven for his sins, and, as Gabe predicted, Troy escapes the devil and finds salvation in heaven.

However, Gabriel, in this final scene, is not only important in showing spiritual hope for Troy; Gabriel also predicts a positive future for the Black soldier.

Ironically, when Cory returns in the final scene of the play, he is a Marine, even though he has witnessed the mental instability of his veteran uncle Gabriel. James

Earl Jones, who won a Tony award for his portrayal of Troy Maxson on Broadway, feels that Cory's return as a Marine is very ironic but also very positive (Interview).

Although Gabriel lacks all of his mental faculties, he is protector, provider, and a symbol of hope throughout the play. If Cory had followed in his father's footsteps by pursuing a career in athletics, perhaps he, too, would have become a bitter victim of discrimination. However, Cory's return as a Marine suggests that Cory, like Gabriel, will be a symbol of hope, as well as a protector and provider.

Furthermore, to emphasize the future success of Blacks in the military, August Wilson adds a new element in his portrayal of Cory that is lacking in his portrayal of Gabriel. According to James Earl Jones, "the soldier out of uniform is out of his element" (Interview); where Gabe lacked both uniform and element, Cory, dressed in uniform, seems to complete Wilson's optimistic outlook for Blacks in the military.

When Cory returns in the last scene of the play, he is "dressed in a Marine corporal's uniform" (91). Lyons remarks, "Look at you man. Look at you. Don't he look good, Rose. Got them Corporal stripes. . . . A Corporal in the United States

Marines. . . . Don't he look good, Mr. Bono?" (92). Lyons, who has been in prison for forging checks, is quick to comment on Cory's stripes and the success and status he has achieved in the integrated military. Lyons goes on to say, "I always knew you was gonna make something out yourself. Your head was always in the right direction" (94). In uniform, Cory is a symbol of hope and success, and his Corporal's stripes are important in signifying the struggles of Blacks in the military to achieve positions of power. By portraying Cory as an officer, August Wilson predicts an optimistic future for Blacks in the military.

Through the two soldier characters, Gabriel and Cory, August Wilson shows the evolution of the Black soldier. From Gabriel's experiences in a segregated military institution to Cory's ranking status in an integrated one, Wilson shows how the military can be an outlet for Blacks to be accepted by the larger white society. Although Gabe is afflicted with mental illness, this mental illness provides stability throughout the play. Cory, on the other hand, is free of mental illness, though he, too, has been a victim of society, more so from his own father than from the white society or other Blacks.

However, Wilson seems to complete the evolution of the Black soldier when Cory returns in a Corporal's uniform; when asked if he will make the military a career, he replies, "I don't know. I got six [years] already. I think that's enough" (94). Gabriel, as a result of being a Black soldier, cannot even choose how to live his life, yet Cory shows the progression of the Black soldier in that he can choose when to quit serving his country. By giving Cory freedom to choose his own

Chapter Three

Charles Fuller's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, A Soldier's Play (1981), contains many of the same elements as George C. Wolfe's and August Wilson's plays. However, Fuller's play gives a more complex look at the Black military experience during World War Two, with mention of World War I, two wars where integration of the military had not yet taken place. Fuller, like Wilson, juxtaposes the military with the civilian institution of baseball; although Fuller is not as descriptive as Wilson in the area of Negro league baseball, the juxtaposition is emphasized in that the Black army unit in Fuller's work is also a segregated baseball team. As expected, all of the Black characters are victims of a racist society, and the effects are the same as in Wolfe's and Wilson's plays: characters within the play receive unjust treatment from both white and Black society, and, like Gabriel in Fences and Junie in "A Soldier with a Secret," C.J. and Sergeant Waters also experience madness as a result of racist treatment. The final element that Wilson introduces in Fences is of particular importance in Fuller's work. The army uniform that serves as a symbol of status for Cory in Fences receives much more emphasis in Fuller's work. The uniform is established as a symbol in the first act, remains an important symbol throughout the play, and, as in Fences, predicts the future of the Black soldier.

