THE EXPANSION OF AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY
IN WALTER MOSLEY’S EASY RAWLINS SERIES

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ABSTRACT

The American Adam, the American Frontier, and the American Dream are fundamental components of the mythology of U.S. American culture. These legends are found in the nation’s greatest novels, including The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Deerslayer, and The Great Gatsby. However, while scholarship on these works has been intensive, the same analysis of contemporary literature is not as vast. The importance of such an analysis is that literature embodies society’s collective mythology, which is in turn reflective of the nation’s cultural ideals. Analysis of contemporary literature provides one with insight into not only the fundamental themes of the nation’s mythology, but it also provides an opportunity to uncover any recent or ongoing alterations in the mythology that might be indicative of changes in the country’s collective consciousness, thus making the analysis distinctive in comparison to other works. Furthermore, given the diversification of characters in American literature and their more accurate reflection, such an analysis can provide greater insight into the multicultural realities of the nation. Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins series provides a unique opportunity for such an analysis, as it is both contemporary and multicultural. This series not only accurately reflects the
traditional themes found in American mythology but it also expands them to be more reflective of modern cultural realities.
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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... v

Chapter

1. THE METHODOLOGY OF MYTHOLOGY ................................................................. 1

2. EASY AS THE AMERICAN ADAM ................................................................. 6
   
   Adamic Innocence
   
   Conflicting with Society
   
   Breaking from the Past
   
   Leaving Society
   
   Living with Eve
   
   Substituting Eve

3. EASY ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER ......................................................... 39
   
   The Urban Frontier
   
   Violence in the Urban Wilderness
   
   Masculinity on the Frontier
   
   The Urban Savage
   
   Justice on the Urban Frontier
   
   Women on the Frontier
   
   Life Between Civilization and Wilderness

   vi
Departure from Utopia

4. EASY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM ....................................................... 87
   The Dream of Upward Mobility
   The Dream of Equality
   The Dream of Ownership

5. REFLECTIONS ON MYTHOLOGY ......................................................... 123

REFERENCE LIST ..................................................................................... 128
CHAPTER 1
THE METHODOLOGY OF MYTHOLOGY

Literature plays an important role in the development of a culture’s ideology and subsequent mythology. Richard Slotkin states that:

The concepts of ideology, myth, and genre highlight three different but closely related aspects of the culture-making process. Ideology is the basic system of concepts, beliefs, and values that defines a society’s way of interpreting its place in the cosmos and the meaning of its history. As used by anthropologists and social historians, the term refers to the dominant conceptual categories that inform the society’s words and practices, abstracted by analysis as a set of propositions, formulas or rules. In any given society certain expressive forms or genres—like the credo, sermon or manifesto—provide ways of articulating ideological concepts directly and explicitly. But most of the time the assumptions of the value inherent in a culture are tacitly accepted as ‘givens.’ Their meaning is expressed in the symbolic narratives of mythology and is transmitted to the society through various genres of mythic expression.¹

Thus, one could conclude that through the reading of a culture’s narratives, one can uncover the overarching mythologies of the culture. One further could claim that an individual can use literature as not only a means to discover a culture’s mythology but also as a means to understand its fundamental ideology. This reverse engineering of ideology from myth discovered from genre allows the readers of literature to have a deeper understanding of a narrative’s culture. In U.S. American literature, the basic myth-narrative involves the rebirth of the protagonist into a new

life, ranging from a boy’s transition into manhood to a savage’s conversion to Christianity to a commoner’s attainment of success. From these myth-themes, one can extract backwards to uncover the fundamental value of “perpetual self-improvement,” which could be directly related to the nation’s Puritanical founding.2

A culture’s myths are a direct result of its collective history combined with the symbolic representation of the underlying culture’s ideology and morality. Mythology then expresses ideology in narrative form rather than in a methodical argument, which is possible due to the transmission of myths via story-telling. This mode of reproduction allows the myth to develop a sense of occurring naturally in the environment instead of through cognitive thought.3 Slotkin states that “The language of the myth is indirect, metaphorical, and narrative in structure. It renders ideology in the form of symbol, exemplum, and fable, and potentially evokes fantasy, memory, and sentiment. The logic of myth is the logic of metaphor and narrative. It depends less upon analytical reason than on an instant and intuitive understanding and acceptance of a given meaning.”4 Throughout the retelling of these myths “the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols,


‘icons,’ ‘keywords,’ or historical clichés.’ Genuine myths are created on a sub-literary plane where the myth teller draws on the historical reality of her people, in order to elucidate reality in a dramatic fashion. For example, “For an American, allusions to ‘the Frontier,’ or to events like ‘Pearl Harbor,’ ‘The Alamo,’ or ‘Custer’s Last Stand’ evoke an implicit understanding of the entire historical scenario that belongs to the event and of the complex interpretive tradition that has developed around it.”

However, it must be noted that no overarching myth can be eternally consistent due to changing narratives that reflect reality. This will result in the modification or expansion of the myth to account for changes in the socio-historical reality. These external forces that change the myth can be attributed to “the bad harvest, the plague, defeat in war, changes in modes of production, internal imbalance in the distribution of wealth and power that produce a crisis that cannot be fully explained or controlled by invoking the received wisdom embodied in the myth.” Once the crisis is over, it is also solidified in mythology via modifications in the culture’s ideology and morality. This usually results in the mixture of old world

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5 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5.


views with new ideas.\textsuperscript{8} Thus, while a culture’s mythology evolves, it creates a universal ideology by transforming historical events into celebrated narratives.\textsuperscript{9}

Given the importance to the formation, expansion, and retention of a society’s culture, it can be concluded that the examination and understanding of the evolution of mythology is vital to appreciation of a society’s human condition. One can easily conclude that this analysis has been conducted extensively. For example, a Google Scholar search returns over 17,600 links when one searches “Huckleberry Finn”, 11,700 links for “Rip van Winkle,” and 9,980 links for “The Great Gatsby,” all of which are classic narratives that invoke U.S. American mythology.\textsuperscript{10} This represents an enormous amount of scholarship devoted to these classic books and their reflection of and impact on U.S. American society. However, when one searches \textit{Devil in a Blue Dress}, the first and what could be claimed as the most well-known novel of the Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins series, the result will be only 411 links, and for when one searches “Blond Faith,” the last book in the series, the result is only 14 links.\textsuperscript{11} One could then conclude that while significant scholarship has been done on the American classics, contemporary narratives have not been exposed to the same critical examination. While part of this might be due to the age of the

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} Slotkin, \textit{The Fatal Environment}, 19.

\textsuperscript{10} Google Scholar. 15 February 2010. \url{http://scholar.google.com}

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
narratives, one could claim that the need for critical analysis of these works is vital as they reflect the current state of U.S. American culture and such analysis will elucidate the changes in the nation’s collective culture that might be overlooked or nonexistent in previous narratives.

Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins series provides an excellent opportunity to examine these changes in America’s mythology. This series is unique in that it gives the reader an opportunity to analyze what could be considered as an underrepresented voice in our national discourse on mythology: the contemporary, urban, African-American male perspective. It can be argued that the lack of such an analysis prevents the nation from understanding its collective identity, both historically and in the present day.

To fully elucidate the impact of these narratives, it is important to demonstrate the ways these novels not only reflect the traditional mythology of the nation but how they also expand it to include contemporary realities of society. Three of the most useful myths to explore focus on (1) the American Adam, (2) the American Frontier, and (3) the American Dream. Through this analysis, one will be able to see that contemporary literature does not represent a new national narrative but that instead it is the continuation of society’s collective consciousness that is constantly evolving to accommodate historical realities. This analysis is interesting because it demonstrates simultaneously the universality of the nation’s culture while elucidating the rich texture of a multicultural identity.
Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins series encompasses and expands U.S. American mythology by not only incorporating the legendary idea of the American Adam but also by demonstrating that the myth encompass contemporary urban life, specifically the African American male condition. R.W.B. Lewis stated that, “a century ago, the image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas was that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history.”¹ Walter Mosley’s protagonist in the Easy Rawlins series, Ezekiel "Easy" Porterhouse Rawlins, can be identified as a representation of the American Adam due to his inherent innocence and conflict with society, both of which eventually forces him to venture into the urban wilderness. However, while Mosley gives his protagonist these characteristics typically found in American literature, he also expands the meaning of these attributes to create a new American mythology that more accurately reflects the dynamics of the nation’s multidimensional cultural fabric.

Adamic Innocence

The fundamental characteristics of the American Adam are “the birth of the

innocent, the foray into the unknown world, the collision with the world, ‘the fortunate fall,’ the wisdom and the maturity which suffering produced.”2 Lewis proclaims that “his [the American Adam’s] moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him”.3 Mosley creates his protagonist’s memory of childhood innocence by the projection of his subconscious desires on neighborhood children when Easy states, “And I’m willing to bet that they all would look back to the days of Mrs. Harris’s yard with the greatest pleasure. Running wild with the animals before the hunters started tracking them down.”4 Moreover, like Huckleberry Finn, Easy experiences a fall from innocence involving his father. Both characters have been let down by their respective fathers, and this realization causes them both to lose part of their innocence.5 However, while each individual’s respective falls have similarities with the other, it is important to point out that their relationships and views of their fathers demonstrate how Mosley is able to transcend the traditional motif of wanting to be free from society to one that

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2 Ibid., 153.
3 Ibid., 5.
reflects a more common but unsavory reality that one can be unwillingly forced to be free from society due to life experiences, such as Easy’s parental abandonment. It can be concluded that this stark contrast shows how Mosley’s work cultivates American mythology to incorporate the actualities of the American experience, where one is freed based on unfavorable and unpredictable circumstance instead of being freed through conciseness decision making. Mosley does not just make this distinction, he further develops the idea of the fall by demonstrating its effects on one’s life when Easy states, “And that was strange, because I had stopped believing in God on the day my father left me as a child in poverty and pain.”

Mosley expands the child’s conflict with society found in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which one could conclude represents naive rebellion, by showing that a child’s rebellion can not only involve religion (which represents society’s constraints) but also a darker, even sexual, aspiration. An example of this modification in the myth can be found when Easy gets out of going to church; he states that:

> I was unworthy. In my misery I told myself that was why my own father never came back for me. My mother was a churchgoer but I never had much use for it. Just as soon as I was old enough to hold back I fought with her on Sunday mornings so I could go out exploring the country and see my friends. On Sundays my friend Holly, short for Hollister, and I would go to Tyler’s place out John Street because on Sunday mornings Lucy Jennings, the whore, would

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6 Mosley, *A Red Death*, 120.
be there entertaining all of the husbands who got out of going to church. We hid in the bushes outside of her window and watched. I remember holding my breath when Robert Green would stand in front of her with his thing standing straight out; it was so big that we couldn’t believe it, Lucy told him that it was the most beautiful one she had ever seen . . . . when I got home I felt guilt but I couldn’t tell my mother about it, it was so dirty and depraved.7

Easy’s innocence is represented not only by his childhood, but also through his rebirth when he moves to California to start a new life. At the start of the series, in Devil in a Blue Dress, Easy remembers his dream of recreating his innocence, when he recounts that “California was like heaven for the Southern Negro. People told stories of how you could eat fruit right off the trees and get enough work to retire one day.”8 This is similar to the self-created innocence of Jay Gatsby. Some, like Edith Warton, claim that the lack of knowledge about Gatsby’s background, similar to the lack of knowledge, save short vignettes of Easy’s background and previous life, reduces the impact of the narrative’s drama. However, one could conclude that this lack of information, as Lewis denotes, enables the protagonist to reject “his former self, with its ancestry, as represented by his former name of James Gatz. And in his new role he had (to use the phrase of Horace Bushnell) ‘just begun to be’”.9 When Easy states, “He asked me what I was fixin’ t’ do with that rifle and I told him that I

7 Walter Mosley, Gone Fishin’ (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997), 186.
8 Walter Mosley, Devil in a Blue Dress (New York: Norton, 1990), 72.
9 Lewis, The American Adam, 197.
was gonna pack it and we was goin’ to California,” it is reminiscent of the protagonist in Richard Wright’s *Almos’ a Man*, when Dave is jumping on board the train: “He hesitated just a moment; then he grabbed, pulled atop of a car, and lay flat. He felt his pocket; the gun was still there. Ahead the long rails were glinting in moonlight, stretching away, away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man . . . .”\(^{10}\) One could conclude that repeatedly throughout the series, through the snapshots Mosley provides us with, Easy is shown to embody qualities of Adam before the Fall, but like most characters in American literature, innocence is bound to be lost. This is especially true given the realistic, contemporary environment in the Mosley has placed his hero.

**Conflicting with Society**

One could theorize that after innocence has been lost, the traditional American hero is at conflict with society. Mosley is able to capture this struggle in two distinct types of conflict with society: (1) The childish rebellion against societal norms and (2) the more refined rebellion against society’s constraints, including discrimination, as a man. Leslie Fiedler expounds on the concept of the protagonist’s struggle with society by declaring that “the figure of Rip Van Winkle presides over the birth of the American imagination; . . . Ever since, the typical male

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protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat—anywhere to avoid ‘civilization,’ which to say, the confrontation of a man and women which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility.”11 Easy embodies this sentiment when he declares that “it’s difficult to express how safe I felt at that moment. It was the safety of being homeless and nameless and not known, not really, to anyone. I slept on that plank floor better than I had in years”’.12 This passage demonstrates his need to escape society and shows how one’s escape does not need to be to the magical land of Rip Van Winkle’s adventures but that one’s oasis from society can be on the run, degenerate, and involve sleeping in the back room of an old country store.13 Moreover, the most direct passage in the series that embodies the spirit of Rip van Winkle and demonstrates the need to escape civilization in order to be truly free is when Easy is staying with Domaque in the Texas swamplands. Domaque states that “‘In the city they all wear the same clothes and they get t’be like each other ‘cause they live so close together. It’s like trees; when they real close they all grow straight up to get they li’l bit’a sun. But out here you got room t’spread out. They ain’t no two trees


12 Mosley, Black Betty, 238.

in a field look the same way. Maybe one is in the wind an’ it grow on a slant or
another one be next to a hill so one side is kinda shriveled from the afternoon
shade”

Easy goes on to comment on the lifestyle by saying “that was the finest
living that I had ever experienced up to that time”.

Fiedler elaborates on the conflict between the individual and society when he
concludes that “. . . America is not exclusively the product of Reason—not even in
the area of legend. Behind its neo-classical façade, ours is a nation sustained by
sentimental and Romanic dream, the dream of an escape from culture and a renewal
of youth.”

Again, the similarities between Huckleberry Finn and Easy Rawlins
become apparent in their struggle with society. Huck recalls after three or four
months in school that “I had been to school most all the time, and could spell, and
read, and write just a little, and could say the multiplication table up to six times
seven is thirty-five, and I don’t reckon I could ever get any further than that if I was
to live forever.” Easy makes a similar statement, which embodies Huck’s
sentiment when he claims that “I always tried to speak proper English in my life, the
kind of English they taught in school, but I found over the years that I could only

14 Mosley, *Gone Fishin’*, 130.
15 Ibid., 115.
16 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day,
1966), 37.
17 Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 11.
truly express myself in the natural, ‘uneducated’ dialect of my upbringing.”\(^\text{18}\) While one could easily conclude that the use of language is an uncomplicated metaphor for the Adamic hero’s conflict with society, Mosley expands the use of language to provide a more dynamic reflection of sociological constraints that his protagonist faces, making the narrative more realistic. Moreover, Mosley further employs language to criticize society’s domination of his novels’ protagonist by showing that what seems like an innocent public policy decision regarding books in a public library in reality denies a culture access to the resources necessary for the survival of its language, which results in the dominant society silently squashing the uncivilized behaviors of its degenerates. About Stella, the local librarian, Easy states that “We were on a first-name basis, Stella and I, but I was unhappy that she held that job. I was unhappy because even though Stella was nice, she was still a white woman. A white woman from a place where there were only white Christians. To her Shakespeare was a god. I didn’t mind that, but what did she know about the folk tales and riddles and stories colored folks had been telling for centuries? What did she know about the languages we spoke?”\(^\text{19}\)

Additionally, Mosley continues to redefine the influence of language in society’s domination of minority subcultures when Easy states that, “It struck me that all black policemen who want to rise in the ranks have to learn how to speak like

\(^{18}\text{Mosley, Devil in a Blue Dress, 52.}\)

\(^{19}\text{Walter Mosley, White Butterfly (New York: Norton, 1992), 91.}\)
half-educated white men." This simple phrase expands the struggle with society into two dynamic circles: (1) the conflict within Easy’s “society,” which is represented by the family, education and morals and (2) the larger conflict with the dominant white, male culture that his subculture lives within. This conflict is apparent when Easy recalls the influence of racism on his motivation to venture out of society and into the wilderness: “I could have gone home then—I should have. But the street had been calling me all day long. I had been seduced, hoodwinked, and blamed for a thief; I’d been bullied and looked at like a crook instead of an honest man. I could have gone home but I knew that I wouldn’t be able to sleep.”

Similarly, the conflict with society can be easily seen in Easy’s interactions with Miss Dixon. Easy recalls that “I took off my clothes and realized how bad I smelled after the last two days. I tried to pile them in a corner where the smell wouldn’t be too offensive in that sweet-smelling room. And then I jumped into the tub.” During his bath, Miss Dixon begins the domesticating process of trying to civilize Easy. ““Nice an’ hot, huh, Ezekiel? Secret to a long life is a hot bath twice a week and no liquor,’ she called through the closed door.” This vignette is strikingly similar to the attempted domestication of Huckleberry Finn by Widow

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20 Mosley, Black Betty, 284.


22 Mosley, Gone Fishin’, 114-115.

23 Ibid., 115.
Douglas, and in the end both Easy and Huck escape their caretakers’ constraints by fleeing back into the wilderness. Mosley provides insight into the rationale for this domestication, when Easy claims that, “She teach me how t’read but not so’s that I owe her nuthin’. I know she do it fo’ her pleasure, not mine.” By showing the reader that the protagonist’s alleged savior gains personally from the domestication of Easy through self-gratification, Mosley is able to instruct his readers that conforming to society is not a favorable outcome.

However, while there is conflict between Huck and Widow Douglas, Mosley expands this conflict to reflect the realities of a racially divided America. Miss Dixon proudly proclaims that, “‘You know I cain’t sit at the same table with you, Ezekiel,’ she said as she put a bowl of beef stew in front of me. ‘You know it’s not proper for white and colored to sit together. I mean, it’d be as much an insult to your people as mine if we were to forget our place.’” This passage is dynamic as it not only shows the conflict between the individual and “civilized society” but also the conflict between the individual and society’s discriminatory constraints based on race, gender, etc. The reality of racial discrimination causes Easy to note that:

I was very uncomfortable. I wasn’t used to spending much time with white people and I knew that colored people are always in danger of doing the wrong thing when they have to deal with whites. It was fine

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24 Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 1-11.

