

threatens their marriage while men spend their time “estimating her, summing her up, wandering up her (Petry 13).” While much of her life is spent under the rule of a white man’s stick, the community of blacks also does not fully accept her because of her mixed skin and flowing hair. Throughout the constant objectifying tone of Petry, from the atmosphere of the street to the daily hurdles Lutie must surpass, she as a protagonist must find the motivations to overcome the surface struggles that are analogous with the worldly economic, social, and emotional situation of the time.

Lutie’s lifestyle mirrors the criticism of the American Dream from the 1940’s. While the white work force has drawn up this achievable and prosperous idea of what a future appears to be, the black community is left to “shining shoes and washing clothes and scrubbing floor for years and years (70).” While they can continue to propel themselves forward, it remains “a circle, and she could keep on going around it forever and keep on ending up in the same place.” This realistic denunciation of a reachable and picturesque lifestyle leaves it to be only a facile dream by the end of the novel. Lutie cannot achieve the dream because she refuses to look past the segregation that is inhibiting her efforts so that she can see the reality of the dream: an abstract idea beyond the limitations of segregation that can only develop as an illusion in a woman’s mind.