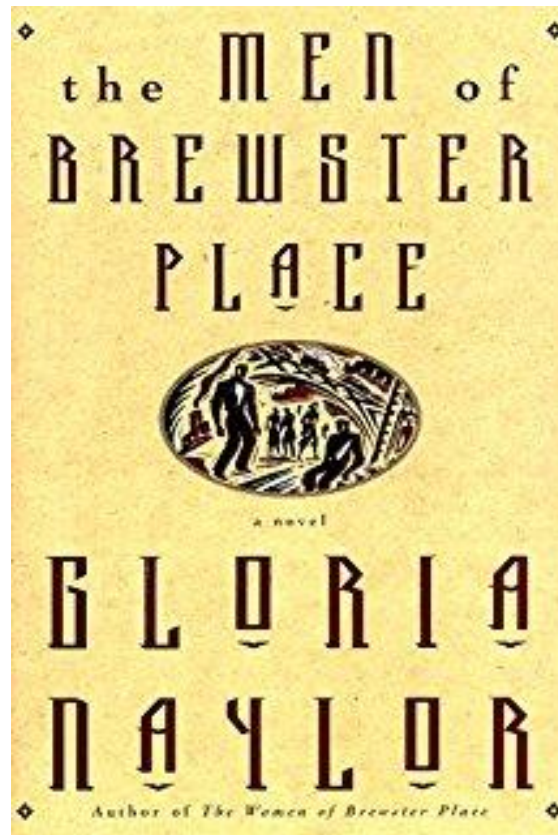


Powerlessness and Quest for Self in Gloria Naylor's
The Men of Brewster Place

D. Punitham and Dr.C. Santhosh Kumar



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Linden-Hills-Gloria-Naylor/dp/B004FRKSG0>

Gloria Naylor

Gloria Naylor was born in Harlem on January 25, 1950, later her parents settled in New York City. Though she was from a poor family background, she was well educated by her parents. She was taken to library by her mom to make her a great writer at her very young age. Naylor who used all these facilities became a fervent reader and used her knowledge in writing poems and short stories at her age of 12. She as a youngster decided to join the Jehovah Witness Missionary to serve people. She was so much fascinated by the speeches of Martin Luther King;

the assignation of him brought a major impact in Naylor. She felt that his death is a great blow to the uplift of black Community.

For next seven years she worked as missionary in order to search meaning of her life. She felt that she must stand against all odds and work for the development of her community. For this purpose, she felt that she must educate herself better, so at the age of 25 she left the missionary and joined Medgar Evers College and was later transferred to Brooklyn College to pursue a degree in English literature. Naylor did not stop with one degree. She worked as a telephone operator in hotels and with that money she pursued her degree in Nursing at Medgar Evers College.

Her First Novel *The Women Of Brewster Place* (1982)

Naylor's eyes opened when she read the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker. She started to write keeping these writers as her role model. In 1980 her short stories was published in *Essence Magazine* by Viking Publishing Company. The next year she published her first novel *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). This novel was about seven women of various ages and background who live in Brewster Place. Despite their differences they were united for one cause to fulfil their dreams deferred by racism and sexism. This novel bagged her The American Book Award for best first novel in 1983.

***Linden Hills* and Other Novels**

Naylor published her second novel *Linden Hills* in 1985. She published her third novel *Mama Day* in the year 1988. In 1992 she published her fourth novel *Bailey's Café* and in 1988 she published her fifth novel *The Men of Brewster Place*. Naylor in all her books has successfully sketched the damaging influences of Whiteman's standards and values on black community. In her writing she artistically gives the details of how the ideologies of whites have brought devastation in the cultural domain and in the value of living of African-Americans.

Black Characters

Naylor present her black characters with their own culture and own place because according to her having own identity is like having everything like health, wealth and family. Her novel *The Men of Brewster Place* she speaks about the problems of black men who are always in confused state and at instant wanted to regret to their female companions. Every male character in the novel whether married or not, they are somehow related to some female character as father, son, husband, boyfriend, or friend. Men in this story commits mistakes often, they feel socially insecure and politically unstable and are so weak to face any problems alone hence they feel comfortable to stick with their family for a happy living.

In this article the powerlessness of black men and their search for self will be discussed in detail with reference to Naylor's *The Men of Brewster Place*.

The Men of Brewster Place

The novel *The Men of Brewster Place* starts with a Prologue Dusk, which symbolically says that the bad times of all the men in Brewster place is ending. Ben's spirit is the narrator of

the novel. It revolves around seven men characters who don't share their secrets to others and they had nothing in common neither as a dream nor an objective. Ben is in the father figure of the Brewster place. His duty was to protect all the inhabitants of the place. Ben learns lesson from the life of his grandfather Jones. Later he learns his second lesson about how to behave in a society from Billy, who is a dedicated worker. Ben observes that black men are controlled by white in all aspects of life. He thinks that white men's economic control is everywhere.