25 Mosley, *Gone Fishin’*, 123.

26 Ibid., 116.
in Fifth Ward down in Huston, or in little colored towns like Pariah, usually, because there weren’t any white people around for the most part. The only time I had ever spent around white people was when I was working, and then how I was to act was clear because whites were always the boss. That was easy because all I ever said was “yes” and “no”; but mainly “yes.”

However, while it would be convenient to say that the two versions of the conflict between the individual and society are separate and distinct in their constraints, Mosley combines them in various degrees throughout the series to fully show the multifaceted dimensions of society’s constraining chains. Mosley writes that:

> It was all good and well but there was a downside to the Bell Street crowd; they were snobs. They thought that their people and their block were too good for most of the rest of the Watts community. They frowned on a certain class of people buying houses on their street and they had a tendency to exclude other people from their barbecues and whatnot. They even encouraged their children to shun other kids they might have met at school or at the playground, because it was the Bell Street opinion that most of the black kids around there were too coarse and unsophisticated.

One can then conclude that Mosley, through Easy’s interaction with various characters throughout his life, is able to artfully demonstrate his hero’s struggle to be free from the constraints that society places on him and his urge to live life free in the wilderness, whether that be in the vast swamplands of Texas or in the gritty, urban jungle of Los Angeles.

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27 Ibid., 117.

Breaking from the Past

One could conclude that once Mosley created a character that is at odds with the constraints created by the myth of the American Adam, that it is then necessary for his hero to break from his past and start fresh in the wilderness, where he could hopefully achieve not only freedom but also manhood. One could theorize that Mosley uses the Second Great Migration as a contemporary representation of the settlement of the new world and the beginning of American mythology. Regarding the emergence of American mythology, Lewis proclaims that “unlike the Roman myth – which envisaged life within a long, dense corridor of meaningful history – the American myth saw life and history as just beginning. It describes the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World. It introduced a new kind of hero, the heroic embodiment of a new set of ideal human attributes”.29 It can be concluded that Mosley uses the migration of Easy from the Deep South as not only a method to incorporate the fundamental mythology into the series but also as a means to begin the expansion of the mythology in order to respond to the African American experience by demonstrating that the breaking from the past is not a romantic concept that propels one forward but a realistic necessity to either renew oneself or risk a slow, grinding destruction. Easy

29 Lewis, The American Adam, 5.
declares:

You could tell by some people’s houses that they came to L.A. to live out their dreams. Home is not a place to dream. At home you had to do like your father did and your mother. Home meant that everybody already knew what you could do and if you did the slightest little thing different they’d laugh you right down into a hole. You lived in that hole. Festered in it. After a while you either accepted your hole or you got out of it. There were all kinds of ways out. You could get married, get drunk, get next to somebody’s wife. You could take a shotgun and eat it for a midnight snack. Or you could move to California. In California they wouldn’t laugh at you, or anybody. In California the sun shone three hundred and more days in the year. In California you could work until you dropped. And when you got up there was another job waiting for you. In California you could paint the slats of your house like a rainbow and put a smiling face on your front door. You could have a caged rabbit and chickens right out in the yard and big granite animals for children to climb on. You could, like Georgette Harris, put a sign on your wire gate saying LITTLE ANIMALS NURSERY SCHOOL AND DAY CARE. Nobody cared. Nobody asked you, ‘what makes you a schoolteacher?’ They’d just take you at your word. And if the law came down and asked for some papers you’d just move a mile or so further on, hang up the same sign, and collect children like a crow raking in glass.30

This passage shows how the migration to California provides an environment in which the characters are able to start anew, breaking from the past and creating a fresh, forward-looking tradition. However, despite one’s breaking from the old, the constraints of one’s past still follow and in turn create the struggle for freedom and constant renewal. Eventually the law will “come down” and force one to renew oneself “a mile or so further on.”

30 Mosley, Black Betty, 72.
Leaving Society

In order to successfully become a man, many have concluded that Adam must be evicted from Eden, as Eden represents the sociological constraints that hold him back from his complete fulfillment. Lewis writes that “This was the view of human development that motivated James’s repeated observation that ‘the first and highest service which Eve renders Adam is to throw him out of Paradise.’ James regarded the contemporary ideal of man as Adam in Paradise as adolescent rubbish; ‘every man who has reached even his intellectual teens,’ he wrote, ‘begins to suspect that life is no farce.’” Easy reminisces on the beginning of his adventure out of the Garden of Eden by recalling:

It was so beautiful but it was my last night there. . . . I couldn’t live with those people anymore. They were living on the edge of despair; like those friends fighting on my street. I had the image that we were all, all of us in Houston and Pariah, living between Miss Dixon and Mouse. It was a deadly line we had to walk and the only thing that kept us going was some kind of faith. Either you believed in God or love. I didn’t believe in any of those things anymore. Maybe I never had. So I had a ticket for Dallas, Texas, in my breast pocket and a hundred dollars in my pocket. I was as happy as I could be at that party because I felt safe. I felt safer with that ticket in my pocket than I would have felt with a gun. They couldn’t hurt me anymore. Mouse couldn’t come banging on my door in the middle of the night. Married women and old witches couldn’t seduce me on dirt floors. I needed a place where life was a little easier and where nobody knew

31 Lewis, 58.
me. I knew that if I could be alone, I could make it.\textsuperscript{32} Michael Collins states that this flight from society in \textit{The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn} is represented by Huck being on land (or in society), then on the river (freedom from civilization), then back on land again.\textsuperscript{33} While Huck has multiple landings and departures from civilization in one novel, Easy makes the same transitions throughout his life, spanning multiple works. Mosley constructs a direct parallel between Easy and Huck, and between the conflict between the individual and society, when he writes:

I’d picked up \textit{Huckleberry Finn} at a used-book store in Santa Monica. . . . I remembered Jim and Huck as friends out on the river. I could have been either one of them. Before I found a home in Houston I was a wild boy riding the rails. No mother, no father. Just enough clothes to keep me decent and ten cents less than I needed to survive. I sat down next to the window and read under the soft light of morning. I entered another dream – of con men and criminals and ignorance too.\textsuperscript{34}

Thus, one could conclude that Mosley, through his invocation of Huck Finn combined with Easy’s migration westward, that his hero embodies what is considered to be the traditional pull of the myth that forces American heroes to break from the past and to create new adventures in the wilderness.

\textsuperscript{32} Mosley, \textit{Gone Fishin’}, 194-195.

\textsuperscript{33} Michael J. Collins. Class lecture on February 13, 2009, at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., as part of a course entitled “American Literature and the American Idea.”

\textsuperscript{34} Mosley, \textit{Black Betty}, 54-55.
However, no matter the rational pull for him to remain in civilization, Easy constantly has an internal urge pulling him back into the urban wilderness of the streets. He claims that, “I hadn’t hit the streets since my wedding. I tried to bury that part of my life. In one way, looking for this killer was like coming back from the dead for me.”35 This desire to be outside society and to live in the wilderness becomes more and more solidified in Easy, despite his efforts throughout the series to remain civilized. By the end of the series he proclaims that, “I had solved the mystery. I knew the players, their reasons and the danger they posed. The right choice now was to go home and be with my family. But the idea of home was like a coffin to me. Jesus and Benita would take care of the children, and I’d continue my investigations for no good reason except that it kept up my momentum.”36

Because of Easy’s desire to live in the wilderness, he is able to position himself in a unique place that enables him to be successful as a private investigator. This enables him to assist other traditional American detectives in solving cases that they would not be able to normally do based on their inability to not only escape the dominant culture but also because of the inability to integrate into the wilderness in a way that would be meaningful to their investigations.

35 Mosley, White Butterfly, 88.

Mosley not only uses the idea of the expulsion from Eden as a mechanism to show the protagonist breaking free from the constraints of society, but he also expands the emotional reaction of the exodus in order to show the dynamic realities of the American condition. Easy states that “I decided on a new neighborhood some time after my wife left me. . . . And I took my kids to an anonymous place where people didn’t know me; where no one asked painful questions about my wife and daughter; where no one knew enough about me to question my legal guardianship of Jesus and Feather. The only agreement between us was love and mutual need – not the kind of agreement they like in courts.”37 However, while the desire to leave society is ever present, Easy acknowledges that each escape is only temporary when he proclaims that, “I thought about Hawaii again. I wondered, for a brief moment, if a man could escape his fate. I knew the answer but I wondered just the same.”38 While the previous passages allude to the fact that Easy enjoys his time in the wilderness, he still feels the guilt associated with his expulsion. This guilt is demonstrated in a conversation with Sergeant Sanchez:

“Why don’t we take a walk and look for your night man?” Sanchez asked again.
“I told you. I got to get home to my kids.”
“It’ll just take a little while. We could answer some important questions.”
“That’s your job, sergeant,” I said. “My job is at home.”
He shook his head again.

37 Mosley, *Black Betty*, 73.

38 Ibid., 172.
“Excuse me,” I said. And then I turned my back on him.39

One can theorize that Mosley’s use of this guilt not only corresponds to the traditional view of the American Adam, but it also allows him to depict his hero in a relatable light, as it could be assumed that many of Mosley’s readers feel the same guilt when faced with the choice of living within society’s constraints or venturing out into one’s personal wilderness.

Fiedler goes on to proclaim that, “The enemy of society on the run toward ‘freedom’ is also the pariah in flight from his guilt, the guilt of that very flight; and new phantoms arise to haunt him at every step.”40 Easy repeatedly struggles with the guilt related to his expulsion from Eden. He proclaims that, “I started my engine back up and drove off thinking about how my life had gone out of control.”41 Mosley demonstrates how this guilt is interrelated with and increased as one ages, which one could claim as a core American cultural value. As one gets older, maturity brings a certain level of responsibility. Easy laments that, “I had spent most of my adult years hanging on by a shoestring among gangsters and gamblers, prostitutes and killers. But I never liked it. I always wanted a well-ordered working life. The Board of Education didn’t pay much in the way of salary but my kids had

39 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 86.

40 Fiedler, 26.

41 Mosley, White Butterfly, 86.
medical insurance and I was living a life that I could be proud of.”42 Easy takes this sentiment one step further by stating that, “I pulled myself from bed and cursed Quinten Naylor. I hated that man. If it wasn’t for him I’d be fine. I actually believed that. Way past thirty and I was still a fool.”43 This passage alludes to the conclusion that living in the wilderness is acceptable in society if such a life is lived by young adolescents, which could be considered a vital part of a young man’s coming of age. However, it can be theorized that as one gets older these adventures are less romantic. For example, Easy notes the following after being interrogated (beaten) by Li’l Joe and Arlen Coleman: “By the time I was back in civilization I was wet, with torn clothes and torn skin. I was breathing hard and the cold of evening went all the way through to my bones.”44 At the end of the series, Easy has overcome his guilt over leaving society, and correspondingly his family, to return to the wilderness. He is able to finally free himself through the fact that he has raised Jesus, who is de facto the father of the family, or at least by society’s definition of what a father’s responsibilities are. Easy states, “And tonight I would drive so far away that no one could find me to tell me if anything had changed. My children were safe and living in a mansion. I wasn’t there to watch over them, but they had

42 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 54.

43 Mosley, White Butterfly, 125.

44 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 246.
Jesus. Jesus – the boy who had always been the better man.”45 However, even though Easy seems to encourage Jesus to embrace his role as a functioning, responsible member of society, he understands that Jesus is pulled by the same mythical forces of the American Adam. Easy states that, “The sea made him stand taller and speak out loud. He was the master of his own fate when he no longer had to deal with anyone he didn’t want to, like all of the teachers who didn’t believe that little Mexican kids were worth the seats they sat in.”46 Through these passages, one can then conclude that Mosley demonstrates the paradox of the Adamic myth. Easy simultaneously wants to live in the wilderness himself, while at some level he wants his adopted son to live in society to assume his abandoned responsibilities. However, he is cognizant that he alone is not the only one attracted to the freedom of escaping civilization but that his son, Jesus, is called to the wilderness for the same reasons that Easy has for such existence.

In a statement by Easy, Mosley redefines what it means for a character to be in the wilderness by showing that society and wilderness can simultaneously occupy the same space and time: “But I was still a nomad because everybody around me was moving in or moving out. Even if I stayed in the same place my neighborhood was


46 Walter Mosley, Little Scarlet (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2004), 41.
always changing.”47 Mama Jo defines for Easy the significance of leaving society and helps him embrace it as a natural phenomenon by telling him that, “‘You always know what’s right, Easy,’ she said softly. ‘Always. If you runnin’, then there’s a reason for it, even if you don’t know what the reason is.’”48

Living with Eve

In traditional American literature, women are regarded as villains who restrict Adamic heroes from fully being free, keeping them trapped in the constraints of society. Fiedler points out that, “Our great novelists, though experts on indignity and assault, on loneliness and terror, tend to avoid treating the passionate encounter of man and women, which we expect at the center of a novel. Indeed, they rather shy away from permitting in their fictions the presence of any full-fledged, mature woman, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of rejections or fear of sexuality.”49 Mosley embraces this view of women throughout the series by demonstrating the pull of wilderness and its impact on relationships during a conversation between Regina and Easy:

“But they was better than you,” Regina said. “At least they needed me for something. I mean, maybe you want some pussy. Maybe you even wanna make me crazy and make me come. But if I do that and

48 Mosley, Blonde Faith, 156.
49 Fiedler, 24.
fall in love with you, all you gonna do is walk outta the house in the mornin’ goin’ who knows where.”
“Everybody goes to work, baby.”
“You don’t understand. I want to be part of something. I ain’t just some girl to suck your dick an’ have your babies.”
When Marla talked like that I got excited. But hearing it from my wife made me want to tear off her head. I held my temper, though. I knew I deserved her abuse.50

Mosley embraces the story of the Fall indirectly most of the time; however, he confronts it head on when he writes, “‘Women,’ Abernathy said as if it were a curse. ‘Women is what destroyed man.’ His tone approached that of a minister infused with the Holy Spirit.”51 This anti-feminist rhetoric can be found throughout the series, and it can be theorized that it not only demonstrates how the series embodies and incorporates the Adamic myth but how it also reflects current cultural sentiments in some sectors towards women since one could conclude that the series provides an accurate reflection of American culture.

However, Mosley takes great effort to reflect upon the realities of men’s interactions and relationships with women. For example, Easy comments on the constraints women and family place on men, as found in traditional American literature, when he notes that “Pericles Tarr was a man of decision despite his weaknesses. He was more afraid of his family’s love than he was of the deadliest

50 Mosley, White Butterfly, 166.
51 Ibid., 199.
man in Los Angeles. He gave me the address in Compton without another word of hesitation."\textsuperscript{52} He notes in addition that “Pericles’ leaving her had nothing to do with Pretty Smart. He just couldn’t take it anymore. It was a house filled with noise and ugliness that only a mother could love. It’s a wonder that she didn’t understand what her man was going through. But then I thought, what would understanding have done for her? He would still have left."\textsuperscript{53}

However, Mosley does not just let the conflict between men and women remain simplistic. Instead he gives the conflict a multidimensional quality by incorporating the frustrations Easy feels from life, especially the racial discrimination by the dominant culture within society. Easy remarks, “It seemed like I was on the warpath against women and that all the men I knew, and those I didn’t know, were too. I treated Marla like a piece of meat. I wasn’t honest with my wife and I yelled at my baby. Somebody was going around killing women and the police hardly cared until a white girl got it. I wasn’t even sure that they cared about her.”\textsuperscript{54} This passage demonstrates that while Easy might be “on the warpath” and conflicting with women on the surface, that underneath his outward emotions lie intricate sentiments that are influenced by not only the Adamic myth but also the discrimination of minorities by the dominant culture.

\textsuperscript{52} Mosley, \textit{Blonde Faith}, 236.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 244.

\textsuperscript{54} Mosley, \textit{White Butterfly}, 126.
One of the main differences between traditional American novels and detective fiction, especially hard-boiled detective fiction, is the portrayal of sex in the narrative. Fiedler comments on the Puritan depiction of sexuality in American literature when he claims that “. . . the best attempt at dealing with love is The Scarlet Letter, in which the physical consummation of adultery has occurred and all the passions burned away before the novel proper begins.”\(^5\) He further examines the rebirth of sensuality in the genre of detective fiction with the following statement:

Though it has never abandoned violence and death, it has radically altered their impact by associating them ever more intimately with sex—that subject so pointedly ignored in the prototypical tales of Poe. Murder laced with lust, mayhem spiced with nymphomania: this is the formula of the chief surviving form of the murder mystery in America, though, indeed, that form has not surrendered its native birthright of anti-feminism. It insists, however, on undressing its bitches, surveying them with a surly and concupiscent eye before punching, shooting, or consigning them to the gas-chamber.\(^6\)

This inhibited view of women as sexual objects is personified by Easy’s view of Betty’s sexuality when he states, “And then there it was, that look of appreciation that Betty has for the male sex. A look that was at once hungry and satisfied. Men communicated to Betty with their bodies and sex. She didn’t care about our words

\(^5\) Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, 25.

\(^6\) Ibid., 499.
or our hearts.” 57 Through this and multiple other passages in the series, Mosley is able to show the conflict between his protagonist and women, through the degradation of women as sexual objects that are to be used and then discarded.

However, Mosley is able to combine the grittiness of unadulterated sexuality with the usually absent male emotional reaction. Mosley graphically does this when he writes: “But Daphne made me look inside myself. She’d whisper a sweet word and I was brought back to my mother’s death, back when I was only eight, by the time Daphne got to my belly. I held my breath as she lifted the erection to wash underneath it; she looked into my face, with eyes that had become blue over the water, and stroked my erection up and down, twice.” 58 This passage shows how Mosley is able to take what some might assume as the degradation of women through sexuality and show that such actions produce extreme emotion reaction within the Adamic hero. This allows for the protagonist to maintain his outward masculinity and domination of women while expanding the myth so that the interaction with and response to women is more multidimensional.

