

A Scope for Hope – Brewster Place

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Abstract - The proud legacy of the African-American race is portrayed through the love, trust, and hope that women show in their lives. The struggle to survive unites these women with other African-Americans in history. The women of Brewster Place show that they can persevere, as the women who preceded them, through their relationships with other women. The Women of Brewster Place is a novel told in seven stories. Of the seven stories, six are centered on individual characters, while the final story is about the entire community. The primary characters and the title characters of each chapter are all women and residents of Brewster Place.



1 INTRODUCTION

Brewster Place is a housing development in an unnamed city. It seems destined to be an unfortunate place since the people linked to its creation are corrupt. Despite the secretive circumstances surrounding its development, Brewster Place survives for decades, offering a home to one new wave of migrants after another. The life history of Brewster Place comes to resemble the history of the country as the community changes with the historical changes. The stories within the novel are the stories of the residents.

2 FEMALE BONDING

The story of Mattie Michael is the first chapter in *The Women of Brewster Place*. As a young woman, Mattie becomes pregnant by Butch Fuller. When her father discovers her pregnancy, he beats her, resulting in Mattie leaving her house and arriving at Brewster Place.

The second chapter focuses on Etta Mae Johnson. Etta Mae likes to live freely. She is constantly moving around from place to place. When Etta's story begins, she has just arrived at Brewster Place to stay with Mattie. Although Etta is not religious, Mattie convinces her to attend the church. While there, Etta takes an interest in the preacher, and he takes one in her. Despite her past experiences, Etta fantasizes about their future life together. She is originally saddened by this realization and feels that no relationship is there to care for her and discovers that Mattie is there to care for her.

The third chapter tells the story of Kiswana Browne. Kiswana is one among the

few, who has chosen to live on Brewster Place. Kiswana has had a privileged life and has grown up in a wealthy household with many opportunities. She left college hoping to better the lives of black people. Her main goal is to make a difference in her world. Kiswana's mother comes to visit her at her new home in Brewster Place, and it is clear that she does not really approve of her daughter's new life. Kiswana becomes defensive because of her mother's criticism.

The fourth chapter focuses on Lucielia Turner. After Eva's death, Lucielia returned to her parents. Lucielia is now married to a worthless man, whom she loves him desperately. The realization of her husband's indifference towards her makes her life worth not to live. Mattie consoles and encourages her to face life boldly and not to grieve for her lost daughter.

Cora Lee's story is told in the fifth chapter. As a young girl, Cora Lee was obsessed with baby dolls, they were all she wanted for Christmas and her birthdays. Once Cora Lee discovers how babies are made, she wants to become pregnant and have one of her own. She does become pregnant, and she loves and adores the child while it is a baby; however, once the child has grown up some she becomes uninterested in the child's life. She then becomes pregnant again and again, until she ends up with seven children; all of them with different fathers except the two oldest. She is unable to care for any of them, except the current baby of the time. She is loving and kind to her children that night, yet after they are all asleep, she sleeps with another faceless man.

The sixth chapter combines the story of two women, Theresa and Lorraine. Theresa

and Lorraine are a lesbian couple who have recently moved to Brewster Place. Originally they are well-liked by the community, but when the local gossip convinces the rest of the town that they are lesbians, Theresa and Lorraine become shunned. As she is returning, she is cornered by a group of men. The men are cruel, and they want to show Lorraine what being with a real man is like. The group brutally rapes Lorraine and leaves her bloody and beaten in the alley. Ben finds Lorraine in the morning, and Lorraine, in her confusion, murders Ben by bashing his head in with brick.

The last chapter of the *Women of Brewster Place* is the block party. Kiswana plans the block party to help to promote changes in Brewster Place. She hopes the landlord will see their party, and will make some positive changes to Brewster Place. The women discover a splatter of blood on the wall where Ben was killed. They quickly begin to demolish the brick wall, by removing brick after brick. When Mattie finally awakens, the sun is shining. The story ends with the closing of Brewster Place. All the residents are evicted, and Brewster Place remains alone, with only the memories of the women who lived there to sustain it.