In The Colored Museum, George C. Wolfe uses a slide montage that spans nearly a century of the Black military experience; through this slide montage Wolfe hints at the discrimination that Blacks faced in the armed forces. However, Wolfe's emphasis is the discrimination that the soldiers will face in the future, when they

return from the war. Fences mentions a war wound that Gabriel received in battle, but, again, the focus is on the discrimination directed at Gabriel after his discharge from the army. Charles Fuller, on the other hand, uses the temporal setting to show the discrimination that exists in actual military service, and it is through the temporal setting that Fuller shows the negative effects of being Black in a segregated army unit as well as the necessity of desegregation in the armed forces.

Fuller's stage directions describe part of the stage as a "limbo":

The inner shell of the stage is black. On the stage, in a horseshoe-like half circle, are several platforms at varying levels. . . . On the rear of the horseshoe, upstage center, is a bare platform, raised several feet above everything else. It can be anything we want it to be--a limbo if you will. (7)

Most of the flashbacks of the soldiers' encounters with Sergeant Waters take place in "limbo." However, "limbo" pertains to both the stage and the temporal setting; the year 1944, four years before the armed forces were integrated, seems to be a period of limbo for the Black soldiers. Though the army could be seen as advancing past this limbo by placing Blacks in authoritative positions, Fuller's portrayal of the character of Sergeant Waters hardly reflects his rank. As the play opens, the first description of Sergeant Waters shows him "down on all fours" in his "World War II, winter army uniform" (8). In these stage directions, before the action of the play even begins, the Black officer, crawling on his hands and knees, is stripped of his status. Moreover, Waters had earned a "croix de guerre" in World War I. However,

Wilkie, a member of Waters's all-Black unit, points out, "the army sent Waters to manage the team" (24). Waters, who obviously showed an outstanding performance on the battlefield in World War I, is appointed to an army unit, not to train men for fighting, but to produce a winning baseball team. In the same act, Waters is shot by "someone," and Fuller sets the mood for the detective drama that follows. It seems obvious that the murderer is the Klan or a white resident of Tynin, which further suggests a lack of respect for a Black officer.

Ironically, a higher ranking Black officer, Captain Davenport, is assigned the murder case, and, when he interviews the Black enlisted men of the 221st unit, their military duties clearly show the negative effects of segregation. Fuller emphasizes this lack of combat training through the menial duties that the unit performs. In his interview with Davenport, Wilkie says, "We'd be assigned to different companies-- Motor Pool--Dump Truck all week long--made us do the dirty work on the post-- garbage, clean up . . . " (24). Furthermore, when Taylor tells the company to stay out of the town of Tynin because it has been placed off-limits, Henson, another member of the all-Black unit, replies, "I don't know what the hell they thought we'd go into that town with--mops and dishrags?" When the company is told to report to the Colonel's quarters for clean-up detail, Wilkie remarks, "Y'all recruits know what Colonel's clean-up detail is, don't you? Shovelin' horseshit in his stables" (12). Throughout the play, there is no mention of combat training, and from the aforementioned examples, it seems that the unit is not a company of enlisted men, but a company of custodians.

Nevertheless, Black soldiers believed that sacrificing their lives in American service would bring acceptance from the white society, so it is not surprising that the unit is excited about learning of their assignment overseas to fight the Germans. Davenport says, during "May of '44, the Allies were making final preparations for the invasion of Europe. Invasion! Even the sound of it made Negroes think we'd be in it--be swept into Europe in the waves of men and equipment--I know I felt it" (59). Ellis expresses his eagerness to fight: "They finally gonna let us Negroes fight!" (91). Others in the unit remark, "Axis ain't got a chance! . . . Look out, Hitler, the niggahs is comin' to get your ass through the fog! . . . They gonna let us get in it! We may lay so much smoke the Germans may never get to see what a colored soldier looks like 'til the war's over!" (92). These Black soldiers certainly have the determination to win a war, but do they have the combat skill necessary to win a war?

According to a Divisional Staff officer in Leo Bogart's Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army, in the army, "the Negroes are at their lowest level when kept in segregated units" (247). As mentioned earlier, the members of the 221st realize that as mere custodians they are at their lowest level; unfortunately, this "lowest level" also includes no combat training, and, as Davenport points out in his last speech, the whole unit is "wiped out" during a German advance (100). Thus, the lack of combat training that Black soldiers in segregated troops received is shown by Fuller to produce tragic results. First, the soldiers are inevitably going to be unprepared for actual military combat. Second, the lack of combat training is probably accompanied by low self-esteem, and with low self-esteem among a whole

unit of soldiers, friction within the unit is certain to arise. Thus, within the segregated unit of non-combat-trained soldiers, a certain level of disorder is present. In other words, "limbo" not only reflects the 1944 time period, but the 221st unit is also in limbo.