A major difference between the Easy Rawlins series and the Adamic mythology’s portrayal of women is that there are numerous instances in the series where Easy wants to be in a committed relationship. However, Easy is reluctant to give up his freedom. For example, he states that “I had lived a life of hiding before I


58 Mosley, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, 228-229.
met Regina. Nobody knew about me. They didn’t know about my property. They didn’t know about my relationship to the police. I felt safe in my secrets. I kept telling myself that Regina was my wife, my partner in life. I planned to tell her about what I’d done over the years. I planned to tell her that Mofass really worked for me and that I had plenty of money in bank accounts around town. But I had to get at it slowly, in my own time.”\textsuperscript{59} Mosley creates a fine line separating love and spite in Easy’s relationships. For example, Easy states that “Talking to Regina was painful for me sometimes. She was so sure about what was right and what wasn’t. She could get me stirred up inside. So much so that sometimes I didn’t know if I was feeling rage or love.”\textsuperscript{60} What is interesting about this fragile balance between adoration and hate is that Mosley is able to capture a true reflection of the human condition and show the emotional personality of an otherwise emotionless character. Thus, one could conclude that Mosley is able to maintain Easy’s masculinity while making the character true to life. Mosley goes one step further by demonstrating that even though the reader knows the multitude of emotions that Easy is feeling, his wife is still unaware of them and frustrated by this fact. Regina proclaims to Easy, “‘You got to let a woman see the weak parts, Easy. She gotta see that you need her strength. Woman cain’t just be a thing that you th’ow money at. She just cain’t be

\textsuperscript{59} Mosley, \textit{White Butterfly}, 70.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 67.
However, while the series seems to portray a sentiment towards women that one could claim as typical of American literature written by men, the Easy Rawlins series exposes a more realistic rendering of the dynamics of personal relationships. In fact, the series shows that an Adamic hero, while on one hand strives to be free from women, he on the other hand recognizes the importance of their relationship. Thus, Mosley’s hero attempts to reconcile the differences between what the myth tells him subconsciously, return to the magical forest with Rip van Winkle, and what society instructs him to do, settle down with his wife. Easy reflects this view when he reminisces on his relationship with Regina: “I intended to tell her all about it someday. A day when I felt she could accept it, accept me for who I was.” While some could see this as a natural progression of the narrative, Mosley insists on demonstrating the effect of this cognitive reconciliation between the individual and

61 Ibid., 206.

society when he transforms Mouse from being the archetypical man living unashamed in the wilderness into a mundane, family-oriented man. Easy announces that “Mouse had a change of heart there for a while and wanted to be a family man, a married man.” However, one must not be fooled by reading this passage alone and assume that Mouse was able to overcome the pull of the myth. Note that Mosley carefully selects his phrasing and states that Mouse had changed “for a while.” One could claim that this is represents only a brief conversion, but it could be theorized that Mosley is artfully demonstrating that the myth is not black and white, one side or the other, but instead is more fluid and that the struggle is not between the competing sides but a struggle to find a point in between that can fulfill both one’s needs to be free and to be loved. This conversion in Easy’s belief system that allows him to find a middle ground is assisted through his interactions with Cinnamon. During a romantic encounter between them, Easy recalls that “In between her rocking and snagging she said, ‘All men feel that women do them wrong. They feel like that all the time. But that’s just silly. Here you got a woman givin’ up everything to save your little girl and all you can think about is a passing fancy or even maybe another lover. What do you think they’re doin’ right now?’” Mosley solidifies this struggle for a middle point where his hero can have successful relationships but still be free when he shows the pain that freedom causes Easy.

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63 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 62.

64 Mosley, Cinnamon Kiss, 273.
When Regina left Easy, he laments that “The tears came and my knees buckled. After a long while I looked up and saw Jesus sitting on his haunches. He was watching over me.”\textsuperscript{65} This raw emotional outburst, while rare in the series, gives the hero a sense of humanity and in doing so changes the way the reader views the idea of the Adamic hero.

Moreover, Mosley takes this depiction of actual relationships one step further. He shows that despite his love being metaphorically branded with a scarlet letter, the hero is not only able to overcome the urge to run free from relationships into the wilderness but also that the hero can overcome what some might say are unforgivable crimes committed by his love. This dynamic is illustrated when Easy proclaims that, “Sitting there feeling what had been gone from my life for so long, I understood that I could not live without Bonnie. It did not matter that she’d been with another man; it did not matter about my masculinity or my age. Either I was going to be back with her or, one way or another, I was going to die.”\textsuperscript{66}

Substituting Eve

The absence of women creates a relationship void that needs to be fulfilled with someone who understands and can relate to our literary heroes. This character is the protagonist’s sidekick. Discussing this phenomenon, Fiedler states, “To be

\textsuperscript{65} Mosley, \textit{White Butterfly}, 252.

\textsuperscript{66} Mosley, \textit{Blonde Faith}, 146.
sure, there is a substitute for wife or mother presumably waiting in the green heart of nature: the natural man, the good companion, pagan and unashamed—Queequeg or Chingaachgook or Nigger Jim. “67 Throughout the series, Mouse is Easy’s loyal sidekick and is always there to help him out of what seems to be an unwinnable situation. However, Mosley brings to light the dilemma of substituting meaningful relationships with handy sidekicks, and in doing so he creates a more realistic reflection of how the myth of the Adamic hero is actually played out in everyday life. This is evident when Easy recounts that “Nobody knew the real me. Maybe Mouse and Mofass knew something but they weren’t friends that you could kick back and jaw with. I thought that maybe Regina was right. But the thought of telling her all about me brought out a cold sweat; kind of sweat you get when your life is in mortal danger.” 68 Mosley makes an effort to show that Mouse, while fulfilling certain needs Easy has in the wilderness, also prevents Easy, at the same time, from finding true love or satisfaction. This is exemplified when Easy comments that “Added to that, Mouse didn’t understand guilt or broken hearts – that was just the kind of ignorance I craved.” 69 In this passage Mosley demonstrates the need for a trusty sidekick who can take one deeper into the wilderness while at the same time expanding the ideal of male companionship. Thus, Mosley is able to demonstrate

67 Fiedler, 26.
that while a sidekick’s companionship is better than a relationship with a woman, it still leaves him unfulfilled emotionally.

Fiedler examines the dubious side of sidekicks when he notes, “But the figure of the natural man is ambiguous, a dream and a nightmare at once. The other face of Chingachgook is Injun Joe, the killer in the graveyard and the haunter of caves; Nigger Jim is also the Babo of Melville’s ‘Benito Cereno,’ the humble servant whose name means ‘papa’ holding a razor to his master’s throat; and finally the dark-skinned companion becomes the ‘Black Man,’ which is a traditional American name for the Devil himself.”

Mouse’s brashness and attraction to danger scares Easy and makes him feel uncomfortable, but one must not deny that this same trigger-happy exuberance is used by Mosley to assist Easy during his time in the urban wilderness of Los Angeles. Regarding Mouse’s dangerous qualities, Easy notes that “He was the only black man I’d ever know who had never been chained, in his mind, by the white man. Mouse was brash and wild and free. He might have been insane, but any Negro who dared to believe in his own freedom in America had to be mad. The sight of his incarceration made me shudder inside.”

This brashness is one of the characteristics that makes Mouse invaluable to Easy, because when Easy truly needs Mouse, his unequivocal determination to live free in wilderness or die makes him advantageous in precarious situations. When Easy and Mouse were giving Clifton

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70 Fiedler, 26.

and Ernestine a lift, Easy comments to himself that “You listened to older folks and did what you were told. Even if you knew better you’d follow the rules because that’s how we were raised. Everybody but Mouse. Mouse never took an order unless that’s what he wanted to do. Mouse wasn’t the only man I knew who’d stand up for what he believed, but he was different in one way: Most men who stood up for themselves would rather die than be slaves; Mouse would’ve rather killed.”

Mosley shows us through the extreme personality of Mouse, that the Adamic hero while self-reliant still needs someone to help him navigate the most dangerous aspects of the urban jungle.

Mosley further expands on the idea of the faithful sidekick, when he shows that there can be disagreements, arguments, and even fights between the hero and sidekick. There are a few instances in the series where Easy is afraid that Mouse might turn on him, and even try to kill him. This most obvious possible altercation between the two characters is when Easy states that “I wasn’t only worried about Mouse and what he might do to exact vengeance on me. I’m not a meek man and I will fight for what I believe is right, regardless of the odds. If I’d felt it was right for me to love Etta, then I wouldn’t have cared about what Mouse might do; at least I would have been at peace with myself.”

Thus, one can theorize that Mosley uses arguments with Mouse to demonstrate how a hero maintains his loyalty to and

72 Mosley, *Gone Fishin’,* 75.

73 Mosley, *A Red Death,* 177.
friendship with his faithful male companion even though fights, and in the case of Mouse, death threats, might occur.

After reading the series, one can conclude that Easy reflects the traditional view of the American Adam. He contains the same innocence as a child and rebirth through his Fall from grace. This ultimately causes him to undergo the classic struggle between the individual and society. At the center of his conflict with the world is his interaction with women and the constraints that they place on him, preventing him from fully being free. The conflict then compels him to leave civilization and venture into the urban wilderness, where he is most at home, and luckily for the reader, he is able to solve interesting and dramatic mysteries. While in the wilderness he is able to find a substitute for women in his trusty sidekick Mouse, who is always ready to assist Easy in the most precarious situations.

However, throughout the novel Mosley demonstrates that while Easy reflects Adamic mythology, he also expands it by incorporating contemporary views of the individual, society, and women. The new mythology created by Mosley produces a more dynamic and multidimensional hero that is ready to tackle the challenges of a multicultural society.
CHAPTER 3
EASY ON THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

Once Easy is expelled from society, he is able to venture into the frontier of the urban wilderness and Mosley takes great effort to reflect the mythology of the frontier in his narratives. Slotkin states that “The Myth of the Frontier is arguably the longest-lived of American myths, with origins in the colonial period and a powerful continuing presence in contemporary culture”1 and that “like the fantasies of Burroughs and the pulp Westerns of Zane Grey, the hard-boiled detective story began as an abstraction of the essential elements of the Frontier Myth.”2 Mosley continues the tradition of expanding this mythology in American culture through his focus on the urban frontier of Watts, the violent nature of this environment, the unavoidable conflict with “savages,” the creation of utopia, and the final struggle that forces his protagonist to leave his creation.

The Urban Frontier

Arguably, one of the most important aspects of the myth is the physical environment where the narrative is placed. It is the untamed wilderness, the Wild

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West, the urban jungle, the space odyssey, where danger lies around the corner and civilization is hundreds of miles, if not light-years away. ³ It could be concluded that this wilderness is just an evolution of Irving’s mountain where Rip van Winkle has his adventure. ⁴ For example, Slotkin states that “The Deerslayer’s quest is enacted in conditions of almost perfect solitude, far from settlements themselves, in the physical and psychological isolation of the dreamlike forest.”⁵ Mosley is able to show this evolution by carefully delineating the environment of Easy’s adventures. For example, when describing John and Alva’s house he states that “The outside walls were slathered with white stucco that had glitter sprinkled in it. There were bullet holes here and there, but that wasn’t unusual. That part of L. A. was full of Texans. Most Texans carry guns. And if you carry a gun, it’s bound to go off sooner or later.”⁶ Mosley directly correlates the landscape of the urban wilderness to traditional frontier stories when he describes Isolda’s house though Easy’s impressions: “The room could have been a hotel flop in a frontier town in the Old West. The walls had never felt a coat of paint and a splinter from that rough floor

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³ Michael J. Collins. Class lecture on February 27, 2009, at Georgetown University, Washington, D. C., as part of a course entitled “American Literature and the American Idea.”


could have sent you to the hospital with lockjaw.”

Mosley further connects the urban landscape to the frontier when Easy comments on his migration to Los Angeles by stating “He asked me what I was fixin’ t’ do with that rifle and I told him that I was gonna pack it and we was goin’ to California.” These descriptions of the physical environment create the aura of the Wild West in an urban environment and are the backdrop on which further, more refined, characterization of the frontier myth can be built upon.

However, Mosley expands the myth of the frontier by showing that the frontier can be lost and that one can be stuck in one wilderness and be unable to get to the true wilderness that will set one free from the constraints of society. Jackson Blue, in the vernacular of a urban cowboy, proclaims, “‘Hell no, man. Africa ain’t got no mo’ wild than America gots. But you know I can’t see how them Africans could take kindly t’no American Negro. We been away to long, man. ’ Jackson shook his head. He almost looked sorry. ‘Too long. ’” This inability to return to a more pure wilderness, the proverbial Garden of Eden, could represent a loss of freedom, not only as an individual matures but also as the society matures. It can be concluded that this loss of the perfect wilderness makes Mosley’s urban frontier

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7 Ibid., 65.


9 Ibid., 243.
Moving beyond the physical aspects of place, the frontier is a result of the conflict between the individual and society. Slotkin states that “peculiarities of the American version of this myth/ideology derived from our original condition as a settler-state, a colonial outpost of the European ‘metropolis.’ In America, all the political, social and economic transformations attendant on modernization began with outward movement, physical separation from the originating ‘metropolis.’”

Slotkin then concludes that the “achievement of ‘progress’ was therefore inevitably associated with territorial expansion and colored by the experience, the politics, and the peculiar psychology of emigration.”

Thus the classical individual versus society theme of the American Adam mythology is invoked. The frontier is necessary for our American Adams so that they can escape the constraints of civilization, and it is because of this escape that not only different physical environments are created but also differing versions of manhood. Slotkin describes the two contrasting personalities when he states that “the informing metaphor of Thoreau’s vision is the struggle between two modes of perception, that of the hunter and that of the farmer. Thoreau’s farmer, unlike Crévecoeur’s, is the materialist, bound forever to the routine of plowing and profiting, getting and spending; his soul is ‘plowed under for compost.’ The hunter and the poet are free souls, whose

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11 Ibid.
purpose in life is neither to sow nor to reap but to perceive and to respond to all of life.”\textsuperscript{12} In references to the hunter/poet’s main goal in life, Slotkin goes on to unapologetically claim, “To perfect their perceptions is their only ambition; to increase the depth and significance of their response is their only profit.”\textsuperscript{13} Thus, one can easily conclude that the farmer is unable to enter the frontier, or at the very least that he is unable to be successful in this environment. However, Mosley expands this aspect of the myth to demonstrate that the frontier can even be off limits to traditional hunters and in doing so creates an exceptional hunter that is freer than other hunters. Mosley alludes to this prohibition to certain aspects of the urban frontier through Detective Melvin Suggs comments: “But I can tell you that we need your help because a white policeman looking into anything down in Watts right now will only draw attention to something we need kept quiet.”\textsuperscript{14} Mosley further expands this exclusion by extending it to African-Americans who are considered to be “civilized,” writing that “Every once in a while the law sent over one of their few black representatives to ask me to go into the places they could never go. I was worth a precinct full of detectives when the cops needed the word in the ghetto.”\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{thebibliography}{15}
\bibitem{slotkin1} Ibid.
\bibitem{mosley1} Walter Mosley, \textit{White Butterfly} (New York: Norton, 1992), 44.
\end{thebibliography}
Through this passage, Mosley artfully demonstrates that, despite what some might believe, race is not the requirement for entry into the urban wilderness and in doing so he expands western mythology. Previously, one could have claimed that “savagery,” which was correlated to one’s race, was an automatic admission into the frontier wilderness.

Mosley artfully crafts a narrative in the series that not only reflects the differing environments of the frontier but also shows how each environment influences a migration into the next through his depiction of rural, small towns and metropolises. Mosley invokes traditional frontier wilderness through Easy’s time spent with Domaque in the Texas swamp lands. Easy proclaims the virtues of Domaque’s place in wilderness by claiming that “It was very pleasant to sit out there in his wild yard. A garden as beautiful as any I’d seen in the rich part of Houston; it was almost like an inside room or greenhouse only with a sky for a roof. I told Dom how much I liked it and he smiled.” Mosley even goes as far as to directly correlate the Texas swamplands with Eden when Easy comments that “There were hummingbirds at the sweet peas, flickering in and out of the blossoms so fast you could hardly tell they were there. I felt funny, light-headed, but I didn’t want to change. It seemed to me that this was the Eden Dom talked about; like he built his own garden right out of the Bible.”

Leaving the Texas swamp lands, Mosley

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continues the evolution of his frontier in the small town of Pariah, whose name implies a rouge state. Easy states that “Pariah looked wilder than the woods. It was a crooked town, not more than two blocks of unpaved red clay street – and all there was to it was the one street.”\(^\text{17}\) Finally, Mosley’s narrative takes the reader into his main frontier landscape: the urban wilderness of Los Angeles:

Southeast L. A. was palm trees and poverty; neat little lawns tended by the descendants of ex-slaves and massacred Indians. It was beautiful and wild; a place that was almost a nation, populated by the lost peoples that were never talked about in the newspapers or seen on the TV. You might have read about freedom marchers; you might have heard about a botched liquor store robbery (if a white man was injured) – but you never heard about Tommy Jones growing the biggest roses in the world or how Fiona Roberts saved her neighbor by facing off three armed men with only the spirit of God to guide her.\(^\text{18}\)

One could conclude that through this passage, Mosley cunningly demonstrates the existence of the urban wilderness within society, not living outside it, like the previous examples of wilderness in the series. Furthermore, Mosley carefully shows that there are differing degrees of wilderness. For example, he explains that rural frontier is more advantageous and free than the urban jungle. Easy states that “The desert quiet of southern California nights was always a pleasure to me. In the South around Texas and Louisiana there were loud bugs and night birds, wind in the trees,

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 124.

and less identifiable noises from the wetlands and its inhabitants. But in L. A. the night was wrapped in silence as if there were always a predator near, waiting to pounce on some hushed victim. That night, I suppose, the predator was me.”

Through this description, Mosley is able to show how a traditional wilderness is safer and more pure than the dangerous, urban frontier. He then further elucidates this idea of wilderness within civilization by showing the alienation of his community by the dominant, “civilized” society through racial discrimination. Easy observes that “Foreign blacks made the news, however. That very day the Congolese had jailed two Russians for espionage, and five hundred Haitians had been reported dead from flooding. To the white press, and many white Americans, black people were easier to see as exotic foreigners, somebody else’s people. But the lives of black American’s were treated with silence.”

This passage shows how the dominant culture can create a frontier within civilization through ignoring, not accepting or even discriminating against a population.

The wilderness presents an interesting intersection of conflicting morality. It is the intersection of good and evil, where the savage and civilized clash. Fiedler states that the American hero “lives on the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence—on the ‘frontier,’ which is to say, the margin where the theory

19 Mosley, Bad Boy Brawly Brown, 86.

20 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 212.
of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face.”21 Mosley expands the myth of the frontier by showing that the same physical location can be simultaneously civilization and frontier. Easy proclaims that “It struck me then that I was unarmed. I had gone unarmed in the streets of L. A. for over two years but this was the first time that it made me feel light.”22 It could be concluded that this simultaneous inhabitation of two environments allows Mosley to accurately reflect contemporary life, as it can be theorized modern inner city dwellers live in civilization both within their houses and cities and on the frontier in their neighborhoods. This duality then creates a ring of wilderness that one must cross in order to reenter “civilization.” However, it is accepted that for most of the inhabitants of the urban frontier, this task of reaching civilization is improbable if not impossible.

