

## MONEY IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S 'LINDEN HILLS'

VAISHNAVI.POKURI, DR. VISHNU DIVYA

**Abstract:** Gloria Naylor is a renowned African American writer in her second novel 'Linden Hills' warns the afro Americans of the impending danger of loosing their uniqueness and individuality in their desire to pursue the American dream. She depicts a middle class afro American society in Linden hills who loose 'the mirror in their souls' for gaining ascendancy in Linden Hills. The moral degradation is depicted through various characters including the protagonist Luther Nedeed. Naylor through her excellent narrative skills and literary techniques brings out the abysmal fall of the characters in their pursuit of money-material advancement.

**Keywords:** afro American, individuality, material, moral degradation.

**Introduction:** Gloria Naylor is an acclaimed Afro American writer and has won several distinctions to her credit. Her first book 'The Women of Brewster Place' has won the American Book Award for the best novel in 1983. Her second novel Linden Hills was published in 1985. Her novels celebrate afro American culture within the wider American culture. Linden Hills deals with the dual status of Afro-Americans striving to be part of America and working for the American Dream. Naylor's novels are known for its exceptional style spewed with symbols and allegory. Her second work Linden Hills speaks about the predicament of Afro Americans who blindly pursue the American dream of material success. The novel is about middle class Afro-American society which strives to acquire material success unconsciously loosing its very essence. Naylor's symbolism seems to echo D.H. Lawrence's sentiment that America is a death society.

Naylor is highly read and one can find the influence of Dante's Inferno in "Linden Hills". Similar to the Dante's Inferno the central character Luther Nedeed lives at the bottom of Linden Hills besides a frozen moat. Just as deadly sins are close to Lucifer in the Inferno we find that residents, who have achieved material success but have deteriorated morally, move towards Luther Nedeed. Naylor through her language and narrative techniques creates an eerie atmosphere. The reader travels through Linden hills and learns about the dual status and moral degradation of the residents of Linden Hills along with Wille and Lester and through third person narration-typical of Naylor's style.

Linden Hills was born out of Luther Nedeed's vision to make it an 'ebony jewel' and 'black wad of spit in the white eye of America'(pg9)LH. For this very purpose he sold his octoroon wife and children, thus putting material success above family. Although generations of Nedeeds succeed in making Linden Hills a haven for materially successful people, the residents had gradually lost 'the mirror in their souls'-their afro American identity. Several characters like Winston, Maxwell Symth, Xavier, Mrs. Tilson, Laurel Dumont, Mr.Hollins, Mr. Chester along with Luther

Nedeed lead a deceptive life only to fall in line with the materialistic rules of Linden Hills. Naylor through many loosely knit plots brings out the negative role money plays in the lives of various residents of Linden Hills. Robert Saunders states that 'Linden Hills is Hell, and in place of morality lies the single-minded thirst for financial success. As was true in the Inferno, the price paid is in human souls'.

Mrs. Tilson's desire for money drove her husband to work two jobs until he died of heart-attack. She, along with her daughter Roxanne wishes to find a suitable bridegroom in order to climb the social ladder in Linden Hills. Willie and Lester seek part time employment in order to earn money for Christmas presents. "Willie, its torment ...'cause it's less than a week till Christmas and I ain't got the **money** to buy them something expensive. It's Chanel or nothing. And I ain't got no Chanel money, so its nothing. And then I'm nothing and they've made their point again for another year. (LH pg 31)

Willie and Lester's first errand is at Winston's marriage. Willie and later Lester find out that Winston is forcing himself to marry Cassandra while he loves David, a lesbian. He succumbs to the pressure of his father and the rules of Linden Hills. Winston swaps personal happiness to materialistic advancement. The resultant effect is that marriage is like mourning as Winston has a frown throughout the marriage ceremony.

Willie and Lester visit Mr. Chester who has lost his wife Lycentia. Although Chester is secretly preparing to restart his life he frequently repeats the phrase "Lycentia would have wanted it that way' though he is not really missing her. During Lycentia's wake the Linden Hills residents actually seem to enjoy the catered food rather than mourn her death. During the wake there is a heated discussion of a housing board of black poor coming up adjacent to Linden Hills. Many are against it as they cannot identify themselves with their brethren. All the residents including Mr. Chester wish to be manipulated by money. And we also learn that the deceased Lycentia's fought against the housing plan until she lived. Thus materialism and superficiality prevails

and the mourners and sympathizers are actually relishing the catered food than mourning the deceased.

Naylor presents materialism in its highest form through Maxwell Symth's character. He lives a life of artificiality and has lost all emotions connected with human being. 'his entire life became a race against the natural-and he was winning.' (pg 10 LH). Maxwell Smyth rejects subjective happiness in the name of external, professional advancement. Maxwell strictly warns Xavier against the dangers of marrying Roxanne, a less economically successful family, living in the periphery of Linden Hills. Moreover, Xavier is ready to sacrifice his love for Roxanne because he wishes to live up to the expectations of Linden Hills. Xavier allows emotions and feelings to be controlled by money and is concerned about his status in Linden Hills. Thus he has forsaken human emotions and replaced it with plastic smile and glass status in order to gain ascendancy in the material world.

Mr. Hollins although being highly educated and admired by many for his generous Christmas parties at the church for the poor blacks, he is found to lead a life of pain. His life is broken with the desertion of his wife. Mr. Hollins is broken and lives a meaningless life. He feels that he was much happy before he came to Linden hills. A posting at Linden Hills brought him fame and luxurious house while leaving his life empty and meaningless. Thus, although Mr. Hollins is provided with a palatial house and a decent wardrobe one finds his house and life disorganized and hollow.

The most pathetic story is that of Laurel Dumont. She is an intelligent girl with a fire to get whatever she wished. Laurel Dumont has a flair for swimming and

music. She excels in this art and becomes a very successful manager at IBM. After she establishes herself economically well she finds that she had ignored her personal life. She has no children and her husband has left her. Shattered, helpless she is forced to leave Linden Hills as she has no male heirs. Laurel Dumont through out her career focuses on material advancement thus leaving a huge chasm between her position at IBM and a married life. Disillusioned and helpless, she commits suicide. She is pitied by Ruth Anderson a foil to Laurel. Ruth swaps love for a luxurious life in Linden Hills.

Willa Nedeed's story is heart wrenching as she has no will of her own. She is forced to live up to the dictates of Luther Nedeed who himself is caught in making Linden Hills a symbol of material success. It is this want for money; fame and acceptance into society that makes Nedeeds ignore their wives. Willa represents generations of Nedeed women who have had no say in their homes and who were just used to give birth to the next Nedeed and who were mere 'shadows'. Willa marries Luther in order to be the wife of a rich man. She is a woman 'who sold her soul' for a comfortable position (Engles 675) Though she achieves material advancement she suffers alienation and effacement.

On the other hand Naylor depicts Ruth as a person who has left Linden Hills and settled with Norman Anderson, in spite of a psychological disease which affects him once a year. Ruth and Anderson are happy because they believe in love as they happily say that "love rules the house". The residents of Linden Hills seek material advancement and allow money to rule their lives which ultimately leads to their downfall.

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Ms. Vaishnavi. Pokuri/ Research Scholar KL Univeristy/  
Assistant Professor/ Eluru College of Engineering and Technology/w/o P. Sridhar,  
Sriramulu Oil Merchants and Co./Main Bazaar/Eluru-534001/rcetrpl@gmail.com  
Dr. Vishnu Divya/Associate Professor/KL University/Vaddeswaram/vis\_divya@kluniversity.in