# From the Quest of the American Dream to the Discovery of the American Nightmare in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*

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## Abstract

*The quest of the American dream has, over history, been the driving force behind American mass immigration. To this regard, we should bear in mind that the American dream is an ideology that encompasses various myths that make America an El Dorado. This study brings to light the reality of the American dream. From a socio-economic, even though America is viewed as an El Dorado, we should acknowledge that the American dream often turns into the American nightmare for some individuals who were hopeful. First of all, we investigate American pull factors that nourish considerably immigrants' hopes and aspirations in Brown Girl, Brownstones. Secondly, our analysis centers on obstacles including race which is an impediment of socio-economic integration. To end, it is considerable to point out that the difficulty of achieving the American dream fuels the loss of hope, destruction either moral or physical as witnessed in Marshall's novel.*
***Key words**: American dream, American nightmare, failure, immigration, success.*

## Résumé

*La quête du rêve américain a été, au cours de l'histoire, le moteur de l'immigration massive américaine. À cet égard, il convient de garder à l'esprit que le rêve américain est une idéologie qui englobe divers mythes faisant de l'Amérique un Eldorado. Cette étude met en lumière la réalité du rêve américain. D'un point de vue socio-économique, même si l'Amérique est considérée comme un Eldorado, nous devons reconnaître que le rêve américain se transforme souvent en cauchemar américain pour certains individus qui étaient pleins d'espoir. Tout d'abord, nous étudions les facteurs d'attraction américains qui nourrissent considérablement les espoirs et les aspirations des immigrants dans Brown Girl, Brownstones. Deuxièmement, notre analyse se concentre sur les obstacles, y compris la race qui est une entrave à l'intégration socio-économique. Pour terminer, il est important de*

*souligner que la difficulté de réaliser le rêve américain alimente la perte d'espoir, la destruction morale ou physique comme en témoigne le roman de Marshall.*
***Mots clés** : Rêve américain, cauchemar américain, échec, immigration, réussite.*

## Introduction

*Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), being Paule Marshall's debut novel, is about the story of a Barbadian immigrant family that, just like many other immigrant families, struggles to fulfill its goals in America. Long referred to as the greatest nation on earth, America has over its history welcomed and continues to welcome immigrants from all over the world. The rationale behind this immigration to America can be, in fact, analyzed through different angles. For instance, from a socio-economic approach, America is an immigrant country which owes its economic development to immigrants who, originating from all over the world, are inspired by ideas and incentives including the American dream, the land of opportunity, and the land of the free, etc.

In her novel, Marshall emphasizes some of these themes by introducing characters that are deeply inspired by the American dream which is among the most attracting pull factors. However, regardless of their determination to achieve the dream, it is important to observe that some of them end up falling into the American nightmare on account of their misinterpretation of the dream or their desire to achieve it whatever the final result. To this point, Marshall presents the Barbadian family in which Selina's parents, Silla and Deighton, nourish conflicting ambitions. On the one hand, Selina's mother dreams to own a brownstone house as a symbol of her success whereas her father's goal is, on the other hand, to earn much money in America and go back to Barbados where he wants to build a house.

Marshall, in portraying Selina's parents conflicting ambitions, describes how the quest for the American dream has led to the loss of moral values, the loss of identity, corruption, and destruction both moral and physical, which are issues that we consider as creating a nightmare in the Barbadian family. In order to buy a brownstone house, Silla makes her husband suffer both morally and physically. The latter, although he is portrayed as a day dreamer by some critics of the novel, aspires to be recruited as an office clerk so as to meet his expectations, a dream that will never come true. By contrast to many immigrants in the Barbadian community, Deighton is a skilled immigrant whose goal is to work as an accountant to fulfil his dream. Unfortunately, in spite of his hopes and aspirations, he will go through various challenges and obstacles that contributed to his loss of hope and downfall.