Violence in the Urban Wilderness

One inescapable characteristic of the frontier is the inherent violence that is found in the wilderness. Slotkin concludes that this aspect of the myth is directly related to the founding of the nation:

In American mythogenesis the founding fathers were not those eighteenth-century gentlemen who composed a nation at Philadelphia.


Rather, they were those (to paraphrase Fulkner’s *Absalo, Absalom!* ) who tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness – the rogues, adventurers, and land-boomers; the Indian fighters, traders, missionaries, explorers, and hunters who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness; the settlers who came after, suffering hardship and Indian warfare for the sake of a sacred mission or a simple desire for land; and the Indians themselves, both as they were and as they appeared for settlers, for whom they were the special demonic personification of the American wilderness.\textsuperscript{23}

Slotkin goes on to describe the sacred use of violence in myth by stating that “The figure and the myth-narrative that emerged from that early Boone literature became the archetypal for American literature which followed: an American hero is the lover of the spirit of the wilderness, and his acts of love and sacred affirmation are acts of violence against that spirit and her avatars.”\textsuperscript{24} This violence is represented by the settling of colonies in the New World, the relocating and eventual elimination of perceived Native American barbarism, heroism in battle, and the proselytizing of the Puritan faith.\textsuperscript{25}

While this analysis of the traditional use of violence is reflected in the novels as Easy solves the mysteries presented, it can be theorized that Mosley transcends the conventional application of violence in order to provide a more holistic and

\textsuperscript{23}Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*, 4.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., 21; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 11.
realistic reflection of the human condition. Mosley accomplishes this through the connection between violence and poverty, which is evidenced in Easy’s proclamation that “I had forgotten that a poor man is never safe.”26 One could conclude that Mosley elaborates on the intersection between poverty and violence when Mouse states that:

‘I’ont think it’s wrong to kill somebody, Easy,’ he said at last. ‘I mean, that’s what life is all about—killin’, killin’ to survive. You see it in bugs and animals—hell, even plants kill to survive. It couldn’t be a sin because I been hearin’ stories out the Bible my whole life; ev’rybody in there’s killin’ an’ getting’ killed. An’ you know it ain’t really against the law, ‘cause we both know a cop’ll snuff yo’ ass as easy as he could sneeze. Shit. Government kill more people than a murderin’ man could count an’ ain’t nobody takin’ no general to court. Uh-uh. No. It ain’t wrong.’27

It could be theorized that Mosley uses this passage reflect the multiple dimensions of poverty’s relation to violence. This excerpt shows that violence is a byproduct of the primordial need for survival and that because of its repetitious and frequent nature it becomes the norm instead of the exception. Additionally, one could also conclude from this passage that those in poverty could also be drawn to violence due to the violence perpetrated on them by the dominant culture, especially through the actions of the government and law enforcement. Mosley describes the organic process which produces violence in the urban jungle through Easy’s commentary on Spider.

26 Mosley, A Red Death, 51.

27 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 320.
Easy recounts that “If Spider was my son I would have slapped that cigarette and that grin away. I would have made him stand up straight instead of slouching like some gangster or pimp. But I didn’t have the right to criticize. Spider was the natural product of the streets I lived in. He made up his own manhood and I had to respect that.”

Thus, one can conclude that Mosley uses this natural development of violence as a mechanism to equip his heroes with tools necessary to survive in the wilderness while at the same time preventing them from being viewed as uncontrolled sociopaths inflicting havoc on unsuspecting victims.

Once Mosley has created characters that are comfortable with violence due to its organic nature and who are able to use it constructively, he can then delve deeper into the problem of race and poverty in the United States through his use of violence in the urban wilderness of racist America. Easy clearly makes this connection when he states that “Poor men are always ready to die. We always expect that there’s somebody out there who wants to kill us. That’s why I never question that a white man would pull out his gun when he saw a negro coming. That’s just the way it is in America.”

However, while his characters often suffer the abuses and humiliation of racist activities, Mosley does not let his characters become victims of these assaults but instead empowers them to confront these abuses head on. Mosley does not just paint a rosy picture of rebellion against the modern day slave masters but

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instead he chooses to mirror what one could claim is the actuality of violence on the human psyche. Easy recounts that “Dickhead cringed. Saliva and blood came from his mouth, mucus poured out of his nostrils, and baby tears welled in his eyes. But I didn’t enjoy it. One of the problems with so many oppressed people is that they don’t have the stomach to give what they get. I hurt that simple white man because I was scared of him. If he’d called me boy or nigger one more time I might have started gibbering myself.”

Finally, Mosley shows that the intersection between race and violence is not confined to confrontations between individuals of different races. For example, John threatens Easy by asserting, “Easy, if I wanted to get you I could put sumpin’ in yo’ drink. Or I could get one’a these niggahs in here t’cut you’ th’oat. But you know better than that, don’t you?” However, one could conclude that Mosley transcends typical views of violence within the African-American community when an old man on the street proclaims that “‘It’s always a black man out there hittin’ another black man so all the white folks could laugh: Look at that fool.’” Through this passage, it can be theorized that Mosley is not only showing the negative impact of violence on individuals (one being hurt or killed) but also the possible origin of such violent

30 Mosley, Black Betty, 85.
31 Mosley, A Red Death, 80.
32 Mosley, Black Betty, 151.
actions (racial discrimination). Finally, in what could be claimed as one of the series most controversial statements, Mosley informs his readers of the extreme difficulty of overcoming the cycle of violence that has been deeply rooted in American race relations by stating that “Even Martin Luther King has given up on a nonviolent solution.” This statement allows Mosley to transcend the rarity of violence to show that it is common in the urban frontier and that even when the main conflict is resolved that violence will continue to exist. It could then be theorized that this continued violence that Mosley is portraying is a direct result of overt and indirect racism. Thus, Mosley transcends traditional views of the frontier where violence occurs due to the realities of the wilderness savagery to show that violence is created through society’s discrimination of minority and marginalized populations. In Mosley’s new model, violence does not flow from the wilderness to civilization but that through civilization’s actions the wilderness and its inherent violence is created.

Masculinity on the Frontier

It could be safely concluded that the wilderness of the frontier creates an environment where violence thrives. This environment then develops specific characteristics in our western heroes such as bravery, outward emotional coldness,

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and tolerance of pain.\textsuperscript{34} One could conclude that the major characteristics that Mosley uses in the development of his protagonist are fearlessness, respect, strength, logic, and loyalty. James Cortese notes that one of the overarching characteristics of the frontier man is that he possess “many of the traits that once were the exclusive property of villains.”\textsuperscript{35} This conclusion might seem contradictory to the list of characteristics previously noted; however, one must not forget that we must view these characteristics in the environment in which our hero is placed.

One of the main characteristics of Easy is that he is usually fearless in situations, or he at least attempts to be so on the outside. Easy expresses this sentiment when he states, “But still I came from a place where to show your fear was like asking for death. It was suicide; a sin.”\textsuperscript{36} This passage show the complexity of contemporary male socialization regarding fear and courage by expanding the traditional western hero from being fearless hero devoid of emotion to a more realistic man with primal fears that must be controlled. Mosley solidifies fearlessness as a virtue his protagonist strives for when Easy comments that “Arno sat. The thing that made him a good cop, probably the best cop I’d ever met, was the

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\end{itemize}
fact that he couldn’t be intimidated. He didn’t mind if I stood over him in that small room. Because that room was his office and he was boss no matter where you were. Easy demonstrates this fearlessness throughout the series. One of the most vibrant episodes is when he is trying to find Hight and gets cornered and bravely proclaims that “I had six bullets and all the training I’d ever need. The decision to slaughter those men came with no fear of law or prison or death. I was about to run down shooting. The war cry was in my throat.” However, in order to make the narrative more realistic, Mosley expands Easy’s interpretation of fear. Easy claims that “I wasn’t afraid, exactly. I rarely got frightened unless I was faced with immediate danger. But there was anxiety rooting around in my gut. It’s the kind of feeling I’m sure birds get when it’s time for them to fly south.” Through this passage, Mosley enables Easy to express his fear while at the same time concealing it, thus expanding the mythology of the frontier to reflect contemporary culture. Mosley then goes one step further by incorporating fearlessness as a mechanism for survival when Easy claims that “If we couldn’t laugh in the face of death there’d be precious little humor for most black southerners.” Easy’s fearlessness is best captured in a conversation he had with the waitress at the Black Chantilly. She asks

“You gamble?” to which he responds “Only with my life.”\textsuperscript{41} This statement reinforces the expanded mythology where the protagonist acts fearless but has a cognitive realization that the actual risks might outweigh the gains. However, such improbability is what makes the protagonist our hero, because he is able to apply mental fortitude, logic, and strength to increase his odds, inspiring readers to do the same.

Correspondingly and complementary to the attribute of fearlessness is that Mosley’s protagonists, like those of traditional westerns, pose great strength. This quality is more than just physical strength and encompasses mental fortitude. When remembering the lessons that his father imparted to him, Easy recounts that:

\begin{quote}
He once told me that anything that happened to a man before he was sixty was a good thing. . . . Because a real man will know that he has to overcome anything that gets in the way of him caring for his family. A real man will study the arm he has left. He will build its strength, learn how to use tools with it. He will make sure that he’s a better man with one arm than other men with two. And he’ll make it so, no matter how hard he has to try. A real man can be beat only if you kill him. And with his dyin’ breath he will try to overcome Death itself.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

It could be concluded that this passage transcends the idea of strength to go beyond the hero’s physical might to demonstrate how one can overcome one’s weakness through sheer determination and will. Thus, Mosley demonstrates the positive

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\textsuperscript{41} Mosley, \textit{A Little Yellow Dog}, 234.  \\
\textsuperscript{42} Mosley, \textit{Bad Boy Brawly Brown}, 149.
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attributes of masculinity in his hero through the combination of mental capacities that allow him to overcome any weakness, both mental and physical.

However, Mosley not only equips his protagonist with the mental abilities necessary for survival in the wilderness but also grants him the aptitude of logic, which Easy uses in settling of the wilderness, or in the case of detective fiction, in solving the mysteries at hand. Easy proclaims that “Logic is the most frightening talent that a man has. A man with logic can see death coming where a fly only sees a shadow. I saw death in Lewis’s reasoning.” However, Mosley expands the utilization of logic from not only being exploited in the analytical application of thought used in the disentanglement of his mysteries but also in the resolve of interpersonal conflicts. For example, when Mouse is confronting his estranged father, Easy states, “I had taken three steps when Mouse started kicking the basket. I felt that if I walked slowly and calmly into that situation I could stop all the hostile activities. I honestly believed that I could calm Mouse down and bring Reese around to reason.” It then could be theorized that this expanded application of reason allows Mosley to successfully make his protagonist more reflective about how actual individuals use logic, solving both professional and personal dilemmas.

Through this use of logic in his protagonist’s personal relationships, Mosley

43 Mosley, Black Betty, 287.

44 Mosley, Gone Fishin’, 169.
is able to grant his hero the traditional western quality of loyalty. However, Mosley
does not just give Easy these qualities but installs them in Easy’s friends and allies.
For example, when Easy became ill he notes that “I never knew Mouse to be so
gentle. He held me all night and kept me warm as much as he could. Who knows?
Maybe I would’ve died out there in Pariah if Mouse hadn’t held me to his black heart.”
Thus, it can be concluded that this strong bond between Easy and his
friends is a vital characteristic that allows him to solve his mysteries, not only
because it ensures assistance from his trusty sidekick, Mouse, but it also allows him
the elucidate information from his informants. However, while Easy has many loyal
allies in the wilderness, his most devoted and steadfast ally is his adopted son Jesus.
Easy reminisces that “Jesus loved me but he didn’t trust that I could handle the hard
world. He was my backup and I didn’t even know it. He was more of a man than I
was.”
While one could read this passage and note that Jesus distrusts Easy, it could
be concluded that Jesus is reflective of the typical father figure, worrying about his
son (or in this case father) but always there to help him along his journey and in his
personal development.

Similarly to loyalty, Mosley equips his characters with respect, which is often
used in conjunction with loyalty. Respect does not necessarily refer to respect of
others but instead it might refer to respect for oneself, for one’s reputation. For

46 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 215.
example, when Easy is taken advantage of at Marvel’s Used Cars, he angrily proclaims that “They humiliated me, Ray. I ain’t gonna stand for that.”

Thus, in order to regain Easy’s respect, Easy and Mouse set out to revenge his honor. However, it can be concluded that Mosley draws on the stereotypical view of respect found in westerns where it is obligatory for a man to maintain or even regain his respect through confrontation. Reminiscent of a duel in a western frontier town, Bonnie informs Easy that “You can’t run from trouble, Mr. Rawlins.”

Thus, like characters in traditional westerns, Mosley intertwines respect with violence. Through this weaving of these two traditional western motifs, it could be concluded that Mosley is able to reflect realistic emotions of honor that are held by contemporary men. Moreover, Mosley is able to transcend the idea of respect by linking it to strength. Throughout the series, Easy is influenced by his self-respect and knowledge of his limitations to strive for constant self-improvement. One could claim that the origin of this attitude is developed during Easy’s experience in the wilderness of the Domaque. One could specifically point to Easy’s comments about Domaque’s ability to read as the start of his life-long self-improvement. For example, Easy states that “I wanted to ask him more but I was tired and a little shy of how ignorant I was. Being a young man I felt I should be able to do anything better

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than a hunchback, and the fact that I couldn’t rubbed me wrong.”49 This transcending characteristic of self-improvement becomes vital to Mosley’s narrative, as it enables his protagonist to gain the skills that he needs to not only survive in the urban wilderness but also the ability to successfully solve the mysteries that confront him.

However, while Mosley expands many of the characteristics of the western hero to reflect contemporary American culture, he remains true to the stoic nature of protagonists in the mythology of the frontier. Mosley is even able to take one of his most passionate characters, Mouse, and install this characteristic in him. For example, Easy recounts that “Raymond sat next to me, quiet and thoughtful. He drew his right knee up to his chin and smoked a Chesterfield. He reminded me of a man sitting in a solitary cell. There was nothing to complain about because there was no one would hear him.”50 Mosley even makes an effort to show that while men might become “softer” or conform to the demands of civilization, the mythological reserved cowboy still exists in contemporary urban culture. For example, Easy further comments on Mouse’s stoic state when he notes that “Mouse might have changed, but he certainly wasn’t what anybody would call normal. I don’t think that you could have gotten a rise out of him if the Russians dropped the bomb on New

49 Mosley, *Gone Fishin’*, 127.

50 Mosley, *A Little Yellow Dog*, 68.
York City."\textsuperscript{51} However, Mosley complicates his characters by showing that while reserved and seemingly unemotional, these men have real emotions and do express them. It can be concluded that it just takes a attuned observer to notice their manifestation. For example, Easy notes that “Mouse had a talent; he could smile without letting it show. You could be looking at him and if you didn’t know it you’d think his face was just plain, but if you knew what to look for you’d see how his eyes go larger and how his mouth lost its hardness. He was smiling then.”\textsuperscript{52} Through carefully crafted passages, such as this one, Mosley is able to provide his characters with complex, emotional personalities without sacrificing traditional values found in the mythology of the frontier.

The Urban Savage

One of the central characters required in the mythology of the frontier is the wild and dangerous savage that is ever ready to pounce onto civilization and destroy it. While the savage lives in the wilderness, he also represents the adverse impact of completely submitting to the wilderness. While one could claim that according to American mythology one wishes to escape civilization and live free from constraints, the savage represents what the impact is of totally disregarding all forms of constraint. Thus, one could conclude that the mythology propels one to be free but

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{52} Mosley, \textit{Gone Fishin'}, 62.
not to surrender all morality. Slotkin states that “The Indian—for Filson, as for the Puritans and for Buffon and de Pauw – represents a memento mori, a warning of the power of the wilderness to kill man’s better nature. Like Boone, the Indian is the product of a wilderness environment, but his politics lack the inner controls, the self-restraint, necessary to the citizen of an ideal republican democracy. The Indian is an instinctive democrat but without a sufficient sense of civic responsibility.”

Slotkin describes how the hard-boiled hero embodies the myth by confronting, in often a violent manner, the villains in the wilderness by stating that “... the hard-boiled dick exposes defalcating bankers, crooked speculators, the usurpers of inheritances. But the more sensational and appealing exposures are those that come when the detective delves into the urban criminal underworld. This is where the key to our social disorder is found, where the trail of an upper-class malefactor can be picked up, where the detective confronts the gang-bosses who constitute the elite of urban crime.”

A prime example of how a protagonist can incorporate savagery of the urban wilderness is clearly demonstrated in Dashiell Hammett’s writings, which one could claim are the literary predecessors to Mosley’s work. In reference to Hammett’s *Black Mask*, Slotkin notes:

> Although his identity is thus bound up with the corporate apparatus of law, he expresses himself and achieves his goals in an ‘outlaw’ style. His profession licenses him to act like the ‘man who knows Indians,’

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54 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 222.
to learn and use the cynical wisdom and violent methods of the underworld so that he can turn them against their makers. But the moral order in which the Op works is far more corrupt than that in the Indian-war romance or western: greed and the evil it causes are so pervasive and dangerous that none of the conventional symbols of good can be trusted. The op’s cynicism is the mark of his realism as a judge of men and women and of his pragmatic professionalism.\footnote{Ibid., 223.}

The first of the savages that Easy encounters is Albright, who informs Easy of the brutality of urban savages when he warns, “‘But the only thing that you have to remember, Easy,’ he said as he picked up the money to hand me across the table, ‘Is that some of us can kill with no more trouble than drinking a glass of bourbon.’”\footnote{Walter Mosley, \textit{Devil in a Blue Dress} (New York: Norton, 1990), 67.}

Albright is of particular importance because he represents Easy’s first introduction, save the experiences in the prequel \textit{Gone Fishin’}, to the contemporary savage. From this encounter onward, one could conclude that Mosley transforms the use of savage from mere helpful guide or dangerous foe living in the wilderness to an complex mixture of the both identities. On one hand, savages throughout the series present a remarkable degree of danger for Easy, but at the same time his association with them is vital to his survival outside the wilderness of the underworld as his adventures provide him and his family with a livelihood.