However, although Fuller shows the confines of "limbo," he does suggest the necessity to make positive movements away from the limbo of race relations. While segregation in the military is apparent throughout the play, Fuller points out the possibility of desegregation that was to take place four years later. In a letter to Henson, his girlfriend writes, "'We know the Nazis and the Japs can't be stopped unless we all work together, so tell your buddies to press forward and win this war. All our hopes for the future go with you, Louis'" (36). C.J. goes on to say, "They tell me, coupla them big-time Negroes is on the verge a' gettin' all of us togetha'--colored and white--say they want one army" (37). The Black characters realize that the Black and white races at home must work together to stop Hitler's racial war abroad, but until Blacks and whites combat the racial war in America, the armed forces will remain in a state of limbo.

To further show the need to move away from the limbo of 1944, Fuller parallels another segregated institution with the segregated military. If the members of the 221st cannot prove their worth as soldiers on the battlefield, they certainly prove their worth on the baseball field. Discrimination is still evident through the juxtaposition of the military with baseball in that baseball was also a segregated institution in 1944. Where Wilson used baseball to show the after-effects of the

discrimination of segregation, Fuller uses baseball to show the need to move away from the limbo of segregation. When questioned by Davenport, Wilkie says, "This company was basically a baseball team then, sir. See, most of the boys had played for the Negro League, so naturally the army put us all together" (23-24). Wilkie then goes on to point out the menial duties--garbage, clean-up--of the team; but, he says, "on Saturdays we were whippin' the hell out of 'em on the baseball diamond!" (24). Furthermore, Henson remarks, "You see the look on that umpire's face when C.J. hit that home run? I thought he was gonna die on the spot, he turned so pale!" Smalls replies, "Serves the fat bastard right! Some of them pitches he called strikes were well ova' my head!" (34). Not only are the soldiers in a segregated army unit, but they are also members of a segregated baseball team. Moreover, Smalls's comment implies that the white umpire treated the soldiers unfairly on the baseball field.

However, the soldiers seem to feel that their outstanding performances on the baseball field will help them overcome racial obstacles from the white society. After "twelve straight hits" off a white pitcher that "everybody claimed was so good," Cobb points out that the white pitcher had "Eyes popin' out they sockets" (36). But Smalls says that this same white pitcher "was the one who started the name-callin'" when he and Peterson were on duty in the mess hall. Although the white pitcher is shocked that the Black team is capable of bettering him on the baseball field, he feels the need to degrade Blacks in the army to maintain his white superiority; as Peterson says, "Every time we beat them at baseball, they get back at us every way they can." Cobb, on the other hand, says, "It's worth it to me just to wipe those superior smiles

off they faces" (37). Cobb feels that beating white baseball teams will make whites see that if Blacks can be aggressive on the baseball field, then they can also be aggressive in battle.

Surprisingly, the white Captain Taylor, who at first appears to be like the other white characters in the play who are racists, also feels that success on the baseball field could contribute to changing white racist attitudes. In the following passage from act one, Captain Taylor points out the importance of success for the Black unit:

Men, I congratulate you on the game you won today. We've only got seven more to play, and if we win them, we'll be the first team in Fort Neal history to play the Yanks in exhibition. Everyone in the regiment is counting on you. In times like these, morale is important--and winning can help a lot of things. (41)

The important phrase that Taylor uses in the preceding passage is "in times like these"--times like 1944 when Blacks were fighting a racial battle in America, fighting the racial war in Germany, fighting a racial battle in the U.S. military, and fighting a racial battle on the baseball field. If the Black unit wins the exhibition game against the Yankees, they will have made progress toward winning one of the many racist battles in which they are involved.