On the economic level for example, Deighton is victim of racial discrimination, an issue which Marshall chronicles in these terms, *"you can know all the accounting there is, these people still not gon have you up in their fancy office and pulling down the money same as them"* (Marshall, 1959: 22). Marshall, in this excerpt, depicts a scene in which Deighton's friend, Seifert, reminds him how difficult it is for black immigrants to secure a good job irrespective of their competence. Though he is an accountant by profession, Deighton finds it difficult to hold a position which meets his know how simply because he is a black immigrant. In a study, Adam David Miller brings to light the difference that exists between black and white immigrants when it comes to finding a well-paid job:

> The small Barbadian group (Bajan as they call themselves) lived in many ways like the poor European ethnics. Given the worst and poorest paying jobs, they worked hard, saved their money, sacrificed to educate

> their children for jobs better than those they had, exploited their own kind and others, looked down on other ethnics, the Trinidadians in particular, and U.S. blacks. In short, they seemed to be like other U.S. immigrants. But they weren't. They were black immigrants in a land that favored white immigrants. (Miller, 1972: 56-58)

As clearly expressed in the above passage, Barbadian immigrants have great aspirations in that they consider themselves as being superior to other ethnic groups, the Trinidadians for instance. However, despite their hope to achieve their goals through hard work, they realize that they live in a society where life is not what it appears to be for most of them. In most cases, they will be subject to racism, discrimination, and other obstacles that hinder their quest for the American Dream. Marshall clearly exemplifies these issues through characters that, at the beginning, had great hopes and aspirations but unfortunately end up in a life that is not promising for some of them.

This paper seeks to retrace the story of those immigrants who, from the quest of the American dream, acknowledged that they have to face another reality which is the American nightmare. The first section of this study explains how American pull factors have shaped Deighton's hopes and aspirations. Thus, despite these incentives, the second section provides information on race which we consider as an impediment of socio-economic integration. The final section of this article summarizes topics including the loss of hope, moral and physical destruction which, among other issues, exemplifies the American nightmare.

## 1. American Pull Factors and Immigrants' Hopes and Aspirations

As previously indicated in this study, America is historically called the greatest nation on earth and we should highlight that such an ideology is, in a sense, part of the incentives that induce people who consider it a place where, based on the definition of the American dream, everybody has the chance to fulfil his or her dreams. The image of America has, in this regard, been sold to the rest of the world and it is, in fact, this image which entices characters in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, a novel in which Marshall helps us better understand how America is perceived outside. When leaving Barbados, immigrants left behind them some push factors and hoped to have a bright future in America. Marshall, in this way, presents the story of Deighton who, rather than staying and working for his native country, preferred to move to another country by relying on pull factors which one can oppose to the push factors in Barbados.

To this regard, just like many immigrants, Deighton dreams to make his life in America regardless of the warnings or information he receives from his community and according to which they are in a society where black immigrants have little chance to be hired in well-paying positions. For him, he is, by contrast to the other members of the Barbadian community in Brooklyn, a skilled person and he will use his competence in accounting to make it, *"He held up the accounting manual. This gon do it. I gon breeze through the course 'cause I was always good in figures. I ain never gon bother my head with all this preliminary work they sending now"* (Marshall, 1959: 11). Through Deighton, Marshall examines the theme of optimism

since, no matter how difficult his living conditions are, he still believes in a bright future.

This perception of America as an El Dorado has brought to this country different waves of immigrants coming from all over the world while hoping to have a better life via material gains. In addition to Deighton, we can find in Marshall's novel other characters that are driven to the United States by different pull factors. Among those characters, Silla Boyce, Deighton's wife, is a good illustration and, unlike Deighton, she is introduced as a character whose final objective is success. Even though she criticizes the white community, she does not care much about the type of jobs she is offered simply because she yearns to buy a brownstone house.

Considering these two main characters, we can see how American pull factors, in particular the American dream, have shaped immigrants' attitudes toward success. Though they have conflicting ambitions, both Deighton and Silla have left their country in the hope of grasping economic opportunities that they found it difficult to have in their home country. As a matter of fact, Silla declares, *"it's a terrible thing to know that you gon be poor all yuh life, no matter how hard you work"* (Marshall, 1959: 70). Here, Silla calls into question the difficulty of succeeding in her native country even if you work hard. Indeed, Silla's words echo both the economic and political system of Barbados, a former British colony, where blacks are treated as inferior to whites, *"People having to work for next skin for nothing. The white people treating we like slaves still and we taking it. The rum shop and the church join together to keep we pacify and in ignorance"* (Marshall, 1959: 70).

