

Hansberry's hope for america through a raisin in the sun

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



Racism is not a new issue by any means. It has been plaguing humanity since its beginnings. Societies of all cultures and from all corners of the world have experienced racism.

America, a country that claims to be one of the most civilized, has dealt with discrimination on a huge scale. Minority groups in America have struggled for equal opportunities and the rights and treatment of first-class citizens. African Americans, more than any other ethnicity, have suffered under the power of white Americans. It all started when their ancestors were forcedly sailed to America as enslaved workers and were treated violently and unfairly. They were perceived to be uncivilized and non-human, so the superior whites can force them to serve them (Nowrouzi, Faghfori, Zohdi, 2269). In response to this discrimination, many African American public figures, artists, and writers used their influence to help fight against their oppressors. One of these people was a young woman named Lorraine Hansberry. Hansberry was an African-American playwright and writer. She wrote her most well-known piece, *A Raisin in the Sun*, about the unfortunate lifestyles of black American in the ghettos of Chicago. This play, however, does not just wallow in the depressing state of American society. In Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry depicts a future of hope regarding racism in America. Hansberry used her play to urge her fellow black Americans to fight against society's oppression.

Lorraine Hansberry was born on May 19th, 1930 in Chicago Illinois. Her father, Carl Hansberry, founded the Lake Street Bank, which was one of the first banks for blacks in Chicago. He also owned a successful real estate

business. Despite being comfortable members of the middle class, the Hansberry family still faced a lot of discrimination. In the summer of 1937, the Hansberrys moved into a house in a white neighborhood. Their new neighbors responded by forming a mob to convince them to leave their new house. The family got the mob to break up, with the help of a shotgun. The community then took another approach. They said the Hansberry family legally could not occupy any residence in any neighborhood covered by a "race restrictive covenant." Lorraine's father took the case to the supreme court. Lorraine Hansberry later recalled her "desperate and courageous mother, patrolling the house all night with a loaded German luger, doggedly guarding her four children, while her father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court" (Gordon, 121). The case, *Hansberry vs. Lee*, was ruled in favor of the Hansberry family and they were able to keep their house. It wasn't until ten years later that the Supreme Court declared the race restrictive covenant to be unconstitutional.

Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is greatly based off of her own experiences as a child and a young adult. Hansberry noted similarities between her mother and Mama Younger and between her father and Big Walter. The characters Ruth and Walter Lee are based off of Hansberry's two brother's and her sister. In an interview, Hansberry laughingly said *Beneatha is me, eight years ago* (Lieberman, 206). By using the experiences of racism she faced, Hansberry's writing persuaded people to fight against three specific kinds of discrimination: housing discrimination, unfair work opportunities, and unequal education opportunities. Hansberry had hope that

if people worked together to face these obstacles, then they could be overcome.

In the early 1900's, thousands of African Americans migrated north to try and escape the prejudicial treatment of the south. Mama describes this to Walter Lee saying, in my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too (Hansberry, 76). When they got to the north, however, finding a decent place to live was a struggle. Most renters preferred to rent to white families. Black families would be threatened with violence when they tried to escape the ghettos. The ghettos where they were forced to live were overpriced, overcrowded and dirty. The Younger apartment was described as having furniture that has clearly had to accommodate the living of too many people for too many years and is tired. The carpet was worn down and falling apart, showing its weariness, with depressing uniformity (Hansberry, 26).

The Younger family was also forced to spray down the walls with insecticides weekly, and at one point, Travis even kills a rat that was as big as a cat (Hansberry, 61). These descriptions show the reality of black live in the ghettos. There were rarely any visits from the landlords, and extremely minimal funding from the government. Despite the horrendous conditions that these families were forced to live in, they were still forced to pay extremely high prices. Landlords knew they could get away with charging black families outrageous prices as they really did not have another place to go. " While a white family could rent a five-room apartment for \$60 a month in Cicero, for example, a black South Side family of four could pay \$56 per

month to live in one half of a two-room flat, infested with rats and roaches, and even well into the 1960s, without electricity or hot water" (Nowrouzi, Faghfori, Zohdi, 2273). To escape these issues, Mama finds a house for the Younger family in Clybourne Park. The problem was, this was a white community. The Youngers knew they would not be welcome. Hansberry did not write the story so that the characters just gave up. This was a situation that she herself had experienced.