However, the Black unit never gets the chance to play the Yankees. Although they could have easily won their remaining seven games, the Black unit purposely loses a game, not to concede to white superiority, but to spite Sergeant Waters, who

has inflicted unjust treatment on all of the Black soldiers. Like Troy in Fences and Junie in The Colored Museum, who mistreated their fellow Blacks, Sergeant Waters also degrades his Black regiment. Throughout the play, the flashbacks of all of the soldiers portray Waters as a hateful, vengeful man. Waters tells Peterson, "I'm the kind of colored man that don't like lazy, shiftless Negroes." Waters further condescends to his unit:

Let me tell you fancy-assed ball-playin' Negroes somethin'! . . . This country is at war, and you niggahs are soldiers--nothin' else! So baseball teams--win or lose--get no special privileges! They need to work some of you niggahs till your legs fall off! (39)

These are just a few examples where Waters verbally abuses the whole unit; he also physically abuses other soldiers, particularly Peterson and C.J. When Peterson, in defense of C.J., tells Waters to "drop dead," Waters challenges Peterson to a physical fight: "I'm going outside and wait for you geechy! And when you come out, I'm gonna whip your black Southern ass. . . . You need to learn respect, boy--how to talk to your betters. . . . Fight hard, hea? I'ma try to bust your fuckin' head open" (44).

Waters does physically beat Peterson, but the verbal abuse is much worse in that Waters refers to Peterson as a "geechy." According to Linda Hughes and Howard Faulkner in "The Role of Detection in A Soldier's Play," this is a term derived from the dialect of the Gullah Blacks, a term that "reduces another human being to the status of an object, categorized rather than perceived or understood" (86). Although Waters physically and verbally abuses Peterson, the unjust treatment that Peterson

receives hardly compares to the treatment that Waters inflicts on C.J. Memphis.

In act one, Waters appears genuinely to admire C.J. in that C.J. is not only an outstanding baseball player, but a talented musician as well. Despite Waters's verbal abuse toward C.J., C.J. says, "'Long as his han's ain't on me--he ain't done me no harm, Pete. Callin' names ain't nothin'." Peterson exclaims, "The man despises you!" (45). Unfortunately, C.J. does not see the truth in Peterson's statement because in act two, Waters sets C.J. up for a crime that he did not commit by taunting C.J. with false accusations of shooting a white officer. When several of the Black soldiers tell Waters that C.J. did not commit the crime, Waters says, ". . . C.J. Memphis, playin' cotton-picker singin' the blues, bowin' and scrapin'--smilin' in everybody's face . . . that yassah boss is hidin' something." Fuller's stage directions following these remarks further show Waters's taunts:

C.J. is stunned, then suddenly the enormity of his predicament hits him

and he breaks free of WILKIE and hits WATERS in the chest. . . .

The blow hurt WATERS, but he forces a smile at C.J., who has

suddenly gone immobile, surprised by what he has done. (66)

Through these stage directions, it is apparent that Waters intends for C.J. to harm him physically so that he can arrest C.J., not for the shooting, but for hitting a non-commissioned officer. Although Waters is the one who is physically abused by C.J., C.J. eventually loses his sanity from the mistreatment from Waters.

Waters's treatment of C.J. drives C.J. to madness, but it is Waters's own madness--the "crazy hate" that Wilkie points out (89)--that drives him to mistreat

other Blacks. According to Frank Rich in "Negro Ensemble Presents 'Soldier's Play,'" Fuller "has compassion for blacks who might be driven to murder their brothers--because he sees them as victims of a world they haven't made" (3). Not surprisingly, Waters's anger toward fellow Blacks stems, like Troy's, from discrimination from the white society. White racist attitudes are evident in the beginning of the play when the Klan is suspected of murdering Sergeant Waters; and, after Davenport questions Byrd and Wilcox, two white officers who were on guard duty the night of Waters's murder, it seems that whites did, in fact, murder Waters. However, the play takes an ironic twist when the murderer is revealed to be Peterson, who feels that killing Waters is "Justice. . . . For C.J.! Everybody!" (97). Thus, Waters is also a victim of violence from other Blacks, but it is Fuller's portrayal of Waters as a victim of white hatred that shows Waters's need to mistreat other Blacks.

Like Troy, who has witnessed discrimination from white society, Waters's term as a soldier has shown him the same discrimination that Troy saw as a baseball player. In act one, Waters explains his reasons for joining the army: "I couldn't do any better--and this army was the closest I figured the white man would let me get to any kind of authority. When this war's over, things are going to change. . . ."