By the means of the above excerpt, Marshall sheds light on the economic hardships that immigrants, namely Barbadians, experienced in their country on account of the heritage of the

British Empire. Thus, as Silla stated, they were exploited by white people whom she terms as "next skin". To escape from this situation, they decided therefore to migrate to a place where they hoped not only to have economic opportunities but more importantly to become free since, as she argued, white people treat them like slaves in their own country. On the basis of Silla's words, we should conclude that individual freedom is an important pull factor which draws many individuals to America which, as above noted, is considered as the land of the free.

Ideas about individual freedom or the ideology of the land of the free is what Emma Lazarus advocates in "The New Colossus", a poem written on the plaque of the Statue of Liberty to illustrate how immigrants are welcomed to America. In this poem, one can read words that express hope, freedom, and the healing of sufferings which are among the most attracting pull factors. In another sense, we can suggest that individual freedom allows characters to have private property rather than working for other people all your life as Silla said. For her, private property is not only a symbol of economic success but also of political one. It is therefore for this reason that she invites her husband to open his eyes and try to earn his living instead of relying on others.

Marshall, through the description of her two main characters namely Deighton and Silla, helps us better understand how immigrants have different interpretations of the American dream. Silla, as we above-mentioned, is more determined to achieve the dream compared to Deighton whose aim is to earn a lot of money and goes back to Barbados a country where it is difficult to fulfill one's dreams. By contrast, the main pull factor that attracts Silla is homeownership which Marshall depicts as the brownstone and economic advancement. Studying *Brown*

*Girl, Brownstones*, Marlene Clark insists on the concept of the brownstone house by recalling Silla's words:

> Land on a lot with a brownstone and buy it; carve up the interior of the purchase into as many rooms as possible; rent those rooms at the most exorbitant the market will bear; save the monies in excess of costs; with those savings buy a second brownstone and carve up its interior into as many rooms as possible; rent those for the most exorbitant rent the market will bear. (Marlene Clark, web)

The owning of a brownstone is a symbol of belonging to the upper class living in Brooklyn. Similar to many immigrant communities in America, the Barbadian community in which Silla belongs is part of the "third class", in other terms the poorest class. She explains to Selina *"The Third class is a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time God sun rise in this heaven till it sun set" and "working harder than a man at the age of ten,"*. (Marshall, 1959: 45)

Thus, such a social status is among the factors that motivate them to work hard in order to achieve their dream of buying brownstone houses regardless of the obstacles they encounter. With respect to this analysis, it is of great importance to note that the possession of brownstone houses reflects Barbadians' hopes and aspirations. The desire to acquire these houses is without any doubt what makes Silla a particular person in the community since, unlike both her husband and daughter Selina, she believes in success which is the result of hard work.

Mary Helen Washington, one critic of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, acknowledges Silla's hard work when she observes that, *"Silla's life is a paradigm of the Barbadian community. Her endurance, her age, her devotion to the dollar*

*and property, her determination to survive in this man country is theirs. Her lights and shadows are theirs"* (Washington, web).

From a socio-economic angle, Silla's yearning to succeed or achieve her version of the American dream is inspired by other immigrants whom she considers as examples. As Marshall writes it, Jewish immigrants represent good example of success and, for Silla, the Barbadian community should follow them. In her words, *"Every West Indian out here taking a lesson from the Jew landlord and converting these old houses into rooming houses—making the closets-self into rooms some them!—and pulling down plenty-plenty money by the week,"* (Marshall, 1959: 171).