While Mosley takes great effort in developing traditional savages that one might expect in detective fiction novels, he takes effort to show that reality is not just a contrast between good and evil, black and white. Unlike traditional westerns, he
shows that savagery happens on multiple different levels. Easy recounts that “On the way out the fat one said to Naylor, ‘Don’t worry, son, lotsa killin’s on nigger patrol. Wait till you see how the nigger bitches cut up on each other.’”\textsuperscript{57} It can be concluded that this passage not only reflects the contemporary reality of the modern frontier but also shows how Mosley uses the series to provide social commentary on savages in the wilderness. It can be theorized that Mosley is drawing attention to the brutality of crime between individuals within Easy’s community in order to vividly instruct his readers to know who the true savages are and that physical violence is less of a danger than racial discrimination. It could be theorized that Mosley’s true villains are not just those found in traditional detective fiction but also in the larger society that, intentionally or not, systematically discriminate against these communities. This hypothesis is supported by Easy’s further conversations with Naylor, when Easy states that “He asked more questions like that and I answered freely. I trusted a Negro I don’t know why. I’d been beaten, robbed, shot at, and generally mistreated by more colored brothers than I’d ever been by whites, but I trusted a black man before I’d even think about a white one. That’s just the way things were for me.”\textsuperscript{58} This passage shows how Mosley not only explores differing versions of savages in the urban wilderness of Los Angeles, but also how he artfully delineates the differences between violence in the wilderness and savagery in the wilderness. It

\textsuperscript{57} Mosley, \textit{A Red Death}, 195.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 197.
can be concluded that savagery in the wilderness is the ongoing, common violence caused by societal discrimination, and that in the wilderness it focuses on the specific individuals who abuse and take advantage of disadvantaged populations.

Justice on the Urban Frontier

A person could conclude that one of the main reasons for interactions with savages, besides the desire to live in the wilderness, is the establishment of justice. Slotkin states that “The detective hero who fights for whatever good and justice exists in such a world is a figure not unlike the Virginian. He is an uncommon common man, a ‘man who knows Indians,’ which in this world means a man who knows the world of crime as if from the inside but who also has a chivalric sense of ‘honor’ or justice, which identifies him with aristocratic values and with the values of an earlier, cleaner America . . . .”59 Mosley, however, expands the idea of justice by incorporating the reality of racism, and its impact on justice. Easy recounts, “And Mouse . . . well, I didn’t know about Mouse. But at least I knew the answer to the question. I knew that the men he suspected were innocent. The truth has to mean something. Truth and Freedom; two great things for a poor man, a son of slaves and ex-slaves. My arm ached. I could feel the deep reach of infection in my veins. One thing was certain – there was no escaping Fate. Fate hauls back and laughs his ass

59 Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 218.
off at Truth and Freedom. Those are minor deities compared to Fate and Death.”

Through this incorporation of race, Mosley is able to develop a mission that is greater than justice for the sake of good versus evil, and that is focused instead on a deeper, internal struggle for basic human dignity. Easy notes that “Somewhere along the line I had slipped into the role of a confidential agent who represented people when the law broke down. And the law broke down often enough to keep me busy. It even broke down for the cops sometimes.”

It can be theorized that unlike traditional detective fiction novels, where there is an assumption that the rule of law is ever present due to the urban geography, that this is not the reality in the urban wilderness. This passage leads one to assume that the police will not descend at the end of the story and bring the true villain to justice, which in turn makes it vital for Easy to act. Mosley’s narrative is more similar to that of the traditional western, the predecessor of the detective fiction novel, where in the extreme frontier justice might not exist. Easy claims:

Somebody might not believe what happened to me. They might say that a prisoner in America always knows the specific crime of which he is accused. They might say that a man has a right to good counsel and at least a phone call. At one time I would have said that white people had those rights but colored ones didn’t. But as time went by I came to understand that we’re all just one step away from an anonymous grave. You don’t have to live in communist country to be assassinated; just ask J. T. Saunders about that. The police could

60 Mosley, Black Betty, 315.

61 Mosley, White Butterfly, 51.
come to your house today and drag you from your bed. They could beat you until you swallow teeth and they can lock you in a hole for months.62

It can be concluded that this passage accurately reflects the contemporary reality of life in the urban wilderness of the inner city. Mosley is able to do more than show his readers that justice is absent in the modern day frontier by acutely noting that in this context those heroes who have been sworn to protect the population actually are the true savages. Easy notes that “I lived in a world where many people believed that laws dealt with all citizens equally, but that belief wasn’t held by my people. The law we faced was most often at odds with itself. When the sun went down or the cell door slammed, the law no longer applied to our citizenry.”63 This reality of racial discrimination and the corresponding lack of justice enables Mosley to develop Easy’s consciousness that propels him into the urban wilderness to fight the savages in order to restore justice. Easy recounts that right before entering the room in Miller Neurological Sanatorium where Nola Payne’s dead body was located:

I had resisted it all through the riots: the angry voice in my heart that urged me to go out and fight after all of the hangings I had seen, after all of the times I had been called nigger and all of the doors that had been slammed in my face. I spent my whole early life at the back of buses and in the segregated balconies of theaters. I had been arrested for walking in the wrong part of town and threatened for looking a man in the eye. And when I went to war to fight for freedom, I found myself in a segregated army, treated with less respect than they

62 Ibid., 288.

63 Mosley, Blonde Faith, 75-76.
treated German POWs. I had seen people who looked like me jeered on TV and in the movies. I had had enough and I wasn’t about to turn back, even though I wanted to. The door opened and the wind blew me through.  

This passage accurately demonstrates that the systematic nature of the discrimination and a life-time of events causes one to choose certain actions, which makes Mosley’s protagonist more reflective of contemporary individuals.

While it could be claimed that other detective fiction stories do include law enforcement officers and judges that act outside the law in their own selfish interests, Mosley is able to show that the reality is that this phenomenon is not just a single case of the proverbial “bad apple” but instead is the systematic discrimination of a minority population by the dominant culture. This reality is evident in Strong’s convictions that “‘There’s no time for Good Samaritans and mother’s tears while the police brutalize our souls and break our bodies.’” Mosley further examines this pervasive inequity when Easy notes that:

My job was to make those cops feel that Raymond and I had a legitimate reason to be there at that phone booth on that street corner. Most Americans wouldn’t understand why two well-dressed men would have to explain why they were standing on a public street. But most Americans cannot comprehend the scrutiny that black people have been under since the days we were dragged here in bondage. Those two cops felt fully authorized to stop us with no reason and no warrant. They felt that they could question us and search us and cart us off to jail if there was the slightest flaw in how we explained our

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Through Mosley’s understanding of race relations he is able then to create a protagonist with an acute view of justice, and in doing so he allows his hero to strive to attain justice on many multidimensional levels. For example, when Isolda asks Easy if he has ever been questioned by law enforcement, he remembers that “I had been ‘questioned’ a hundred times and more. And every time my life and liberty has been on the line. It hadn’t mattered that I was innocent or that they had no proof of my guilt. There was no Emancipation Proclamation posted on the jailhouse bulletin board. No Bill of Rights, either.” Through these passages, Mosley gives Easy not only the motivation to bring the villains in the series to justice for their individual crimes but also to act in such a way that brings the “civilized” world to justice for their crimes against the basic humanity of minority populations.

This view of justice while on one hand is unique to Mosley because of the particularities of place and time in his novels, it is also characteristic of his detective fiction predecessors. Slotkin concludes that similarly to Mosley’s expansion, “Hammett in turn built on the themes and characterizations developed in the dime-novel detective series, in which ‘outlaws’ and ‘detectives’ define alternative ways of

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66 Mosley, *Cinnamon Kiss*, 203.

imagining American justice.”68 For example, Easy states that “If the cops had killed Marlon there was no court that would hear his complaint. The only revenge we could get would be personal – a showdown. But I wasn’t willing to kill a cop.”69 This passage is remarkable because it not only invokes the traditional “showdown” motif of traditional westerns and how justice can be redefined outside the law but it also interestingly shows that for Easy, as can be assumed for some aspects of modern urban culture, that the “showdown” does not necessarily mean confronting those at the source of the conflict directly.

Moreover, Easy redefines the view of justice to show that sometimes action is not always the most appropriate course and that one must weigh a multitude of consequences that are presented by reality instead of answering the romantic callings of traditional American mythology. For example, Easy warns Clarissa that “You saw what the police did the other night. You know what they’re capable of. If we just get out in the street and urge people to vote, they break down our walls and put us in jail. What do you think they’d do if we formed into guerrilla squads armed to the teeth?”70 Through these and other examples, Mosley is able to demonstrate the reality that even heroes must carefully decide which evils they wish to confront and that logic is paramount. He is also able to show the realistic impact of long-term

68 Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 219.

69 Mosley, Black Betty, 307.

70 Mosley, Bad Boy Brawly Brown, 131.
discrimination on his protagonist, through a sense of hopelessness that one can change the state of the nation, which could serve as a prime example of how the contemporary American Adam has lost his innocence and must struggle to not only establish justice in an uncivilized “civilized” world but how he must also fight just to survive in it. Easy’s loss of innocence regarding the possible creation of a society with full equality is exemplified when he states that “I was thinking that white America also had an army of young fools like Brawly, that all the young men in all the history of the world were like him. Young men fighting and dying for ideas they barely understood, for rights they never possessed, for beliefs based on lies.”

It can be theorized that in this passage, Mosley shows how innocence leads one to want to remedy all the ills of society, even if one does not understand the full ramifications of one’s actions, but that with maturity one understands that the only justice one might be able to achieve might not be as glamorous.

However, Mosley is able to give his protagonist a desire for justice and at the same time is able to create a hero that fully understands the reality of racial discrimination. This understanding often causes Easy great strife when he is attempting to do what is morally right by finding out the truth at the bottom of his dangerous mysteries. Easy demonstrates this understanding when he states that:

And you have to understand the impact of the death of a white man on a black southerner like me. In the south if a black man killed a white

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71 Ibid., 155.
man he was dead. If the police saw him on the street they shot first and asked questions . . . never. If he gave himself up he was killed in his cell. If the constable wasn’t a murdering man then a mob would come and lynch the poor son of a bitch. And failing all that, if a black man ever made it to trial and was convicted of killing a white man – even in self-defense, even if it was to save another white man – that convict would spend the rest of his days incarcerated. There would be no parole, no commutation of sentence, no extenuating circumstances, no time off for good behavior.72

Thus, it can be theorized that through this understanding of race relations, Mosley has created a protagonist that expands the definition of the hard-boiled detective. It can be concluded that the traditional hard-boiled detective knows that no matter the growing body count that eventually, in the end, he will be found to be the savior of the city in need and will be honored for his courageous work. However, it can be theorized that Easy, like modern man who lives in the present day urban wilderness, understands that in the end, one is more likely to be arrested and beaten, if not executed, because of his skin color or socioeconomic background, despite his honorary actions. However, what sets Mosley’s protagonist apart from mere mortals is that while he understands the danger of not only the imminent violence but also the larger sociological ramifications of racial discrimination, he is still motivated by this discrimination, both present day and historical, to exact justice on the villains who terrorize his community. For example, when Conrad is being beat on, Easy overhears one of the villains saying, “‘I know you gonna pay, nigger,’ the white man

72 Mosley, Cinnamon Kiss, 224-225.
said. ‘I know because after I burn your ass, you won’t ever forget to pay anybody ever again.’” This realization of history repeating itself causes Easy to note that “‘Maybe, if the thug stuck to his regular job, that is, a sound beating for late payment, I might have stood by until he was through. My best bet was to wait for him to soften Anton up. And then, when he’d gone, I come in and ask a few questions about Brawly. But anything having to do with ropes or fire when it comes to black-white relations was bound to set my teeth on edge.” Thus, while Easy fights for justice, it is not always justice for a specific crime, but it is many times motivated by past racially oriented crimes against African-Americans. It could be theorized that this new view redefines what justice means not only in the genre of detective fiction but in society in general.

Women on the Frontier

While women exist in the narratives of the American Adam as the ogres that are ever ready to pounce on the freedom of men and to constrain them in civilized cages, on the frontier women are transformed into the stereotypical and clichéd damsels in distress. Slotkin states that “Almost from the moment of its literary genesis, the New England Indian captivity narrative functioned as a myth, reducing the Puritan state of mind and world view, along with the events of colonization and


74 Ibid.
settlement, into archetypical drama. In it a single individual, usually a woman, stands passively under the strokes of evil awaiting rescue by the grace of God.”75 Throughout the series, Easy rushes to the aid of these vulnerable women, in a misogynistic fervor that is typical of the genre. This clear delineation in Easy’s mind as to the superiority of the male sex is apparent when he recalls his interactions with Gwendolyn Jones and states that “Maybe it was because I never learned to respect women. If I knew that a man was dangerous I’d be wary, because a man can be a serious problem. I wouldn’t necessarily be afraid of a man – still, I’d take him seriously. But a woman never called up fear in me. I’ve seen at least a dozen women kill men dead but I’d still laugh if one was to threaten me.”76 Easy not only understands his prejudiced view of women but Mosley allows him to use it in a constructive way in order to gain information. When trying to solicit information from Alfred Bontemp’s mother, Easy notes that “she was so scared that she told me the address. Woman’s love has killed many a man that way.”77 Mosley even takes great effort to demonstrate a perceived inferiority of women by artfully showing how a woman, such as Miss Bonnie Shay, who is educated and a world traveler, can be belittled in the mind of the protagonist. For example, Bonnie states “If you didn’t do

75 Slotkin, Regeneration through Violence, 94.
76 Mosley, Black Betty, 174.
77 Mosley, A Red Death, 77.
anything there’s nothing to worry about.” While on the surface this statement might seem to be demonstrating how strong a character she is by being able to stand up to Easy and question his motivations, it is really an attack on her intellect as Easy perceives it to be limited by her nationality and inexperience. Easy goes on the state that “I knew right then that she wasn’t a fully American Negro. A black man or woman in America, with American parents, knew that innocence was a term for white people. We were born in sin.” Through this and other passages, Mosley paints his female characters as not fully understanding the world they inhabit, which prevents them from seeing fully the danger that awaits them on the frontier. By this anti-feminist approach, Mosley is able to create an environment where women are viewed as significantly inferior to men and thus are in need of saving. Given this interesting point of view, it could be theorized that Mosley struggles with maintaining a sense of adherence to the genre while reflecting the actual characteristics of modern women. It could be then concluded that Mosley is able to walk this line by dividing his women among numerous permutations within the grey area between the “damsel in distress” and the self-reliant woman.

However, one could argue that the need to rescue the “damsel in distress” is vital to the progression of the narrative as it is a motivating force that propels Easy into the dangerous underworld where he is able to solve the mysteries at hand.

78 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 256.

79 Ibid.
Mosley alludes to this in Easy’s comments regarding Celia, “I had to ask myself was this woman worth that much to me.” However, it is interesting to note that the impetus to assist women is not only always, or even often, motivated by sexual conquest or romantic intentions. For example, Easy notes that “Never in my life had I taken such a chance for somebody else. I’d risked my life before but that was always because of my pride—or stupidity. But here I was working for a dead woman to save a woman who I hardly even knew.” It can then be theorized that Easy is propelled to assist these women not from some individual connection but by some larger, cosmic force. The difficult aspect of examining Easy’s motivation is identifying if it is propelled by attitudes toward sex or if it is the by-product of racial discrimination, or some other factor such as socioeconomic issues or morality. This confusion makes Mosley’s protagonist a multifaceted individual who is most likely more reflective of contemporary male attitudes since it might be hard to distinguish which factor is the primarily motivating reason. It could be then assumed that Easy’s motivation to save his damsels is related to a combination of factors, which may not be related to sex.

However, unlike the traditional view of the puritan, virgin damsel in distress, women are transformed in detective fiction to more realistic sexual individuals. Slotkin states that “By the beginning of the twentieth century it had become possible

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80 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 154.

81 Ibid., 340.
to see ‘good women’ as sexual creatures, arousing and even experiencing erotic desire, rather than as symbols of an asexual spirituality . . .”82 Slotkin goes on to conclude that “the sexualizing and darkening of these ‘good’ women is still circumscribed by the devices of plot and characterization that identify them with the most essential elements of female respectability. Within their setting and context they are still identified as being noble blood and character (princess, heiress), and their passion is entirely monogamous and fixed on the hero.”83 Mosley shows that women on the frontier are not only capable of being “good women” but are also empowered by their sexuality. Easy recounts his experiences with Georgette and Cinnamon in an effort to contrast these differing approaches to feminine sexuality when he recounts that “Georgette was wonderful and passionate but Cinnamon Cargill was the spice of sex with no impediments of love at all. Where Georgette kissed me and told me that she wanted to take me home forever, Cinnamon just sneered and used sex like a surgeon’s knife. She never said one nice or kind thing, though physically she loved me like I was her only man.”84 Furthermore, Mosley does not just examine the physical aspect of the expanding contemporary view of sexuality and women but he also uses his female characters to transcend traditional ideas of the family. For example, Philomena informs Easy that “‘Love is an old-

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83 Ibid.

84 Mosley, *Cinnamon Kiss*, 275.
fashioned concept,’ she replied in university-ese. ‘The human race developed love to make families cohesive. It’s just a tool you put back in the closet when you’re done with it.”

However, while he does take great effort to break traditional misogynistic views of sexuality, he is careful not to turn his characters into nymphomaniac deviants unable to control their primal urges. For example, Easy describes Nurse Brown by stating that “. . . even though everything about her was geared to making babies and a home she sat there night after night with Geneva Landry, listening to her grief and loss.”

Through these multiple variations of female personas, Mosley is able to stay true to the traditional “damsel in distress” motif of detective fiction and the frontier mythology while at the same time reflecting a more diverse, complex, and realistic picture of contemporary women.

Life between Civilization and Wilderness

One could claim that one of the distinctive differences between the mythology of the American Adam, escaping the constraints of society and venturing into the wilderness, like Huckleberry Finn on his raft or Rip van Winkle on the mountain, and the mythology of the frontier is that the latter realistically shows that

85 Ibid., 276.
86 Mosley, Little Scarlet, 113.
our heroes live somewhere on the fine line between civilization and the wilderness, where they cross back and forth throughout their life. Slotkin states that “The Boone narrative establishes its meaning through a rhythmic repetition of a single pattern of experience, reinforced by an imagistic connection between the state of Boone’s mind and the state of the real landscape. This pattern of experience constitutes the essence of Filson’s ‘myth.’”89 He goes on to conclude that myth “. . . begins with the total immersion of Boone in an experience of the wilderness, continues with his tasting both the promise and the terror of the Indian’s world, and culminates in his achievement of a deeper perception of the nature of the wilderness and of his own soul and his assertion of rational control over his environment.”90

Mosley expands the mythology from a simple calling or compulsion to cross over from civilization into the frontier wilderness to an uncontrolled propulsion forcing one unwillingly into the horrors of the wilderness. Easy recalls that “Images of bodies I’d stumbled upon in my street life came back to me. But I dismissed them. I was a workingman, versed in floor waxes and bleach – not blood. The only weapon I carried was a pocket knife, and it only pierced flesh when I cut the corns from my baby toes.”91 Mosley uses this, and many other vignettes, to demonstrate

89 Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*, 293. Filson’s myth refers to protagonists going back to a more natural state in the wilderness where their true nature is revealed.