Waters further explains how he will send his children to white schools to "let 'em rub elbows with the whites. . . . Otherwise, we'll be left behind--you can see it in the army. White man runnin' rings around us. . . . [We] got to challenge this man in his arena--use his weapons. . . ." (29). Waters feels that he can have authority by

being in the army, yet Waters has no real authority over any of the white characters. The only authority Waters has is within his own unit of all-Black soldiers, and, if he cannot have authority over whites, he wrongly uses his authority on the Black soldiers.

As Waters says, Blacks need to challenge the white man by using the white man's weapons, and Waters does use the white man's weapons--discrimination and unjust treatment against Blacks--for what he thinks is the way for Blacks to be accepted in the white society. In act two, Waters further explains to C.J. his reasons for his mistreatment of fellow Blacks:

The First War, it didn't change much for us, boy--but this one--it's gonna change a lot of things. Them Nazis ain't all crazy--a whole lot of people just can't fit into where things seem to be goin'--like you. . . . The day of the geechy is gone, boy--the only thing that can move the race is power. It's all the white respects--and people like you just make us seem like fools. And we can't let nobody go on believin' we all like you! You bring us down--make people think the whole race is unfit! . . . I waited a long time for you, boy, but I gotcha! And I try to git rid of you wherever I go. . . . Now I got you--one less fool for the race to be ashamed of! (72-73)

Like Troy, who tries to prepare Cory for the white society, Waters also tries to prepare his Black soldiers for white society. Ironically, Waters, who is fighting a war against Hitler, is, in fact, a Hitler figure in that Waters plans to destroy the Black

race, or at least the "geechie"--the good "homey kinda' niggah" who "reminded [whites] of the old days" (72). With C.J. in jail, Waters feels that he has disposed of "one less fool for the race to be ashamed of"; however, as C.J. descends into mental illness, it becomes apparent that Waters is the fool for the Black race to be ashamed of.

While in jail, C.J. tells Cobb, "I don't think I'm comin' outta here, Cobb--feels like I'm goin' crazy. Can't walk in hea'--can't see the sun! I tried singin', Cobb, but nothin' won't come out. I sure don't wanna die in this jail!" C.J. goes on to say, "I got no protection--nothin' to keep the dog from tearin' at my bones!" When Cobb tells C.J. to "Stop talkin' crazy!" (71), C.J. goes on to explain the metaphor:

... O'Connell, he had a dog--meanes' dog I eva' did see! An' the only way you could enjoy them plum trees was to outsmart that dog. Waters is like that ole dog, Cobb--you gotta run circles roun' ole Windy--that was his name. They say he tore a man's arm off once, and got to likin' it. So, you had to cheat that dog outta' bitin' you every time. Every time. (73)

When C.J. describes Waters as a dog, he exposes Waters for the inhumane person that he is. Waters gains pleasure from inflicting pain on his fellow Blacks, and if he feels that he can advance the Black race by terminating Blacks, he is a Hitler to his own race.

Like Cory, who escapes the fences by which his father surrounded him, C.J.

also escapes mistreatment from Sergeant Waters. But whereas Cory sought escape from unjust treatment from another Black through the military, C.J. must escape from the military to be free of the unjust treatment he receives from Sergeant Waters. Unfortunately, to be free of Sergeant Waters, C.J. commits suicide, an act which causes Cobb to comment, "C.J. had to be outta' his head or he wouldna' killed hisself" (74). Thus, Waters is responsible for C.J.'s death, and C.J.'s death weighs heavily on Waters's mind as he, too, descends further into madness.

But can Waters be held completely responsible for his actions? Although Waters drives C.J. to suicide, it is the white racism that Waters has experienced that makes him both victim and victimizer. And it is Waters's dual role as victim and victimizer that drives him into madness. Cobb points out that after C.J.'s death, "Waters, he started actin' funny, sir--stayed drunk--talked to hisself all the time" (74). During Waters's final drunken stupor of madness, Waters as victim and victimizer can clearly be seen. When Waters is harassed by the two white soldiers Byrd and Wilcox, he exclaims, "Followin' behind y'all? Look what it's done to me!--I hate myself! . . . I've killed for you! And nothin' changed! . . . Nothin' changed--see? And I've tried everything! Everything!" (52-53). Thus, in act one, Waters is established as a victim of white racism; however, Waters's remark, "I've killed for you," takes on a double meaning. First, Waters implies that even though he has killed in battle for whites, he is still a victim of racism. Second, although the reader does not know in act one, Waters has killed other Blacks to try to gain acceptance in the white society. Thus, it is white racism that is indirectly responsible for C.J.'s

madness and death. Moreover, white racism is also responsible for Waters's madness and death in that Peterson, ironically like Waters, feels that he must kill another Black--Waters--to protect the Black race.