Marshall, in this passage, portrays Silla's inner personality which is, throughout the novel, reflected by her desire to acquire a brownstone house in order to make much money by renting the rooms to other people. Unlike some immigrants in the Barbadian community, Silla has planned how she wants to make her dream becomes true. In describing Silla's personality, Marshall recalls how some immigrants are, regardless of the obstacles they encounter, determined to find their way in America. Such a determination is, among other things, one the tenets that can lead to the achievement of the American dream. Nonetheless, whatever the determination that immigrants have, they are too often subjugated to some obstacles that obstruct their quest of the American dream. Through our exploration of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, we notice that race can constitute an impediment to socio-economic integration.

## 2. Race as an Impediment of Socio-economic Integration

Race, based on the definition proposed by the *Britannica*

*Dictionary*, is *"the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups on the basis of inherited physical and behavioral differences"* (*Britannica*, web). In the same vein, it evokes that *"In the United States, for example, the term race generally refers to a group of people who have in common some visible physical traits, such as skin color, hair texture, facial features, and eye shape"* (*Britannica*, web). Building upon these two excerpts drawn from the *Britannica*, we should admit that race, whatever the definition that it can be given, has always to do with skin color through which a group of people differs from another one.

In the field of literature, the term race has widely been used by many authors. Marshall, in this perspective, lays emphasis on some characters whose socio-economic integration is not easy owing to their race that differs to the American mainstream race or white race. While some immigrants may easily integrate to the American society thanks to their race, it is obvious that others are not only victim of rejection but also of discrimination in the workplace. With regard to rejection and discrimination in the workplace, Marshall describes the story of Deighton Boyce, one of the immigrants of the Barbadian community in Brooklyn.

Similar to many other immigrants in the United States, Deighton is victim of racial discrimination in the workplace and that is what has undeniably affected his socio-economic integration. To put it differently, he could not integrate into the white society and he is, at the same time, seen as a stranger in his Barbadian community because he does not share the community's cultural values or attitudes. Furthermore, for some critics of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, he has lost his identity provided that he tries to resemble to the white employers through his clothing and behaviour but unfortunately his skin color is what impedes his dream of becoming literally a white person. Concerning racism in Marshall's novel, Deanna Jenkins states

that, *"From the moment the reader picks up the book Brown Girl, Brownstones, it is evident that color plays a major role in the story" (*Jenkins, web).

The problem of race and socio-economic integration has long marked American history and it is an issue that has been examined by various authors in different fields. In a report "Chasing the dream of equity: How policy has shaped racial economic disparities" published in *Economic Policy Institute* (2023), the author states that:

> Systemic racism has been at the heart of policy decisions that deprived Black Americans and other people of color of economic opportunity, security, and freedom. This history of racial injustice and economic inequality is embedded within American attitudes, ideas, institutions, and policies. (Maye, Adewale)

Through the above quotation, we realize that race may play an important role when it comes to achieving socio-economic opportunity. To this point, we notice that, some groups referred to as minorities, are unfortunately victim of a systemic racism that reduces their chance of achieving the American dream. Marshall, by the portrayal of some characters including Deighton and her daughter Selina, explains clearly how systemic racism prevents people of colour from fulfilling their dream. When they leave their countries, immigrants are hopefully driven by ideologies or pull factors that make America a land of opportunity. Despite those pull factors, it remains to observe that systemic racism has been implemented in order to hinder integration and socio-economic mobility for people of colour considered as not being real Americans based on their origins.

To illustrate this perspective, we can quote President Herbert Hoover, American 31st President who, during his presidency (1929-1933), led a wide-ranging campaign with the slogan "American Jobs for Real Americans" (web) in a period when Mexican immigrants and others from Europe or elsewhere were invading the United States. The slogan "American Jobs for Real Americans", though it was created in a real context marking the Great Depression, can be applied to *Brown Girl, Brownstones* more specifically with the case of Deighton who, as we know it, is not an American even less a real American.

To further shed light on the issue of race and its impact on the social or economic integration of immigrants, one can refer to a study made by John Hope Franklin and Henry Louis Gates Jr. "Race in America: Looking back, Looking Forward". In quoting Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, they write:

> In memory they are equal to the whites; in reason, much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid…. They seem to require less sleep. A black, after hard labour throughout the day, will be the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight (…) they are more ardent after the female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender, delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. (Franklin and Gates Jr.)