Throughout the story, the women must constantly struggle to survive in Brewster Place. A large part of the struggle deals with overcoming the evil of men. Mattie must learn to raise her son alone, as the father of her child has abandoned her. She must also accept the fact that her father is ashamed of her pregnancy, and as such she can never go home after he beats her to death. Finally, Mattie raises a selfish and dependent son. Basil depends on his mother for everything, yet he offers nothing in return. Once Mattie puts their house up for his bail, Basil leaves town, causing Mattie's move to Brewster Place. Mattie never hears from Basil again in the story. Etta also experiences difficulties with men. She is constantly sleeping with random men and she believes she can have something more with a man.

Kiswana is perhaps the only woman of Brewster Place who does not experience problems with a man. She appears to have an adequate boyfriend who she loves and who loves her in return. Kiswana's conflict lies elsewhere. She must learn to accept the differences between her and her mother; she must also realize that the two of them really

have more in common than she originally believed. Despite the different living arrangements between the two, they are both proud of their African heritage.

Lucielia has problems with a man as well, in particular her husband, Eugene. Her husband is a cruel man, who seems to care nothing for his wife or daughter. He even tells Lucielia that he does not want a second child, which causes Lucielia to get an abortion. He finally tells Lucielia that he is leaving her and their daughter for a so called job opportunity. Lucielia does not believe him, and as it turns out he is just leaving them; there is no job opportunity. While they are arguing, their daughter dies, and Eugene does not attend the funeral.

Cora Lee experiences problems with men in different stages of her life. The father of her first two children routinely beats her until she leaves. After him, Cora Lee has sex with many random and faceless men. With these men, she becomes pregnant multiple times, and she ends up with more children than she can handle. It is unclear what happened to all the fathers, but they definitely did not stick around to be in their children's lives. As a result, Cora Lee raises all of these children alone, yet she continues to sleep with a multitude of men.

Lorraine and Teresa have difficulties with men from the beginning of their story. Obviously Lorraine and Teresa are not fond of men on a sexual level, as they are lesbians. A group of men cruelly wound her with words and brutally rapes to the extent of death. Lorraine is the woman most hurt by men, as she is gang raped in a dark alley and dies. It is obvious that throughout the novel, women are consistently struggling against men.

3 SEXUALITY

The sexuality of each woman is a major part of her character. The time that Mattie allowed herself to feel anything sexual toward a man, her life was torn apart. Her father beat her and then disowned her and forced to flee from her home. Instead of chasing after men, she dedicated her time to care for her child. After Basil broke her heart by deserting her and leaving her homeless, she decides to have nothing to do with the male race and dedicated the rest of her life to care for her female friends. Etta Mae is contrary to Mattie in her realization of male sex. Later on, she

agrees Mattie in her view towards men. Kiswana Browne's sexuality is important because it leads her to discover that she is more like her mother than she realized. Through the similarities with the fetishes of her boyfriend and father, she finds that she and her mother are not different. Ciel continues to take her husband back, though he is abusive. Cora Lee's sexuality brings her the babies that she loves so much. She does not know how to care for her children but continues to have sex with random men to bring her new babies to care for. Theresa and Loraine are being lesbians are unable to make friends with men folk. A sexual act leads to Lorraine's death and the ultimate the demise of Brewster Place.

4 CONCLUSION

The theme is on the women community of the utmost importance in The Women of Brewster Place because it creates a unifying force which brings all women together. The women have been brought to Brewster Place,

because of men, each of them experiences the hardship of life in Brewster Place. The community itself influences the identity of the women in Brewster Place. Each woman is affected with some kind of grief with some man or other in their life. The wall of Brewster Place is also important as a symbol of oppression. The wall divides the inhabitants from the poor with rich. Thus the women of Brewster place stayed there with hope that definitely they can lead their lives without any men to support. They also try to identify their individuality in the future lives.

REFERENCES

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