90 Ibid.

91 Mosley, *A Little Yellow Dog*, 44.
that Easy, while called to the wild of the frontier by his heart, logically wants to remain in the civilized world. However, it could be concluded that what propels him ultimately is his understanding that the civilized world is a farce, an illusion that everyone can see though and that can only be corrected through the deeds of our hero. Easy expresses this motivating sentiment when he proclaims that:

I had read the newspapers and heard the commentaries from the white newscasters. But my point of view was never aired. I didn’t want the violence but I was tired of policemen stopping me just for walking down the street. I hated the destruction of property and life, but what good was law and order if it meant I was supposed to ignore the fact that our children were treated like hoodlums and whores. My patience was as thin as a Liberty dime, but still I stayed in my house to protect my makeshift family. That’s what brought me to tears. But how could I say all of that to a ten-year-old girl?92

Mosley describes Easy’s return to the frontier wilderness when Easy recalls that “I’d been on good behavior for more than two years. I was out of the streets and had my job with the Los Angeles Board of Education. I took care of my kids, cashed my paychecks, stayed away from liquor. I steered clear of the wrong women too. Maybe I’d been a little too good. I felt an urge in that classroom, but I wasn’t going to make the move. That’s when Idabell Turner kissed me. Two years of up early and off to work dissolved like a sugar cube under the tap.”93

Once Mosley has created the opening for Easy to venture into the wilderness,


he is then able to allow his protagonist the opportunity to debate which side of the civilization/wilderness line he will inhabit. When presented with the dilemma of fulfilling his destiny in the urban frontier, Easy weighs the impact of such an adventure on his family when he states that “I didn’t run out of the front door. I didn’t get into my car and drive out of the state with my children. I didn’t, but I should have.”94 It can be concluded that in the end, as is to be expected of any hero true to the western mythology, Easy is compelled to act, not by logic but through an internal conviction created through his sociological indoctrination in the virtues of frontier heroism. A prime example of this struggle can be seen when Mouse drives Easy home and metaphorically back into civilization. Easy states that “He left me standing in the warm night air appreciating the silence. There I was, a middle-aged city employee. The only thing I should have had on my mind was my bed and my children, my mortgage, and the woman I loved. All of that was waiting for me in the house. But instead of heeding the domestic call I went to my car, turned over the engine, and drove off.”95 This indoctrination combined with the blurring of the line between civilization and wilderness create a unique environment for Easy, where civilization and wilderness become so intertwined that they almost seem to be one entity. The mixture of these two environments can be seen when Easy states that “It was a regular family scene. All we had to do was clean up a few murders and a

94 Ibid., 110.
95 Mosley, Little Scarlet, 109.
matter of international dope smuggling, then we could move next door to Donna Reed."\(^{96}\) Furthermore, Mosley is able to show the power of the sociological conditioning that forces his protagonist to be a hero when Easy states that “I believed at that moment that I would one day be compelled to give up my life and that when the time came I would go gladly. I shivered at the thought and turned away.”\(^{97}\)

However, Mosley expands the use of the fine line between civilization and the wilderness from just solely a phenomenon in the physical environment to a balancing act within his protagonist’s mind. This allows the reader to gain a deeper appreciation of the emotional impact that is created when these two different worlds collide. This collision becomes evident when Easy states that:

> Just the idea that those men, whoever all they were, would break into a house that my children called home shattered every covenant the civilized world lived by. This made me laugh at myself thinking that I lived in a civilized world where lynchings, segregation based on race, and all the men who died for freedom’s lie were somehow under the umbrella of enlightened concern. I staggered and laughed my way out to the car. I had rarely been so intoxicated. I had never been that evil.”\(^{98}\)

Furthermore, Mosley expands this cognitive balancing act further during his interactions with his family, especially with his daughter Feather. These interactions force Easy to confront the attributes that the frontier demands of western heroes to

\(^{96}\) Mosley, *A Little Yellow Dog*, 264.


encompass those promoted within civilization. Easy struggles with this dilemma when he states that “I was her father. I never felt pain or weakness. I never got tired or brokenhearted. I was invulnerable and could therefore hear her anger without danger of being hurt. But the moment that sound came from me, Feather understood the pain that had been festering inside me, the pain I had never shared with her.”

Through this interaction, it can be concluded that Mosley is able to perfectly straddle the fine line between the forces of these two environments and allow his protagonist to maintain the characteristic of what a frontier man should be while enabling him to fulfill his parental duties in society. However, while Mosley enables his protagonist to successfully have emotional vulnerability, in the end the power of the frontier mythology demands Easy’s conformity to its ideals of masculinity. Easy states that “I wanted to deny it. I wanted to say to her that I could not be hurt, that I was her father and beyond the pain and tears that are so important to children. I wanted to, but I could not. Because I knew that if I tried to refute her claim, she would see the pain in my heart.”

It could then be concluded that during the balancing act between the wilderness and civilization, Mosley’s protagonist is more drawn to the wilderness and in doing so creates a new environment of the frontier civilization where both society and wilderness are intermingled. It can be theorized that it is only through the clash of these two environments that Easy is able to solve

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99 Ibid., 85.
100 Ibid., 283.
the mysteries in the series and attempt to create a utopia in the frontier wilderness.

Departure from Utopia

It could then be concluded that the intertwining of society with the wilderness is fundamentally necessary in the mythology of the frontier as the colliding of these two environments allows our western heroes to create a utopia. Slotkin describes the creation of utopia out of the wilderness when he states that “The original ideological task of the Myth was to explain and justify the establishment if the American colonies; but as the colonies expanded and developed, the Myth was called on to account for our rapid economic growth, our emergence as a powerful nation-state, and our distinctively American approach to the socially and culturally disruptive processes of modernization.”101 One could conclude that one of the major goals in frontier mythology is defeating the savages and taming the wild so that civilization can be created. However, the creation of civilization then creates a paradox for our mythic heroes as they are forced to leave their creation because of the pull of the wilderness and the need to be free from the constraints of civilization.102 Slotkin further elaborates on this conclusion when he questions, “If a man is civilized, why would he leave society for the savage solitude of the forest? And if he is not


102 Michael J. Collins. Class lecture on February 13, 2009, at Georgetown University, Washington, D. C., as part of a course entitled “American Literature and the American Idea.”
civilized, how can he be set up as a hero for civilized men to emulate?" He responds to these inquiries by theorizing that “Boone’s justification is largely pragmatic: the final results of his act are good, whatever his motives. He creates a new society by leaving it. He returns in the end to his family. Thus the trinity of values on which Anglo-American society is based – social progress, piety, and the family – is invoked at the outset as the basic standard for judging Boone’s actions.” Easy throughout the series embodies the traditional vision of the lone cowboy riding out of town at sunset after civilization has been created on the edge of the frontier. This imagery begins in the prequel to the series where after the conflict has been settled in Pariah, Easy notes that “It had been gray all morning but the drizzle didn’t start until we left Pariah. It wasn’t a rain that cleaned the leaves of dust but a mist that changed the dust to caked mud on everything. The whole world turned filthy and streaked.”

At this point, the start of Easy’s adventures, he quickly learns that once the conflict has been resolved, the promise of utopia is not perfect and that in order to be truly free he must leave the civilization of the rural South and head for the untamed urban wilderness. This motif of leaving civilization and returning to the wilderness is continued throughout the series until the end of Blonde Faith, the last book in the

104 Ibid.
105 Mosley, *Gone Fishin’*, 178.
series. After the conflict has been settled and civilization reestablished, Easy takes one more drive off into the sunset. This ride, in true western fashion, ensures that the protagonist will forever be in the wilderness, free at last from the constraints of society and the danger of the wild. Mosley informs his readers of this final ride when Easy proclaims, “And tonight I would drive so far away that no one could find me to tell me if anything had changed. My children were safe and living in a mansion. I wasn’t there to watch over them, but they had Jesus. Jesus – the boy who had always been a better man.”\textsuperscript{106} However, Mosley, in keeping with the tradition of surprise and unexpected resolutions found so often in detective fiction, ensures in the last words of the novel that his protagonist had finished his job and will not be returning to civilization. Easy remembers that “The front of the car hit something, making a loud bang and a wrenching metal sound. Chevette Johnson rushed into my mind then. She was sleeping on my new couch, safe from an evil world. I think I smiled, and then the world went black.”\textsuperscript{107}

It can be easily concluded that the Easy Rawlins series is a contemporary western set in the urban jungle, where violence is more frequent than that found in the clichéd dusty frontier town in the Wild West. In this environment, Mosley draws on traditional frontier mythology and has his protagonist confront modern savages, in all their varying forms, as well as societal discrimination in general in order to

\textsuperscript{106} Mosley, \textit{Blonde Faith}, 307.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 308.
restore some sense of justice. To achieve this new version of justice, Easy must perform a delicate balancing act of living and acting between the frontier civilization and the frontier wilderness. However, like the lone, western hero, once justice has been restored, Easy rides out of town in the sunset. More importantly, while Easy has conquered the frontier wilderness, Mosley has redefined it and in doing so created a realistic frontier that reflects the contemporary human condition.
CHAPTER 4
EASY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

One of the most pervasive myths of American culture is that of the American Dream. Daniel Boorstin proclaims that “America has been a land of dreams. A land where the aspirations of people from countries cluttered with rich, cumbersome, aristocratic, ideological pasts can reach for what once seemed unattainable.”¹ This imagery of possibility, of hope for a better future, can be seen as the unparalleled energy that drives the ambitions of America’s citizenry. Jim Cullen describes the formation of this myth by stating, “Yet the United States was essentially a creation of the collective imagination—inspired by the existence of a purportedly New World, realized in the Revolution that began with an explicitly articulated Declaration, and consolidated in the writing of a durable Constitution.”² However, like many myths, while we can trace their evolution throughout history, their definition is often more ambiguous. One could claim that the American Dream is for one to lead a “richer and fuller” life, but what does “richer and fuller” mean for the individual American. Cullen writes that “Sometimes ‘better and richer and fuller’ is defined in terms of money—in the contemporary United States, one could almost believe this is the only


definition—but there are others. Religious transformation, political reform, educational attainment, sexual expression: the list is endless.”

Of the many variations of the American Dream the struggle for upward mobility, equality, and proprietorship are fundamental themes that are resonant not only in the collective mythology but are also present in Mosley’s Easy Rawlins series.

However, while these novels adhere to the mythology, they also inform the reader of the reality of the myth of meritocracy. Boorstin states that “A dream is a vision or an aspiration to which we can compare reality. It may be very vivid, but its vividness reminds us how different is the real world.”

One might conclude that this realization of the flaws inherit in the American Dream would diminish the myth’s impact on society. However, the power of the myth is not in its eventual attainment but instead in its promise of the potentiality, no matter how small, of its realization. Boorstin summarizes the power of the myth, despite its imperfections, when he notes that “If America was also a land of dreams-come-true, that was so because generations suffered to discover that the dream was here to be reached for and not to be lived in.”

Belief in the American Dream is so prevalent that even those that one might assume should be skeptical of its promises are actually its strongest advocates. For example, data have shown that working-class African Americans have

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3 Ibid., 7.

4 Boorstin, The Image, 239.

5 Ibid., 240.
unwavering faith in the myth to a degree that is inexplicable to more affluent African Americans.  

The American Dream began before most of the original settlers landed on the shores of America. Arriving at the Massachusetts Bay Colony, almost 150 years before the Revolution, the Puritans used their imagined “city on the hill” as their inspiration for their renewal in a new land. Cullen comments that “Their [the Puritans’] confidence—in themselves, in their sense of mission for their children, and in a God they believed was on their side—impelled them with ruthless zeal to gamble everything for the sake of a vision.” While one could claim that the Puritans’ American Dream was one of religious freedom, it can be argued that their dream was much larger than simply freedom of worship. It could be seen as freedom for a better life, freedom from constraints preventing their development, freedom of promising opportunity. This nebulous idea of a better life was solidified and carefully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, which turned hope into legendary myth. Cullen concludes that “The key to the Declaration, the part that survives in collective memory and which underwrites the American Dream, is the opening clauses of the second paragraph: ‘We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of

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7 Ibid., 18.
Happiness.” The inclusion of the “Pursuit of Happiness” in the Declaration of Independence took an abstract emotional state and transformed it into a tangible and achievable goal. Nevertheless, throughout American history, many (Native Americans, blacks, women, and indenture servants) have been systematically denied the pursuit of happiness. However, this pivotal language in the Declaration has been used by those seeking to realign the American Dream with current socio-historical realities, ranging from Lincoln’s invocation in the Gettysburg Address to present day gay-rights activists at marriage rallies.

The Dream of Upward Mobility

Benjamin Franklin was not only one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence but he also assisted in the development of the American Dream well after the Revolution through his writings and public life. Drawing on his family’s Puritan roots, Franklin was able to fuse happiness with concrete actions. Cullen states that “Yet the core components of Franklin’s dream as expressed in his writings—trust in the basic decency of human beings, a belief that earthly and heavenly rewards are broadly consonant, and, above all, a serene confidence that

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8 Ibid., 38.
9 Ibid.
both can be attained—reflected the core convictions of a great many Americans of
his time.” Franklin’s beliefs are interesting because they demonstrate the pervasive
idea that the American Dream is not confined to a select few but that all citizens are
entitled.  

The key to upward mobility in the myth is hard work. Cullen notes that
“Hard work was no longer a (hopefully useful) distraction from the dictates of fate
but rather an instrument of fate itself, a tool for self-realization.”12 This view of the
American Dream created the formula: ambition plus hard work equals monetary
rewards, property, and love. This theme has been employed throughout American
literature, notably in F. Scoot Fitzgerald’s work. Callahan concludes that “In
Tender Is the Night as in [The Great] Gatsby, the dream of love and accomplishment
is distorted by the values of property and possession. Like Gatsby, Dick Diver has
large ambitions: ‘. . . to be a good psychologist maybe to be the greatest one that ever
lived.’”13 In Fitzgerald’s works the American Dream is expressed through his
characters’ material aspirations and in their romantic affairs. Furthermore, his work
demonstrates how each individual’s achievement is not solely an inner goal to be
reached for but is instead a measuring stick to be compared with other males in the

11 Cullen, The American Dream, 60-65.

12 Ibid., 59.

masculine world.\textsuperscript{14}

However, one of the major dilemmas that Easy faces through the series is the conflict between the call of the urban wilderness and the pursuit of the American Dream. He repeatedly longs for “honest” work and the potential for advancement in the “working man’s” world. For example, Easy reminisces on his relationship with Bertrand Stowe, “We met in the fall of ’61. I’d just recently gotten out of the hospital. I’d been recovering from a wound inflicted upon me by an old friend. While convalescing I reflected on my life, wondering how it could be that I was in danger even from my friends. I had decided, upon coming home, to concentrate on getting honest work.”\textsuperscript{15} This passage is interesting because it clearly demonstrates Easy’s cognitive reconciliation of the two myths, with the adventure of the frontier on one side and the promise of the Dream on the other. However, Mosley is able to show that the two myths are not mutually exclusive and that one’s relationships in the frontier can actually be of assistance not only in the wilds of the urban jungle but also in the pursuit of upward mobility. Mosley makes this connection when Easy comments on Bertrand, “He stood up, as far as he went, and put out his hand. ‘Easy. ’ The fact that he used my street name meant that Bertrand had known me before I

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 384.

\textsuperscript{15} Walter Mosley, \textit{A Little Yellow Dog} (New York: Norton, 1996), 131.
became a respectable workingman.”\textsuperscript{16} Thus, it can be concluded that Mosley is able to seamlessly integrate the myths of the American Adam, the American Frontier, and the American Dream.

Mosley is able to draw on Franklin’s concept of rules that lead to the attainment of the Dream when Easy notes, “I wasn’t really mad at Gladys. The way I figured it, Sergeant Sanchez had told her to report on any one who asked about Mrs. Turner. People in the working world went by the rules. That’s how they knew to survive.”\textsuperscript{17} Throughout the series Easy longs to adhere to the “rules,” as he perceives them to be fundamental to a good life; however, the series repeatedly points out that such a life is not always a reality given the protagonist’s environment and personality. Furthermore, it is because of these rules that many characters are unable or unwilling to undertake traditional work roles. For example, Jackson Blue scoffs at the idea of taking what some might consider a good job and the idea of slowly climbing his way up the corporate ladder. Easy, however, offers to help Jackson find a job while soliciting information from him. Easy declares to Jackson, “‘You get me the right information and maybe I’ll find you an honest job mopping up floors.’ Jackson frowned at the idea and I laughed.”\textsuperscript{18} Instead, Jackson is more interested in achieving the Dream without hard work. However, Mosley does not

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 130.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 119.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 228.
stray far from the idea of hard work as being fundamental to success. He is able to accomplish this by showing that there are aberrations in reality, where certain individuals are able to achieve success due to some extraordinary circumstance. Thus, Jackson is able to get a senior corporate position based on his superior intellect. While Mosley uses Jackson as an example of how success is determined in reality, he installs in Easy a conviction that such advantages are not completely acceptable. For example, in order for Jackson to get his job, he needed fake references and he asked Easy to assist him in return for information that Easy needed in order to solve his mystery at hand. Despite being his close friend, Easy comments, “I realized that I had been of two minds about giving Blue a fake recommendation. It hadn’t felt right. I needed his help, so I said I would do it, but I still didn’t like it.”

Thus, one can conclude that Mosley not only reflects the traditional version of the myth in the series but that he also expands it to encompass the actualities of contemporary work life by illuminating that hard work is not always the key to success.