Ben and Elvira

Ben marries Elvira, whom she finds so dedicated and perfect. After few days of their marriage Ben understands that Elvira is a racist, this creates many bitter experiences in him. Ben endured Elvira only because of their beautiful, lovely, little daughter. Mr. Clyde offered job to Ben and Elvira, to keep the house tide in his absence of him, the couple accepts the offer. After few months working in the house Ben found the changes in the behavior of his daughter, who becomes a victim of child abuse. When the child first complains to her parents Elvira did not believe and scolds her daughter for lying but Ben trusts his daughter and learns the third lesson of his life. But the third lesson was twofold, like his daughter's worst experience with Mr. Clyde, the death of his grandfather's sister who was raped to death at her young age of 10 by a powerful white man. This memory of his grandfather's sister makes him feel furious at times. But being a protective father of his only, child he felt completely powerless and impotent to help his daughter or to punish his white master.

After seeing the lethargic attitude of the parents, the daughter runs out of home to Memphis to earn more money. Ben finds the place much unsafe for his daughter. Here Naylor depicts that the poverty of the black men makes them powerless in rich white men society. Ben finds helpless and falls prey to his guilty consciousness. He feels powerless as he couldn't kill Clyde or Elvira and decides to kill himself by drinking hard.

Jerome

The second story is about Jerome, who was unable to speak, write or go out alone, he was an expert in repairing piano. This character of Naylor says that men should struggle against white's persecution until they succeed. The third story is about Basil, who searches his father Butch Fuller, after the death of his mother Mattie. He finds Butch Fuller and gets to know about the story of why his father left his mom. Later Basil falls in love with Keisha who was mother of two children. Keisha's children get close with Ben but Keisha takes away the kids from Basil and when they meet again everything was changed Keisha started living once again with Penny and her children did not recognize Basil. He gets terrified and swallows all his pain with the hope of new dream and aims.

Eugene

The novels fourth character is Eugene, who left his wife as he was unemployed. Though he loved his wife and daughter unconditionally he couldn't be with them because of his ill-fate. He feels bad for the death of his daughter and so beats himself with leather whip as a punishment for his sin. Ben's fifth introduction is Reverend Moreland T. Woods, minister of Sinai Baptist Church. He gets married to Annette. Moreland starts seducing women who comes for help from

him. When Deacon Bennett gets to know this he calls for a meeting against Moreland. In order to escape the situation Moreland plans to put the blame on Deacon that he is responsible for the pregnancy of Sister Louise, Deacon couldn't win against injustice, but he never stopped his spirit for fighting against injustice.

With the smooth soul that Ben has identified, Woods becomes a means by which the Brewster Place members of Sinai can measure their own ragged wounds of the soul. Sinai will continue because people like Deacon Bennett will never stop fighting for it. Moreland T. Woods, on the other hand, is only passing through. (12)

C.C. Baker

The sixth character is C.C. Baker, who is known for his violence and who was involved in the rape case of Lorraine. He also kills his brother Hakim.

He is only twelve years old when his mother and father stop trying. They can't keep him in school and off the streets. His father came back from Vietnam with one leg and three of his fingers blown off. . . . His mother works full-time to keep them off welfare. But there are six children in this home – two his father brought from another marriage – and only so much energy to go around. They lost the oldest boy, Hakim to the streets and he hasn't been home in three years. (123)

Abshu

The last character of novel is Abshu, He was the most positive and is like a role model for next generations to come. He is a playwright and was so much attached to his family; he had two sisters and a little brother. His father was a rude man and he used to beat Abushu's mother as he was alcoholic, because of this Child's Protection Agency puts all four children in different homes. Abshu's mother tries to bring them back to their home. Abshu has been taken by Mason family. Abshu finishes his graduation and helped his mom with the money he got. Abshu started to fight against injustice done against women and redeemed them. This characterizing of Abshu shows that if men of Brewster Place when walked in right path they get good position in the society.

Dealing with Men's Problems

Only few women writers wrote about men's problems. Gloria Naylor is one such writer who wrote on the black men problems in a society. *The Men of Brewster Place* is a classic example for bringing forward the conditions of black men to the world. She has so well portrayed the good and bad shades of seven black men characters in her novel; she has attempted to bring out the self-identity and self-respect of black men in this novel. This study shows that not only Black women, but also Black men are under depression. The readers can be how Naylor has expounded the portrayed of Powerless black men in American society.

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