In this assertion, the use of the subject personal pronoun "they" shows at which point the authors draw our attention to black people whom they compare with the white ones. For them, black people work hard but compared to the whites they have less chance and as we have already stated this is what hinders

their integration either social or economic. Dealing with black people in our study, we mostly refer to immigrants from the Caribbeans. Thus, commenting upon Marshall's novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, other authors are interested by the theme of race. As a case in point, we can mention Martin Japtok whose study "Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones: Reconciling Ethnicity and Individualism" underlines issues pertaining to race. Recalling Marcus Garvey's "African Fundamentalism" (1925), Japtok notes:

> Remember always that the Jew in his political and economic urge is always first a Jew; the white man is first a white man under all circumstances, and you can do no less than being first and always a Negro, and then all else will take care of itself. Race appears here as the basis of all action. Know who you are, "racially", and you know what to do. Solidarity underwrites both the more extreme and the more moderate forms of nationalism, Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and Negritude. (Martin Japtok)

Considering race as being the basis of all action, Japtok sensitizes people to know who they are racially in order to know what to do. However, when we apply this statement to *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, we can say that Marshall's character Deighton does know whom he is from a racial point of view and that is why he is lost to the point of not knowing what to do. By contrast to him, her wife Silla can be viewed as knowing herself and more importantly her place in society. As earlier indicated, Deighton is a qualified accountant and due to his professional status he wants to hold a position that meets his skills contrary to the other members of the Barbadian community who are unskilled immigrants.

Bearing in mind his attitude, we may suggest that Deighton seems to ignore the systemic racism that is present in the job market as is the case in other sectors. His ignorance toward racism can be illustrated in these terms, *"Soon as I catch my hand here. You see this? He held up the accounting manual. This gon do it. I gon breeze through the course 'cause I was always good in figures. I ain never gon bother my head with all this preliminary work they sending now"* (Marshall, 1959: 11). These words witness the racism that Deighton faces in the job market because employers offer him a position that is inferior to what he expects. He further argues that, *"I gon wait till they send the real facts and study them. Then a job making descent money and we go"* (Marshall, 1959: 11).

In spite of the racial discrimination he experiences, Marshall evidences Deighton's optimist attitude in the above passage. To a certain extent, though we consider some characters as being aware of the obstacles that obstruct their socio-economic integration, Silla's husband advocates for a well-paid position so as to make descent money and go back home. With no doubt, his dream of holding such a position will never come true on account of a system put in place to relegate black people and other minorities behind white people. In an article "Brown Girl, Brownstones by Paule Marshall", Adam David Miller investigates questions about racism. He argues that:

> The small Barbadian group (Bajan as they call themselves) lived in many ways like the poor European ethnics. Given the worst and poorest paying jobs, they worked hard, saved their money, sacrificed to educate their children for jobs better than those they had, exploited their own kind and others, looked down on other ethnics, the Trinidadians in particular, and U.S. blacks. In short, they seemed to be like other U.S.

> immigrants. But they weren't. They were black immigrants in a land that favored white immigrants. (Miller, 1972: 56-58)

In like manner, Philip Deutsch, in "The American Dream is Still", opines that, *"Blacks are twice as likely to be poor compared to other races, and eight times as likely to be imprisoned. Only 75 percent of blacks have received post high school education, compared to 85 percent of whites. Not surprisingly, blacks on average also make less money than whites"* (Deutsch, web). Deutsch comparison of black people with regard to others is very telling provided that the former undergo diverse obstacles almost in all sectors. To some extent, those various obstacles are consequently what conduct to the loss of hope, moral and physical destruction as it is evidenced in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*.

## 3. The Loss of Hope, Moral and Physical Destruction

*Brown Girl, Brownstones*, like Marshall other novels, is a novel that is rich in themes which have drawn the attention of many scholars. In this perspective, themes such as the loss of hope, destruction either moral or physical are well discussed by Marshall who brings to light the other side of America. In other words, as earlier asserted, America is a land of opportunity where everybody can achieve the American dream, an ideology according to which everyone is able to fulfil his or her dream regardless of their race, religion, social status, or other characteristics. As we observed it in the first section of this study, immigrants have hope and aspirations that are profoundly linked to the American dream.