Interestingly, Mosley crafted his narratives to show that the dream of upward mobility has an uglier, more sinister side. Part of this dissatisfaction with the dream comes from the myth’s connection to capitalism. Easy proclaims that “I’ve read many a novel that extolled the virtues of capitalism. Not one of them ever came

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19 Walter Mosley, Little Scarlet (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 2004), 204.
within a mile of the truth." Easy has a difficult time reconciling the fact that one works hard in order to be rewarded and that in a capitalistic economic structure these rewards sometimes are contingent on the suffering of others. One can then effortlessly understand why Easy entrusts Mofass with his business dealings. This conflict within Easy is exemplified in a conversation between him and Mofass regarding Poinsettia. Despite Easy’s pleas that she is sick, Mofass asserts “Uh-uh, Mr. Rawlins. I collect it and until I put it in yo’ hands it’s mine. If that gal go down and tell them other folks that I don’t take her money they gonna take advantage. . . . She got a momma, a sister, that boy Willie she always be talkin’ about. She got somebody. Let them pay the rent. We in business, Mr. Rawlins. Business is the hardest thing they make. Harder than diamonds.” However, throughout the series, Mosley redefines what living the American Dream is in terms of financial compensation. For example, Easy asks Tourmaline about what kind of economics she is studying at the university, “Marxist economics or the kind that makes money?” She replies with a smirk, “I’m political but not a revolutionary; interested in a good living, but I have no need to be rich.” This passage and others demonstrate that the desire for upward mobility does not necessarily mean making millions of dollars a year but is more realistic, reflecting the actuality of


contemporary Americans’ dreams. However, Mosley is careful to articulate that adhering to the rules of upward mobility can cause one to be detached from her community and from life in general. This is particularly true if one is too focused on achieving the dream that she forgets to actually live the dream. Recalling Mouse’s perceived death, Easy apprehensively notes, “Maybe it was that I hadn’t looked around me lately. Maybe a deep sadness had entered my community but I had been too busy being a workingman; a company man.”

Through these passages Mosley informs his readers that there are multiple variations of what the Dream means and that abandoning one’s personal life to focus on achieving the Dream can adversely affect the attainment of the Dream.

Because the American Dream is rooted in hard work it is then possible for success not be measured by pedigree or legacy but by individual actions. This made it possible for those who started with less means to overcome their disadvantaged backgrounds and become successful. For example, it has been noted that many thought that Andrew Jackson was great because of his initial poverty. Andrew Jackson, among others, represented a new world view where “Modest beginnings were no longer a somewhat embarrassing obstacle to be overcome but rather the indispensable bedrock of distinction.”

The phenomenon of the potentiality of upward mobility due to hard work created a powerful myth within the American


__24__ Cullen, *The American Dream*, 68.
culture and because of its organic nature, this myth is incorporated into much of the nation’s literature.

Cullen claims that “For hundreds of years, American readers and writers have had tireless appetites for tales of poor boys (and, later, girls) who, with nothing but pluck and ingenuity, created financial empires that towered over the national imagination (and in some cases towered over the national landscape as well).”

Adhering to this theme, Easy notes, “I was born as poor as it gets in America. No running water, no heat, only internal organ meat to eat once or twice a week if we were lucky. I never owned a new article of clothing until I was sixteen and already on my own for seven years. In my mind I still had that home to return to but I was no longer poor. Bonnie’s offer and Juanda’s embrace were gifts many a rich man could never claim. I was saved by the love of black women.”

It is through this fumbled beginning that Mosley’s readers are able to be inspired, for if Easy can overcome these obstacles, then it is possible for them as well. However, while Mosley does give his protagonist the skills and abilities to be successful, he crafted a rich narrative that displays the truth regarding the myth: hard work is not the sole factor nor the most predominant element in the determination of success. Mosley writes that “LaMone couldn’t help but give me a little smile after that. Couldn’t help but laugh at how he had it over some poor nigger who wanted to come up with the

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25 Ibid., 60.

big boys and get his chance.”27 Through the intertwining of these attributes of the Dream, Mosley is able to capture the aspect of the myth that focuses on overcoming great obstacles, while at the same time noting that sometimes the barriers preventing the realization of the dream might be great, and even may be insurmountable.

The myth of meritocracy encounters difficulty in American culture due to slavery and racial discrimination. This creates a paradox where one’s ability to achieve the American Dream could be significantly, or completely, prevented due to one’s race. Mosley is able to intensify this contradiction, by showing that for many, such as Meredith Tarr, the dream is completely out of reach. This lack of possibilities is vividly portrayed in the following passage from *Blonde Faith*:

“They put an eviction notice on my door,” she said. “Where Perry’s friends gonna be when I’m out on the street with twelve kids? Where the police gonna be when I’m diggin’ through trash cans tryin’ t’ feed my babies?” She looked at me then. “Where you gonna be when that’s happenin’? I’ tell you where, asleep in your bed while we livin’ with the rats.”

Being poor and being black were not the same things in America, not exactly. But there were many truths that all black people and poor persons of every color had in common. One of the most important particulars in our lives was the understanding of the parable of the Gordian knot. You had to be able to cut through that which bound you. Maybe that was leaving a woman behind or breaking into a bank under cover of darkness; maybe it was bowing your head and saying “Yes-sir” when a man just called your wife a whore and your children dogs. Maybe you spent your whole life like some John Henry banging away at a boulder that would never give.28


The contradiction of who has access to the American Dream is further intensified when one considers the fact that those who are the oppressors are not fully achieving the American Dream as they are not rewarded for their individual merits but by the fruits of others labor. Cullen states that “There was a place for such figures in southern mythology—men who began with virtually nothing did amass fortunes, as vividly depicted in later novels like William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom and Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind—but because of the contradictions involved, being ‘self-made’ through slave labor was a wobblier construct.” This incongruity in the Dream can been seen in Devil in a Blue Dress, where Carter, and even Albright, have access to the promises of the American Dream, but for Easy no matter how hard he works, he is systematically denied. Furthermore, this is evident when Daphne is discarded by Carter at the end of the novel because of her race. Mouse asserts, “She wanna be white. All them years people be tellin’ her how she light-skinned and beautiful but all the time she knows that she can’t have what white people have. So she pretend and then she lose it all. She can love a white man but all he can love is the white girl he thinks she is.”

Thus, Mosley is able to show that while slavery might be an intuition that is abolished, its remnants still prevent many from achieving the Dream.

29 Cullen, The American Dream, 74.

At the time of the Declaration of Independence, indentured servitude was on the decline and slavery was legal throughout the colonies. Cullen notes that “Upward mobility remained possible, but the terms had a decisively racial cast. For much of American history, then, upward mobility was understood, even defined, by a visible alternative of immobility.”

Some have even concluded that the abolition of slavery was not related to the idea that slaves had an inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness and the American dream. Cullen points out that “Lincoln was not opposed to slavery because he cared very much about slaves. He was opposed because he cared very, very much about whites (and unlike some of his fellow Republicans, he cared about all whites). Slavery was bad for them.” The rationale for this view was that while slavery eliminated the possibility of upward mobility for slaves, it greatly diminished the probability for European Americans due to the start-up capital required to own slaves.

However, despite the overwhelming obstacles for slaves, and later African-Americans, the power of the myth of the American Dream did influence their individual world views. Cullen provides an example of the power of the myth by noting that “The escape slave Frederick Douglas titled his 1845 biography Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave, written by Himself, those last three words emphasizing the degree to

31 Cullen, The American Dream, 74.

32 Ibid., 84.
which Douglas, in the teeth of great adversity, was very much a self-made man.”

It can be concluded that the end of slavery radically changed the evolution of the myth of meritocracy by planting the seeds of equality. Cullen realizes this fundamental change when he states that “The Dream of Upward Mobility, however, lived on. If Franklin, Emerson, Clay and others were its Old Testament prophets, then Lincoln was its Jesus Christ. In the decades that followed, countless admirers proclaimed themselves disciples of the Dream, spreading the Good News to anyone who would listen: that in American, it was possible to make your own destiny.” It can be theorized that these sentiments are the force behind the solidification of the mythology in adversely affected populations. This could be a result of the fact that while they might not presently have the opportunities embodied by the Dream, they have hope in the promises of the mythology that one day they will.

Throughout the series, Easy struggles with fighting the racial divide that determines who has access to the American Dream. Similarly, like Frederick Douglas and despite the barriers that Easy has to overcome, the dream of upward mobility is a commanding force within him. Easy asserts, “But I was serious that day too. I had shared the same sour air with men like Sal and his lackeys for my whole life. One day one of them was bound to kill me – unless I could make the break. I could have gotten a job as a dishwasher or stone buster, I could have

33 Ibid., 70.
34 Ibid., 100-101.
become a regular janitor for the city or state. But I was like Sallie when it came
to the disrespect shown to blacks by white men. I needed a job with responsibility and,
at least, some pride.”

It can be theorized that this passage shows that while Easy could have access to a position with some growth, those lower level positions would not provide him with the equivalent opportunity for mobility that would be granted to a white person. Furthermore, this passage demonstrates the intertwining of upward mobility with masculinity and suggests that access to the Dream provides one with a source of pride, when compared to other men. However, despite Easy’s views of how Jackson obtained his position, he knows that he too must work outside of the predefined system if he wants to get a position that will enable him to have pride. He is able to achieve this through “trading favors” with Stowe. Easy responds to Stowe’s question, “And how much do you charge, Mr. Rawlins?” by using it as an opportunity to advance his career, “I want Bartlett’s job.”

It can be concluded that while Easy does not necessarily agree with this ploy, evidenced by his responses to Jackson Blue, he also realizes that in order for him to overcome the obstacles to the American Dream because of racial discrimination he must employ this tactic of achievement not based on merit.

Easy understands the disadvantage he is at due to his race. He states that “I’ve run across quite a few white me who have bragged to me about how they

35 Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog, 138.

36 Ibid., 135.
worked their way through college; about how they worked hard to get where they’re at. Shit. I’d like to see any one of them working like I did with Sallie that day. I had my hand on the trigger and my eye in his. There was going to be blood or money on the table before long because neither one of us was walking away until the issue was settled.”37 It can be concluded that through this passage Mosley is able to demonstrate an alternative definition of work that is contrary to traditional view. In doing so, it can be asserted that he expands the idea of the American Dream to include an unconventional means of achieving success that is influenced by a combination of race, environment, and socio-economic standing. However, in describing the reality of the intersection of the myth between upward mobility and race, Mosley is able to create characters that simultaneously realize the barriers to the Dream’s attainment while at the same possessing the self-respect demanded of a man on the frontier. Mouse proclaims, “We ain’t dogs, man. We ain’t have to sniff after them. Shit. You an’ me an’ Easy here do things our mamas an’ papas never dreamed they could do. ’ I appreciated being included in the group but I realized that Mouse and Jackson were living on a higher plane. One was a master criminal and the other just a genius, but both of them saw the world beyond a paycheck and the rent. They were beyond the workaday world. I wondered at that moment they had

37 Ibid., 139.
left me behind.”38 This passage enlightens the reader to each character’s resolve not to be subjugated by the dominant culture, while understanding its constraints, thus creating multidimensional characters that are reflective of contemporary culture.

The Dream of Equality

However, it can be theorized that in order for the myth of upward mobility to be valid there must also be a corresponding myth of equality. The most important part of this analysis of the Dream of Equality is that individuals be afforded the opportunity to access the promises of the American Dream. The Supreme Court’s finding in Plessy v. Ferguson underscores how the dominant culture can systematically deny access to the American Dream through discrimination. Cullen notes that “The Court concluded that Plessy’s case finally foundered in the idea that segregation itself was the problem. ‘We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.’”39 This excerpt from the majority opinion shows how culture can not only deny the American Dream but how it can place blame for the lack of access on the disenfranchised population. The rationale for why systematic


discrimination denies the American Dream is due to the realization that separate but equal only results in “separate but unequal” status, which in turn inherently prevents the obtainment of the American Dream.\textsuperscript{40}

This view of acceptable inequality has been present throughout American history from its beginnings. For example, “Abraham Lincoln may have made the slaves \textit{free}, but not even he, as he pointed out repeatedly in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, was prepared to make them \textit{equal}.”\textsuperscript{41} However, Mosley does not just limit his representation of inequality to race, but instead informs his readers on the dynamic connection between race and socioeconomic status. Easy expresses this view when he states, “Poverty took on a new class in L. A. Anyone looking in from the outside might think that this was a vibrant economic community. But the people there were still penned in, excluded, underrepresented in everything from Congress to the movie screens, from country clubs to colleges.”\textsuperscript{42} However, Mosley further highlights socioeconomic factors that prevent one from fulfilling the promises of the American Dream by removing race from the equation. Easy astutely notes the varying degrees of systematic discrimination when he recounts, “I wanted to say to the little white man, ‘Listen, brother, we’re not enemies. I just want to go up in an elevator like anybody else. You don’t need to worry about me. It’s the men that

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{42} Mosley, \textit{Little Scarlet}, 218.
own this building that are making you poor and uneducated and angry. ’ But I didn’t say anything. He wouldn’t have heard me. I couldn’t free either one of us from our bonds of hatred.”43 Thus, Mosley is able to go beyond race and show the impact of varying versions of inequality on the Dream, particularly socioeconomic status.

Mosley goes further to demonstrate that traditional values of upward mobility can be neutralized by systematic discrimination. He accomplishes this by showing that hard work is not the sole factor in determining success and that those discriminated against must work even harder to get the same reward, if not less.

When Easy asked Paris if he had talked to many white people, Paris responds, “‘They don’t see how it is that black people could be so mad at them. One guy who owns the hardware store up the street said that if he didn’t put his store in, then there wouldn’t be no hardware store. He said that the people who live around here don’t want to own a business. ’ ‘What’d you say to that?’ I asked. ‘What can I say, Easy? Mr. Pirelli works hard as a mother-fucker out here. He don’t know how hard it is to be black. He can’t even imagine somethin’ harder than what he doin’. I could tell him but he wouldn’t believe it.”44 Here Mosley is able to demonstrate that his characters, like many individuals in reality, cannot get ahead even if they work as hard, if not harder, than members of the dominant culture.

Additionally, Mosley is able to expand the myth of the American Dream by

43 Mosley, Blonde Faith, 79.
44 Mosley, Little Scarlet, 75.
showing that inequality is not just an individual struggle but one that faces the entire community, often with compounding results. Commenting on the economy, and overall neighborhood of Watts, Easy notes, “The row of buildings across the street were all boarded up – every one of them. The riots had shut down South Central L. A. like a coffin. White businesses had fled and black-owned stores flickered in and out of existence on a weekly basis. All we had left were liquor stores for solace and check-cashing storefronts in place of banks. The few stores that had survived were gated with steel bars that protected armed clerks. At least here the view matched my inner desolation. The economy of Watts was like feather’s blood infection. Both futures seem devoid of hope.”

45 This passage is interesting because it shows how inequality can be created in a community through what might not be seen as overt discrimination (white flight) but that has a profound impact on the ability of a group of people to have the opportunity of the American Dream. It could be theorized that this phenomenon creates a cycle of domination where discrimination against individuals on the micro-level causes discrimination of a community on the macro-level which then reinforces and strengthens discrimination against the individual and so on.

However, throughout history there have been numerous instances of Americans who risk their lives in order to obtain the prospect of living the Dream.

45 Mosley, Cinnamon Kiss, 28.
Cullen recalls “In what became a group of cases collectively titled Brown v. Board of Education, the NAACP represented parents and children who were willing to risk ostracism—or worse—in the name of their aspirations.” However, it can be theorized that it is this risk that is fundamental to realigning the American Dream with American reality. Thus, it is no surprise that allusions to the Dream of Equality have become a rallying cry for those that are discriminated against in society. Cullen notes, “The most famous of these invocations was King’s celebrated ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, which he delivered at the Lincoln Memorial as part of the March on Washington in August of 1963.” However, some might claim that the country, even with the election of its first black president, has yet to fulfill the dream that Martin Luther King spoke about. Mosley is able to capture the essence of this dilemma, where progress has been made in providing equality, and correspondingly opportunity, while at the same time unbearable discrimination still exists. This is evident in the conversation with restaurant manager, Hans Green, when Easy is discriminated against at a Brentan’s:

“I’m a white man,” he said. “An Aryan. I golf, belong to a men’s club. My parents came to America in order to be free and to share in democracy, but ten minutes with you and I’ve had arguments with four people about their bigotry. If that’s what I face in ten minutes, what must life be like for you twenty-four hours a day?” “Ten years ago I didn’t have it so bad,” I said. “Things have gotten worse?” “In a way. Ten years ago you wouldn’t have been able to seat me. Ten

46 Cullen, The American Dream, 118.
47 Ibid., 126.
years ago I wouldn’t have been in this neighborhood. Slavery and what came after are deep wounds, Hans. And, you know, healing hurts like hell.”

Through this passage, and others, Mosley is able to show how in actuality individuals fight for the Dream of Equality on a daily basis. He is able to transcend the view of large scale marches or sit-ins, which one could claim represent many individuals’ view of how the struggle for equality manifests itself. Thus, Mosley is able to expand the view of this struggle in the minds of his readers to reflect contemporary reality.

While on the one hand a person can recognize that the inequality is inherent in the American Dream, extreme disparity creates a situation where the possibility of the opportunity to achieve the dream becomes almost impossible. Given this reality it is not a surprise that the Dream of Equality developed as a variation of the American Dream. Addressing why equality is important to the myth, Cullen states, “That’s because the American Dream depends on it. At some visceral level, virtually all us need to believe that equality is one of the core values of everyday American life, that its promises extend to everyone.” However, it is important to note that while equality is an important concept to the American Dream, this factor does not mean that all individuals should be afforded the same outcomes. Instead, one’s outcome is based in a Franklinian philosophy where one’s actions determine the


outcome one receives. Hence, equality refers more to opportunity than to rewards.

Cullen describes this idea when he states:

The way we typically square the difference between principle and reality is to cite the concept of equality of opportunity. The notion that everyone has the hypothetical possibility of being equal in public life is a standard we consider practical, as opposed to equality of condition, which we typically do not. We can accept, even savor, all kinds of inequalities as long as we can imagine different outcomes—that you can earn a million dollars (if you’re lucky); that there’s no obvious external barrier forcibly preventing a Latina child from attending an Ivy League university (if her test scores are good enough); that you can hire jury consultants in your murder trail (if you’re rich and/or famous); and so on.50

This understanding is illuminated through Jackson Blue’s comments on the duality of winners and losers in society. Easy recounts the conversation: “Using that as his argument Jackson postulated that there was some sort of mathematical and poetic necessity that brings about a balance in scientific, economic, and social extremes. ‘You can’t have a rich man if you don’t have a poor one, Easy,’ he said. ‘You can’t have a clean floor unless you got somewhere to put the dirt.’”51 This excerpt recognizes the inequality in the American Dream and at the same time reveals that this inequality is necessary and even held as advantageous by those characters that are limited by it. Thus, Mosley is able to accurately capture what some might claim is a true representation of the dream of upward mobility and how even those who are seemingly not able to exploit its full promises still believe in its underlying

50 Ibid.

51 Mosley, Little Scarlet, 172.
assurances. Conversely, there exists a delicate balancing act within the myth between freedom and equality. Equality can be a force to limit freedom, which could result in individuals not being able to achieve their full potential.\textsuperscript{52} Mosley then is able to express how one who is denied access to the Dream can overcome its obstacles. However, he articulately crafts his narrative to show that in order to achieve the Dream one has to become the individual that is expected of her by the dominant culture. It can be concluded that the adverse affect of this is that it causes one to live a lie and thus compounds the effects of discrimination. Mosley not only shows this phenomenon in the drastic concealing of race in two of his novels but more interestingly he gives examples of subtle changes in appearance that have the same effect as “passing.” A prime example of this is Jackson Blue’s physical modifications that lead to his acceptance by white society and that enable him to fulfill the American Dream. Easy recalls, “He wore an elegant gray suit and sported the prescriptionless glasses that he claimed made him seem less threatening to white folks. . . . But from the moment he put on those glasses white people all over L. A. started offering him jobs.”\textsuperscript{53} It can be asserted that this concealing of one’s true identity reflects the American Dream while showing how such actions prevent the realization of the Dream through forcing one to deny herself.