In act one, Charles Fuller leaves many unanswered questions such as the motive for Waters's murder and the identity of the murderer. Nevertheless, among the uncertainties in the first act, Fuller establishes a symbol that remains constant throughout the play--the army uniform. Like August Wilson, Fuller uses the army uniform as a symbol of status and as a symbol of the future of the Black soldier. But Fuller also uses the uniform as a symbol of pride.

Before the dialogue of the play begins, the uniform is established as a symbol of pride. In the opening scene of the play, Sergeant Waters, in his World War Two winter army uniform, is "stinking drunk, trying to stand and mumbling to himself." The first words spoken are "They'll still hate you! They still hate you. . . ." Sergeant Waters is also seen "down on all fours" (8). Then "someone" lifts a pistol to Waters's head and shoots him twice. That Waters is down on all fours suggests a lack of pride that he exhibits when wearing a uniform. Furthermore, the lack of respect for a Black officer in uniform is immediately established when "someone" kills Waters.

Ironically, though Waters exhibits a lack of pride in his uniform, he does, however, recognize the uniform as a symbol of pride, if not for himself, for his fellow Black soldiers, particularly Wilkie. But, not surprisingly, Waters turns the uniform into a negative symbol of manipulation and degradation for Wilkie. When

Davenport questions Wilkie about his relationship with Sergeant Waters, he asks, "When did you lose your stripes? . . . You lost your stripes for being drunk on duty, is that correct? . . . You said Waters busted you, didn't you? . . . Weren't you and the Sergeant good friends? . . . Was the Sergeant a nice guy or not?" (86-88).

Wilkie replies, "No, sir. . . . I mean, a friend would give you extra duty--I would have--or even call you a whole buncha' names--you'd expect that, sir--but damn! Three stripes? They took ten years to get in this army, sir! Ten years!" (88).

Wilkie's frustration at losing his stripes is obvious. More important, however, is that the uniform is such an important symbol of pride and status that Davenport would see the stripes as a motive in connection with Waters's murder, and, when Wilkie describes Waters's manipulation and bribery in connection with Wilkie's stripes, Fuller's portrayal of the uniform as a negative symbol can further be seen.

When Davenport says, "Made you mad, didn't it?" (88), Wilkie's response and the conversation that follows further show Waters's degradation and manipulation of Wilkie:

WILKIE: Yeah, it made me mad--all the things I did for him!

DAVENPORT (quickly): That's right! you were his assistant, weren't you? Took care of the team--(Wilkie nods) Ran all his errands, looked at his family snapshots (Wilkie nods again), policed his quarters, put the gun under C.J.'s bed--

WILKIE looks up suddenly

WILKIE: No!

DAVENPORT (quickly): It was you Henson saw, wasn't it, Wilkie?

WILKIE: No, sir! . . . (pleadingly) it was the Sarge, Captain--he ordered me to do it--he said I'd get my stripes back. . . . (88-89)

Not only has Wilkie been Waters's "go-fer," as Peterson calls him, but Wilkie is also indirectly responsible for C.J.'s death. Because Waters realized the pride Wilkie had for his uniform, Waters blackmailed Wilkie into setting C.J. up for a crime. Thus, what was once a positive symbol to Wilkie is now a negative reminder of Waters's degradation of him and of C.J.'s unnecessary death.

Perhaps Davenport is quick to notice the importance of the uniform to Wilkie because he, too, sees the uniform as an important symbol of status and respect in that he, as a Black officer, receives deserved respect from both white and Black characters, unlike Waters and Wilkie. As expected, the Black soldiers notice Davenport's uniform as a symbol of status; more important is that the Black soldiers recognize the uniform as a symbol of hope for Blacks. Ellis comments, ". . . It sure is good to see one of us wearin' them Captain's bars, sir" (22). Ellis's remark seems to carry a tone of relief, the relief that comes with the knowledge that Blacks are finally making advances in the military. But Fuller seems to place more emphasis on the response of whites, especially Captain Taylor.