In this sense, some of them will discover the other side of America which does not guarantee success to everybody as they believed it. This other side of America is what we associate

to the American nightmare instead of the American dream. In some passages of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Marshall presents Barbadian immigrants as people full of hope who left Barbados in order to make new lives in America. Upon their arrival, some of them, including Deighton and Selina just to name but a few, realize that what they believed is different from what they found on site. Deighton, for example, is a character through whom Marshall chronicles the concept of the American nightmare considering the multiple obstacles and deceptions he went through.

As a matter of fact, while discussing with his daughter Selina, Deighton confessed "*I got big plans or nothing a-tall. That's the way a man does do things,"* (*Brown Girl, Brownstones,* 1959: 83). His determination to make his dream comes true is accordingly what will give birth to Deighton's failure which results in his moral and physical destruction. Though he was full of hope at a certain moment, it is worth acknowledging that he ends up losing hope due to the sad experiences he came across during his journey in Brooklyn. When remembering to Barbados, his native land, he expressed his regret as follows *"poor poor but sweet enough"* (*Brown Girl, Brownstones,* 1959:11). His discussion with his daughter Selina illustrates at which point he is hopeful but unfortunately he will never see his "big plans" be fulfilled.

Deighton along with other characters such as Selina, his daughter, and Clive, Selina's boyfriend, are characters that illustrate themes including the loss of hope, moral and physical destruction. Selina, for instance, is like his father Deighton; that is to say she couldn't make her life in Brooklyn unlike her mother Silla Boyce, the hardworking Barbadian woman. Selina is victim of the binary opposition of her parents and the influence of the outside world embodied by Suggie. The opposition of her

parents results in the absence of a family unit, which Heather Hathaway portrays in *Caribbean Waves: Relocating Claude Mckay and Paule Marshall* (1999). While Silla is materialist and Deighton pessimist in some circumstances, Selina follows her own way in order to forge her identity. Hathaway explains:

> These very differences help Selina carve out her own independent identity, they also suggest at this point certain "outlawed" behaviors and emotions that distance her from the comfort and (approval) of the family—and larger societal— circle. Selina stands as peripheral to the family unit and attributes this status to her own differences from her sibling (s) and parents, but as the novel unfolds, both we and Selina come to recognize that the reason for her exclusion is the absence of a family unit in the first place—and more importantly, that this absence is due to radically different responses to the American environment on the part of each of her immigrant parents. (Hathaway, 1999: 94)

Marshall, through these characters, examines the theme of failure which is clearly marked by the inability to achieve the American dream on account of racism and poverty which some characters will experience. As a consequence, the inability to achieve the American dream has engendered many problems in the Barbadian community provided that some members including Silla Boyce are ready to achieve their dream by all means necessary. To illustrate this perspective, let's recall that Deighton has inherited a plot of land in Barbados but unfortunately Silla will sell it secretly without his husband's consent. After the sale of the land, Deighton felt betrayed by his own wife who was supposed to support him in his fight against injustice and racism. Through the sale of the land, Marshall

examines the theme of materialism which has a lot of setbacks in the Boyce family:

> For long months the question of the land draped itself in a thin gauze throughout the house and they were all caught within its mesh. At night the children were often awakened by muffled arguments from the master bedroom; savage words sparked in the darkness: sell it, sell it (…) and always the same reply, growing more weary each night but persisting, It' s mine to do as I please. (*Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 1959: 51)

Silla's materialistic attitude has negatively shaped her behaviour and relationship with her neighbors. Trudier Harris, in "No Outlet for the Blues: Silla Boyce's Plight in Brown Girl, Brownstones", thematizes this longing for material acquisition. In Harris's words, success implies the failure and misuse of others according to Silla and that is what has happened with Deighton, his husband. With reference to Silla's material spirit, Harris observes:

> People got to make their own way. And nearly always to make your way in this Christ world you got to be hard and sometimes misuse others, even your own. Oh, nobody wun admit it. We don talk about it, but we does live by it—each in his own way… Nobody wun admit it, but people got a right to claw their way to the top and those on top got a right to scuffle to stay there… Silla's philosophy is that of the driven capitalist, not of the humanitarian. She has accepted the tenets of the American Dream to the point of exploitation of people (especially Blacks from the American South)… Her plight is especially destructive because she has adopted the values of an avaricious society which has not shown

> her in turn how to rid herself completely of conscience. (Trudier Harris, 11)

Silla has greatly contributed to Deighton's downfall because in addition to selling the plot of land, she accused him of being an illegal immigrant, which caused his deportation and suicide before their arrival to Barbados. Describing this scene that marks the return to Barbados, Marshall summarizes Deighton's moral destruction, symbolized by Silla's betrayal, and physical destruction illustrated by his suicide. The search for materialism or the quest of the American dream has turned wrong for Deighton who, in addition to being accused of being an illegal immigrant, will lose his life in the sea.

At this stage of the novel, Marshall denounces the dark side of materialism given that Silla, as we stated above, is ready to fulfill her dream by all means necessary. But, in order to fulfill this dream there is a price to pay and that is the death of her husband and the fact of being rejected by her daughter Selina who was closer to his father. Deighton's physical destruction and his closeness to Selina can also be exemplified by his accident while working in a company where his wife worked too. Discussing with Selina, Silla points out that:

> Yuh father had something happen to his arm today at the factory. Nothing serious but he's in the hospital for a few days…". The strength that had brought her to her feet failed her now and she sank down. They start up some new machine and he asks to work on it without knowing what it gave and the arm got caught. The nerve gone, they say. (Marshall, 1959: 154-155)

What can we drawn from the above passage is that Deighton's accident is caused by his lack of skill to handle the

machine that injured him. From another angle, this proves that he wanted to earn his living and had no choice than accept the job offered to him. Unfortunately, the desire to earn his living compels him to hold a job which does match his skills and that results to his physical destruction, which Marshall explains through the accident.

## Conclusion

The American dream, just like many other ideologies that make America a land of opportunity, is the most powerful ideology which, over history, has attracted a lot of immigrants to the United States. The latter, as we explained throughout this study, are on the one hand individuals who very often leave their countries with the hope of achieving the American dream. On the other hand, they may find in America socio-economic problems that infringe their quest of the American dream. Exploring *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, we noticed that the pursuit of the American dream implies several obstacles and hardships some characters went through.

Marshall, in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, presents the American dream as a concept which has two sides that must be necessarily taken into account. Success, although it may be difficult to be achieved, is the first side that we discover when we talk about the American dream. By contrast, failure is another aspect that is very important to consider when dealing with the American dream. Regarding this perspective, it is worth noting that the quest of the dream requires sometimes high costs that lead individuals to degradation. Silla's relentless attitude to own a brownstone house is a good example that illustrates such a perspective.

Though she is depicted as a hardworking person who embodies the American dream, Silla is a corrupt character whose obsession with regard to the brownstone house has led to

emotional and spiritual degradation. She has no sympathy toward his husband who experiences multiple obstacles in Brooklyn. In this sense, Silla prioritizes material success over love to the point of being even hated by Selina whom, as we observed in previous passages, is closer to his father than her mother. Selina does not share her mother's attitude toward materialism and that is what brings forth her detachment with regard to the community's values and rules that are from a social stance linked to the owning of a brownstone house.

As we earlier pointed out, the American dream is a crucial pull factor that has, over the years, lured many immigrants to the United States. However, even though it has been historically defined from different angles that highlight material success, property, freedom and equality, the promise of a more comfortable life, we should acknowledge that the American dream, very often, may turn into the American nightmare. For some people, problems such as racism, discrimination make it difficult to move up the economic ladder and as a consequence their hope of achieving the dream turns into a nightmare as Marshall illustrates it in her novel with some characters whose dream will never come true. From a social standpoint, Marshall demonstrates that family is more important than material acquisition provided that the Boyce family will be split up on account of each member who seeks to put its own interests first.

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