Grippingly, Mosley does not just limit his view of discrimination that

\textsuperscript{52} Cullen, \textit{The American Dream}, 129.

\textsuperscript{53} Mosley, \textit{Cinnamon Kiss}, 205.
prevents the Dream of Equality to images of bigotry from the dominant culture. For example, Easy describes the varying strata within the black community, with the perceived elite sectors augmenting the effects of inequality. When describing Clovis, Easy recounts, “He was from the old days when there was a black community almost completely sealed off from whites. He wore old-fashioned clothes. He belonged to a Negro social club that excluded poor blacks. Clovis got many of her investors from among Mofass’s friends.”

Once Mosley has created diverse classes with differing opportunities to realize the Dream, he is able to carefully craft his narrative to show the intersection of upward mobility and inequality. This acute sensibility is seen in Easy’s interactions with Sergeant Sanchez:

“I had a lot of help,” he continued. “People like you helped me. Negro people and my own Mexicanos – living like dogs instead of standing up and taking advantage of what’s right in front of them. It was hard for me to get a job because the bosses downtown didn’t believe that a Mexican could speak good English or work hard. They think our people are lazy, Ezekiel. They think that we’re all no-good crooks. Because of people like you. And because of you I made myself perfect to get this job. And now I have it. And I’m not going to hold your hand and say how sorry and sad I am that you were poor or that you think it’s too hard to be as good as other people. That’s why your’re going to talk to me now – because I know what you are and I don’t give a shit about you.”

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54 Mosley, *Black Betty*, 166.

It can be concluded that Mosley through this passage reveals the reality that once one has achieved upward mobility it becomes sustainably easier to discriminate against others and thus deny access to the American Dream. Mosley goes one step further in his examination of the Dream of Equality by showing that the idea of the American Dream can cause those who are adversely affected to act in ways that perpetrate inequality. When Easy discusses why he chose to work for Robert E. Lee, he states, “All I thought about was doing a good job for the man named after one of my enemies by descendants of my enemies in the land of my people’s enslavement. But none of that mattered. I didn’t care if he hated me and my kind. I didn’t care if I made him a million dollars by working for him. And if he wanted a black operative to undermine black people, well . . . I’d do that too – if I had to.”  

However, by the end of *Cinnamon Kiss*, Easy has a realization of the impact of such actions. He states that:

All those years our people had struggled and prayed for freedom and now a man like Christmas, who came from a whole line of heroes, was just another killer like all those white men had been before us. Is that what we labored for all those years? Was it just to have the right to step on some other poor soul’s neck? Were we any better than the white men who lynched us in the night if we killed Easter Dawn’s mother and father, sister and brother, cousins and friends? If we could kill like that, everything that we fought for would be called into question. If we became the white men we hated and who hated us, then we were nowhere, nowhere at all.  

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57 Ibid., 245.
This realization is important for the development of Easy, and of the reader, because it informs one of the adverse impacts of adhering to the mythology at the expense of morality. Thus, Mosley is able to create a protagonist that strives for equality, recognizes its manifestations both outside and inside his community, and understands how one’s actions can adversely prevent the achievement of the American Dream.

However, Cullen points out that “Equality without freedom may be a totalitarian nightmare. But freedom without equality has been an oppressive reality for much of American history—and that’s the ‘better’ half.”58 This delicate balancing act between equality and freedom is evident in Easy interactions with the Urban Revolutionary Party. Easy recalls:

The Urban Revolutionary Party was a cultural group, it said, that sought the restitution of recognition of the builders of our world – African men and women. They didn’t believe in Slave laws, that is to say, any laws imposed on black men by whites, just as they didn’t accept forced military service or white political leadership. They rejected the white man’s notion of history, even the history of Europe. But mostly they seemed perturbed about taxes as they applied to social needs and services; the distribution of wealth, the blurred purple words explained, as it applies to our labor, and dreams that we hardly dare to imagine, is woefully inadequate.59

What is interesting about Easy’s response to the claims of the Urban Revolutionary

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58 Cullen, The American Dream, 129.

Party is that he understands the delicate balance between freedom and equality. This in turn creates hesitation within him as the pull of the myth within his psyche tells him that the group’s actions will destroy his freedom. Even though he is not provided with equality of opportunity at this junction in his life, it could be theorized that Easy is unwilling to sacrifice the freedom necessary to achieve the American Dream as the possibility for equality of opportunity might arise if social conditions change, irrespective of how unlikely this change is to happen. This realization is fascinating as Easy has to debate freedom versus the American Dream. Easy recalls “They were going to create freedom out of the sow’s ear called America. They believed in the spirit of the Constitution and not in the direction of the cash register.”60 This passage in combination with others reveals the true influence of the myth. On one hand, Easy longs for the ideals of the Constitution but when he is pressed chooses the ideals of the Declaration of Independence instead. Additionally, Easy passes this sentiment on to the next generation when discussing Charles Winters with LaMarque. He asserts, “The kinda world he wants, nobody owns anything. It’s like this here TV would be for everybody.”61 Thus, Mosley is able to capture the fundamental essence of the dream, even though his characters are prevented from realizing its full potential.

60 Ibid., 44.

61 Mosley, A Red Death, 63.
The Dream of Ownership

The Dream of Ownership fundamentally represents the physical manifestation of the American Dream. This aspect of the myth is the integration of both the myth of upward mobility and equality and has been integral to the conceptualization of America. From the first colonists, the idea of proprietorship became an illustration of the promises of the New World. Cullen states, “Amid this panoply of motives, however, there remained those who championed the value of the independent farmer cultivating a home as an end unto itself: Jefferson’s republican dream of the independent yeoman still loomed large.”62 One could assume that in contemporary society, many do not dream of becoming a farmer, tilling the land in order to provide for their families. However, this aspect of the American Dream, like the previous others, has evolved with historical developments in order to respond to modern life. Cullen articulates Frederick Jackson Turner’s view of the Dream when he states, “For the rest of the twentieth century his imagined heirs proclaimed a series of disembodied ‘new’ frontiers—from space exploration to the Internet—that would somehow extend the original one. The hunter, trapper, cowboy, and farmer would be replaced by the researcher, engineer, bureaucrat, and consumer. And the homes they returned to would not be ‘open’ tracts but rather

62 Cullen, *The American Dream*, 140.
planned ‘developments’ specifically zoned to house such workers.”63 Thus, one can easily conclude that this version of the American Dream is the version that most individuals identify with the Dream.

The two major physical materializations of this aspect of the myth are the house and the car. Cullen notes, “Like the house, the car became widely celebrated as an emblem of democracy even for those who had not yet acquired one, and for many of the same reasons.”64 These material items become embodiments of the American Dream because with hard work (upward mobility) and opportunity (loans) many Americans were able to purchase them. This development was aided through technological refinement which made the cost more affordable and through long-term financing. Eventually, these items became ingrained as markers of success in society. For example, a working class housewife commented to Robert and Helen Lynd in their 1937 study of Muncie, Indiana, that she would be willing to go without food or clothes before giving up her car. Cullen notes, “Such sentiments were impressive when one considers them in light of the relatively severe economic conditions that preceded and followed that era, but car ownership, like home ownership, points to one more distinctively American trait: relative wealth.”65

Home ownership is a great source of pride in Easy. He states, “I loved going

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63 Ibid., 143.
64 Ibid., 150.
65 Ibid.
home. Maybe it was that I was raised on a sharecropper’s farm or that I never owned anything until I bought that house, but I loved my little home.” In fact, it is the power of the myth that propels him to enter the business of “trading favors,” which results in him risking not only his own safety but also that of his family throughout the series. After Easy comes into a large sum of money at the end of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, he promptly invests it in real estate and a new car by the beginning of the second book in the series, *A Red Death*. Mosley is able to capture the impact that these purchases have on Easy’s life, and the corresponding Dream of Ownership, when Easy proclaims, “At the far end was a large window that let in the morning sun. That’s why I fell in love with the place.”66 Mosley even connects the dream to one’s worldview when Easy goes on to note, “Sometimes I’d stand there for a hour and more, watching the cars and clouds making their ways. There was a peaceful feeling about the streets of Los Angles in those days.”67 In this passage it can be concluded that Watts had not really changed, but what had was Easy’s perspective on life as a result of his ability to obtain the Dream and relative wealth. The ultimate achievement of the Dream of Ownership for Easy was moving out of Watts into a better community. He notes, “I had been a major success in light of my upbringing but that was all over. I was no more than a specter haunting the streets that where

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67 Ibid.
once my home.”68 It could be theorized that this passage represents the ultimate fulfillment of the Dream, where ownership is not the sole objective but ownership of the right house in the right place. However, what makes Easy’s obtainment of the Dream interesting is that unlike the mythology, he wishes that others not know about his success. He feels that success will change the way that others view him in the community. Thus, he has Mofass manage his buildings and tell everyone that a rich, white woman owes them. In order to keep informed about his property he instead acts as a janitor and, uncharacteristically of typical landlords, cleans his own buildings. Easy notes, “I always took the bus when I went out to clean, because my Ford was a little too flashy for a janitor.”69

However, since the Dream of Ownership is found at the intersection of the previously mentioned versions of the American Dream, not all individuals are eligible participants in this aspect of the mythology. Cullen examines this phenomenon when he notes, “The explicit government policy of redlining certain towns, cities, and neighborhoods with high minority populations—declaring them too risky to insure—made them virtually worthless to banks and buyers. Nor could minority families escape such places, for reasons that included individual irresponsibility, government neglect and the self-fulfilling prophecies of mass


abandonment.”70 Thus, through one’s race, socioeconomic level, or residence, one could be excluded from promises of the myth. This lack of access is not just a result of indirect discrimination but is also due to overt and systematic discrimination. For example, “Levitt himself refused to sell to African Americans for fear that it would hurt his business.”71 Mosley examines this dilemma in the prequel to the series, Gone Fishin’. During Easy’s time with Miss Dixon, she informs him of these constraints through her comments. She proclaims, “‘The country people are poor, Ezekiel, they couldn’t get the cash to buy. But even if they could – this is my land,’ her voice became hard, ‘for me and mine. I can’t just hand it over to strangers.’”72 Through this passage, Mosley is able to demonstrate the real life barriers that prevent many individuals from living the American Dream. Not only do they not have the possibility for upward mobility or equality, but even if they did, Miss Dixon’s views of African Americans and the significance of her property to her identity prevent her from selling it to her neighbors. When Easy grasps the reality of Miss Dixon’s position he recounts, “I thought about that grasshopper crushed in that jay’s beak and about Miss Dixon; how she was like a bird too.”73 However, what is interesting about the situation is how Easy reconciles the discrimination he faces with the

70 Cullen, The American Dream, 152.

71 Ibid.

72 Walter Mosley, Gone Fishin’ (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997), 119.

73 Ibid.
Dream of Ownership. He states:

But there’s a reason I wasn’t angry then, why I’m still not angry and why the people of Pariah didn’t raise up and kill that woman. ‘It’s what I call the ‘Scared Cow Thinking.’ Miss Dixon lived alone out in a colored community that hated her because she owned everything, even the roads they walked on. But Miss Dixon, and every other white person, was, to that colored community, like the cow is to those Hindus over in India. They’d all starve to death, let their children starve, before they’d slaughter a sacred cow. Miss Dixon was our scared cow. She had money and land and she could read and go to fine events at the governor’s house. But most of all she was white and being white was like another step to heaven. . . . Killing her would have been worse than killing our own children, killing her, or even thinking of it, would be like killing the only dream we had.  

This passage demonstrates the power of the myth of the American Dream. While one might assume that Easy would be mortified by the inherent lack of access to the Dream, he is instead reverent. It could be concluded that this is because of hope in the promises of the myth. However, Easy acutely summarizes this hope when he notes, “Hope is the harshest kind of dreaming.”

The Myth of the American Dream is successful, not because of its realization, but because of its promises. The myth is centered on the promise of upward mobility. However, despite his willingness to conform to the myth, Easy understands that the myth of upward mobility is in reality the myth of meritocracy. This realization is further intensified due to the inequalities that Easy faces due to

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74 Ibid., 119-120.
75 Mosley, *Black Betty*, 57.
racial discrimination. Thus, like in American society, the myth of equality emerges. No matter how intense Easy’s determination is in achieving the Dream, his lack of opportunity prevents the Dream’s full materialization. However, Mosley is able to demonstrate that while discrimination prevents upward mobility and equality, one can still achieve parts of the American Dream. Easy is able to fulfill the dream of home ownership despite of his circumstances. This in turn helps reinforce the power of the Dream in the nation’s collective culture, because if Easy is able to partially attain the American Dream, then it is possible for everyone else to do the same.
CHAPTER 5
REFLECTIONS ON MYTHOLOGY

One could question if Mosley is deliberately choosing to reflect American mythology within the Easy Rawlins series or if such comparisons are mere happenstance. It could be argued that since Mosley is an American and the series is placed within the United States, his work accordingly reflects the values that have been ingrained through the nation’s collective consciousness. While an interesting point, Mosley work does more that repeat verbatim the stories of our communal past. Instead he revises the narrative to reflect the reality of his characters, which are based on an understanding of contemporary life. Thus, the end result is an amended mythology that corresponds to one of the many extraordinary strands of the American cultural fabric.

Easy as the American Adam is an interesting example of this modification of the myth. Like previous Adams, Mosley shows that Easy is at conflict with society and that he is forced to break from his past and start anew. He ventures into the wilderness and has adventures with his trusty sidekick—the correlation to our traditional legends is obvious. However, Mosley does more than just regurgitate the same themes that one has become accustomed to reading. For example, as previously noted, he redefines the impetus for his protagonist’s adventures by redefining the conflict with society. Easy’s conflict is not as simplistic as Huck’s; it...
is gritty, real and tragic. Orphaned at a young age, he is thrust into the wilderness instead of venturing down the river on his own accord. This and other examples previously noted enable Mosley to craft a narrative that accurately demonstrates how the theme of “the individual versus society” has changed in the last century by incorporating multicultural and multidimensional characters, and their realities, that are absent in the canon of great American literature. Mosley shows how the urban landscape has been tamed by gentrification and how this same process constructs a modern urban wilderness. Throughout the series Easy is continually drawn back to this wilderness, a place where he is truly free from the constraints of society and is able to break from his past. Through meeting noteworthy characters and having extraordinary adventures, Mosley propels his readers to become Adamic, even if they never venture into Watts or down the Mississippi. In the end, Easy is the same Adam that America has always known and loved. However, through Mosley’s narrative, he becomes a hero that many individuals can identify with as he shares their past, their experiences, and their conflicts. Easy is the contemporary American Adam.

However, as Mosley immerses his characters in the wilderness, he is able to transcend the stereotypical views of the frontier. Like traditional narratives, there is violence and savages hiding behind every tree and around every corner. However, Mosley challenges conventional views of danger by accurately depicting modern villains. One could conclude that traditional literature constructs individuals of color
as the trickster, the devil, the savage—all ready to brutally murder the virtuous and sadistically rape their women. Mosley is able to show that, yes, violence does exist within communities of color. However, he reiterates time and again that the overarching and unadulterated savages are members of the dominant culture—white men. Nevertheless, one must be careful not to assume that savagery is represented solely by white men as individual entities. Instead, one must view the barbarity of the urban frontier as a direct result of the manifestation of cultural ascendancy propagated by the dominant culture. The frontier is then less about a physical location—the Wild West, the space odyssey, the ghetto—and more the consequence of the nation’s atrocious race relations. It is because of this systematic discrimination that Mosley is able to redefine justice on the frontier. Justice in the series is not the simplistic conceptualization of good versus evil. It is fighting for one’s life, and basic dignity, when wrongfully arrested and beaten for being in the perceived wrong place at the wrong time, when called “boy,” “son,” and “nigger,” and when lynched, literally and metaphorically, for living, working and loving. In response, Mosley’s protagonist, like other western heroes, stands up and fights for justice, focusing on both the brutality of the specific crimes and those offenses against humanity. Easy is the modern cowboy on the edge of the American frontier.

This fight for basic human dignity is more than just a necessity for justice on the frontier. It is a prerequisite for the opportunity to live the American Dream. The inequality inherit in the American Dream is compounded with the reality of
systematic discrimination. Thus, it is apparent to Mosley’s protagonist that hard work is not the sole determinate of upward mobility as without equality the prospect of the Dream does not exist. However, Mosley is able to show that Easy can strive for the Dream and achieve many of its rewards, particularly home and car ownership. These markers of success enable Mosley’s readers to be inspired to strive for the Dream, battling social constructs that discriminate against them and prevent the realization of their full potential. However, this dream is not that of material or relative wealth. At its roots, this Dream is about freedom. Freedom to live, to love, to prosper, to be happy. It could be argued that Easy never really accomplishes this goal. However, the Dream is less about achieving its promises but instead it is about reaching for hope—hope that one’s children will be able to achieve the Dream because one’s actions destroy their barriers to the Dream. In doing so, one overcomes her individual obstacles and can reach for and grab the possibilities of the Dream. In the end, Easy achieves this realization of hope. His children are safe, healthy, and living in a mansion. One could say that the Dream has been accomplished but true to the mythology of the American frontier, Easy rides off into the sunset, this time never to return to civilization that he rebelled against. Easy reaches for and ultimately lives the American Dream.

These embodiments of American mythology combined with Mosley’s current socio-historical adaptations, enable him to create a distinctive American narrative, reflecting the actuality of the nation’s experience. These elements do more than
simply fabricate entertaining and engaging narratives for Mosley’s readers.
Cosmically, these modified invocations reproduce the nation’s soul—its fundamental
values and aspirations. The narratives ask readers, if not compel them, to strive to
unleash their inner individuality, to bravely conquer the feral boundaries of
civilization, and to live with hope and ambition. Optimistically, these actions will
create not just individual freedom but also collective equality. In the end, it is not
only Easy that is the incarnation of American mythology, but through the experience
of reading Mosley’s enriching narratives, each reader will hopefully personify these
characteristics off the page, solidifying American mythology for future generations.