As soon as Davenport enters the stage, his uniform is a positive symbol, as can be seen in act one in the following stage directions:

. . . a rather wiry black officer wearing glasses, CAPTAIN RICHARD

DAVENPORT, walks across the stage from the wings, dressed sharply

in an M.P. uniform, his hat cocked to the side and strapped down, the way airmen wear theirs. He is carrying a briefcase, and we are aware of a man who is very confident and self-assured. He is smiling as he faces the audience, cleaning his glasses as he begins to speak. (15-16)

Fuller effectively uses Davenport's uniform to make several points. First, the reader, after recognizing the uniforms of the non-commissioned officers and enlisted men, will be aware of Davenport's uniform and know that Davenport is a man to be respected. Second, respecting Davenport's appearance, the reader will respect and trust him as he investigates the murder. Finally, the first person Davenport encounters is Captain Taylor; Fuller presents two men of different color but of the same rank, and the white Captain Taylor's comment--"Forgive me for occasionally staring, Davenport, you're the first colored officer I've ever met" (17)--expresses Taylor's uncertainty at the idea of Black authority figures. Taylor goes on to say, ". . . I don't want to offend you, but I just cannot get used to it--the bars, the uniform--being in charge just doesn't look right on Negroes" (20). Thus, in act one, Taylor shows respect for Davenport as a military figure, but he has yet to respect him for being a Black authority figure.

Yet, by reinforcing Taylor's comments on Davenport's uniform throughout the play, Fuller shows how the uniform is not only a symbol of status, but a symbol of changing white racist attitudes. At their initial meeting, Taylor says, "The Colonel doesn't give a damn about finding the men responsible for this [murder]! And they're making a fool of you--can't you see that?--and--take off those sunglasses!" Davenport

replies, "I intend to carry out my orders--and I like these glasses--they're like MacArthur's" (18). That Davenport compares himself to MacArthur makes Taylor realize that Blacks, too, can be leaders, and from this point on, Taylor's attitude toward Davenport gradually changes from being skeptical about Davenport's involvement in the investigation to supporting it.

In the beginning of act two, Fuller again uses stage directions that show Davenport's uniform as a symbol of status in that Davenport is "putting on a shirt, tie, bars, etc." (59). However, it is Taylor's final comment at the end of the play that shows his acceptance of Black authority figures. After Davenport solves the murder, Taylor says, "I was wrong, Davenport--about the bars--the uniform--about Negroes being in charge. (Slight pause) I guess I'll have to get used to it." Davenport replies, "Oh, you'll get used to it--you can bet your ass on that. Captain--you will get used to it" (100). Taylor finally accepts Davenport's authority, and, although Taylor is only one person who totally accepts Blacks in authority, his ability to dismiss white racist attitudes provides hope that the larger white society will also change its white power ideals.

In his final soliloquy, Davenport says, "Two colored soldiers are dead--two on their way to prison. Four less men to fight with--and none of their reasons--nothing anyone said, or did, would have been worth a life to men with larger hearts--men less split by the madness of race in America" (99). The "madness of race"--a theme that recurs in Fuller's work not only through the references to Hitler's quest for power, but also through the quest for power among African-Americans and white Americans.

Fuller's work suggests that as long as one race tries to be superior to another, then a state of limbo will exist, and a state of limbo is still apparent at the end of the play. Following Davenport's report of the deaths of the entire 221st, including Captain Taylor, is the aforementioned scene where Taylor apologizes to Davenport for doubting his authority. There is, in a sense, a limbo of time as past and present become blurred. Taylor is already dead, along with the whole 221st unit, and what seems like a hopeless ending is actually positive in that Fuller again advances past limbo when men of two races, Captain Davenport and Captain Taylor, work together to produce positive changes. Thus, where Wolfe and Wilson illustrate madness in their concluding scenes, Fuller creates hope. Fuller develops Captain Taylor from a white racist character to one who is able to see past racial boundaries. Furthermore, Fuller discards all ideas of madness and projects hope through Captain Davenport. Whereas only the insane mind of Gabriel can comprehend the display of madness in Fences, only the sane mind of Davenport, a Black military man, can comprehend the hope in A Soldier's Play. Although Davenport recognizes an American society that is "split by the madness of race," it is his ability to recognize the madness, and at the same time predict hope, that foreshadows a positive future.

Conclusion

John A. Williams's novel Captain Blackman has been called "a stunning work in which the truths of history are heightened by the perceptions of fiction to unsparingly reveal both the tragedy and the heroism of the black soldier in American history" (jacket cover). Likewise, George C. Wolfe, August Wilson, and Charles Fuller heighten the truths of the history of the Black military experience through drama. In reference to Charles Fuller's 1976 play, The Brownsville Raid, about an all-Black army unit that in 1906 was dishonorably discharged for inciting a riot, despite a lack of evidence, critic Martin Gottfried writes:

[Fuller's soldier characters] are ordinary men, products of their era. They don't know they should resent their segregation in an all-black regiment. They are too accustomed to being ineligible for commissions to be angry about it. Treatment of them as inferiors was the American way and, in fact, they are proud to be soldiers, proud of the Army.

Such keeping of faith with social history was disciplined of Fuller and the discipline paid off. The power of the play lies in the realization of his characters that they have placed their faith in an Army, an America that would betray them the first chance it got. By staying his anger until it could pay off dramatically, Fuller reaped a more telling harvest of theatrical and thematic power.

Gottfried goes on to note that "his black soldiers are not made to be aware ahead of their times" (180). On the other hand, Fuller's, Wilson's, and Wolfe's works of the

1980s reveal characters who are "aware ahead of their times," and it is through figurative resurrections that these Black soldiers are able to see the future of race relations in America.

In "A Soldier with a Secret," Junie says, "I know the secret. The secret to your pain. 'Course I didn't always know. First I had to die, then come back to life, 'fore I had the gift. . . . I walk right outta that explosion, fully expectin' to see white clouds . . . only all I saw was more war" (11). Junie is resurrected in madness, only to return to more war; to save his fellow Black soldiers from the pain of discrimination, he murders them. Thus, George C. Wolfe predicts a pessimistic future for the Black soldier and for Blacks in general in America, as he emphasizes through the madness of the final scene in The Colored Museum.

In Fences, August Wilson's soldier character is resurrected not physically but mentally. Although Gabriel's war wound leaves him mentally unsound, he provides stability throughout the play. Gabriel strongly believes that he is the Archangel Gabriel, heavenly messenger and trumpet-blower on judgment day; he believes that he has been to heaven, and he provides characters with the knowledge that they, too, will find salvation. Wilson's portrayal of Gabriel as a symbol of hope reflects optimism in relationships among all races in that in his madness Gabriel has seen St. Peter's book that has "everybody's name what was ever born" (26). If, as Gabriel predicts, everyone is going to heaven, then Wilson seems to express hope for the human race to overcome racial boundaries.

Charles Fuller portrays both the pessimism found in Wolfe's work and the

optimism found in Wilson's work. The flashbacks resurrect the madness of Sergeant Waters, victim of discrimination and victimizer of fellow Blacks. However, the resurrection in the final scene is clearly positive. All of the members of the 221st have been killed in combat, including the white Captain Taylor. Yet, Fuller resurrects the conversation between the Black Captain Davenport and Captain Taylor to predict a positive, sane future for race relations, as can be seen in Captain Taylor's last words: ". . . I was wrong, Davenport--about the bars--the uniform--about Negroes being in charge. I guess I'll have to get used to it" (100).

Through the resurrections of the Black soldier characters, the future for race-relations is predicted, and the reader, in a sense, also undergoes a resurrection. In the three plays from the 1980s, a history of discrimination is recreated, a history that gave rise to murder and madness. And while the madness of the Black experience is recreated, the madness is transformed into a potentially cathartic experience for the reader to be cleansed of a bitter past and, like the soldier characters portrayed by the three playwrights, projected into a future that may be positive.

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Biography

Born June 20, 1968 in Pinehurst, North Carolina, Ashley Reed Warren received her Bachelor's degree in English from Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia. An avid golfer, Ms. Warren played for the Division II National Champion Lady Lancer golf team from 1986 - 1990. Upon graduating from Longwood in 1990, Ms. Warren worked as a school teacher with the Moore County School System before returning to Longwood in 1991 to pursue a Master of Arts in English. Upon completion of her M.A., Ms. Warren will return to the Moore County Schools to continue her teaching career.