

The theme of racism in a Raisin in the Sun

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The text in the book *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry was happening in the early 50s-late 50s in Chicago where racism was a huge issue in all aspects such as education, employment, and housing. One of the preexisting conditions or problems that's still going on in the society is racial segregation and discrimination. Even though the Supreme Court overturned the separate but equal doctrine in 1954, we all have implicit| hidden bias by nature.

This is still a prevalent issue in our society currently as people have stereotypes and prejudice mainly towards women, Muslims, Latino, and minorities, and especially Black or African- American people and their communities. Everyone is striving to get the American dream; as for the Younger family described in *A Raisin in the Sun*, they are denied the pursuit of the American dream because they are African-American. Some people have to work harder like the Younger family did. In this time period, while white people still have better treatment or easier access to housing and better opportunities, African Americans, such as the Younger family, have to work harder in order to have a better way of living.

Part of their American dream was to live in a better place, but the Younger family did not have the right amount of money to do so. They lived in a two bedroom apartment at Southside Chicago. The son didn't have his own bedroom. He slept on the living room couch. In addition, they didn't have their own bathroom. They shared a bathroom outside the hallway with other neighbors living nearby (Hansberry 27-28). It seemed like this family did not have any privacy at all and they were all cramped up into one small area. During this time period, Walter drove other rich people around while Ruth

and Lena were servants. Their socioeconomic status was low - classified as the servant class or working poor class. (Constantakis 141). In addition, Drake and Cayton said similar to the Youngers' situation, only 64% of black women and 34% of black men were servants or housemaids in the city (Gordon 123).

There weren't a lot of resources or opportunities that was a great benefit for the African Americans. Constantakis stated that segregation and discrimination increased rapidly during the time period of 1950s and 60s in Chicago (142). However, this affected Black people and their communities negatively as there were limited opportunities. For instance, for housing, the Black people were restricted to reside in housing projects that were often crime ridden (Constantakis 142-143). Also more black people didn't get jobs or lost their jobs more often than the white people (Gordon 123). The Younger family was facing a lot of financial struggles when they lived in the apartment. One example is when the Younger's family had to work so hard to get money. Being African American, Walter and Ruth did not get the right amount of pay to what they were doing. Getting the check was their only hope to change or turn their lives around. In the text, Ruth was talking to Walter saying: They said Saturday and this is just Friday and I hope to God you ain't going to get up here first thing this morning and start talking to me about no money - cause I 'bout don't want to hear it (Hansberry 29). Based on their financial situation, the first thing that comes to their mind is money. At some degree, I could see and agree why Ruth was frustrated when she was talking to her husband, Walter about the check coming in. First, it's not even her money. It's her mother in law (Lena) and they don't know what was

going to be her motive once Lena gets it. Second, until then, just like every other Black or African American families, they had to struggle to meet their ends financially, mentally, and physically such as having food, clothing, and paying their bills on time. Even though the White families in the 1940s and 50s paid around the same amount of money for housing, the Black families living arrangement was different, such as no electricity and less space (Gordon 125). Also Ruth's son, Travis, was asking Mom briefly if the check was coming and that he needs fifty cents for school. Ruth said to him Well I ain't got no fifty cents this morning. I don't care what teacher say. I ain't got it. Eat your breakfast, Travis (Hansberry 31). I feel the struggle that's happening in this scene. She was going through an economic hardship like other Black families where they can't afford to give their child what they need in terms of school or personal stuff like entertainment wise. They were struggling to survive. Every penny or any type of money they got, they made sure they spent it wisely and not just gave it away carelessly. However, money was a root or a main cause in the Younger's family. In the play, Walter said to his sister, Beneatha, Have we figured out yet exactly how much medical school is going to cost (Hansberry 40). This seems like a financial burden on how much money was allotted only to the sister to further her education. This caused resentment or envy on Walter's behalf since he does not have enough money to spend on what he wants for himself and the family.

Money was a financial problem on how it affected the children in the parents' relationships of black families. When the mother couldn't give her son the money that he needed for, Walter stepped in and provided his son the

money for his basic needs. Walter said, In fact, here is another fifty cents. Buy yourself some fruit today-or take a taxi cab to school or something (Hansberry 34). I found this to be interesting and loved the fact that even though they were struggling money-wise, the father went out of his way boldly to give his son what he needed. That's what every Black or African American family really wants their children to see their parents as role models and depend on them for anything to give it to them. Young children shouldn't experience financial troubles when the parent can't even give them 50 cents to school. It was part of their life as they were in poverty. It seemed a little bit heartbreaking to see that as a parent, Walter would feel more as a failure that he can't give his son the little money he needed it for.

Racial segregation or discrimination played in the story was played through several characters. One of the characters was Karl Lindner, who was a representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association for the New Neighbors Orientation Committee. Clybourne Park is an all-white neighborhood and he is the one that took control over the neighborhood and made sure he had the right type of people he wanted to see living in that community. In the text, Linder said, I'm the chairman of the committee- go around and see the new people who move into the neighborhood and sort of give them the lowdown on the way we do things out in Clybourne Park(Hansberry 115). It seems like he was entitled and wants to be mean to the people who he has disapproval of into moving in the perfect neighborhood he wants. This welcoming committee seems like it had contradictory attitudes and behaviors of people getting along together. In the text, Linder stated to Walter, Beneatha, and Ruth, I want you to believe

me when I tell you that race and prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It's a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities (Hansberry 118). Gordon described Linder's statement that he was having the same beliefs upon segregation similar to the people that reside in the urban northern part of Chicago (Gordon 129). This is an example that could lead into the cognitive dissonance theory. This was quite disturbing when Karl said it out bluntly that black people should not be in this type of neighborhood. He definitely pulled out the race card. As the chairman of the new people orientation, instead of welcoming them with open arms and letting them join the neighborhood peacefully: he was full of pride and told them how he felt about them moving in. Instead, he thought giving them money as an alternative would be a better solution for them to forget the house. The Younger family denied their money because they just want to get out and live or integrate in a better neighborhood. These people came from Southside Chicago living in the slums. Black families, like the Youngers' lived in hazardous living conditions in their apartments. Gordon described it as indestructible contradictions to this state of being with the rats, roaches, worn furniture, and over-crowded conditions (Gordon 127). Who wouldn't want to live a better life in a good neighborhood? It seems that Karl was afraid to see change and was living this utopian fantasy that things would only run good if there's only white people in the neighborhood. Moreover, Gordon stated some of his concerns about segregation and racism. In reality, there's no exact term called white folks' neighborhood except for those that

clearly wants to be prejudiced or people that are open to have or accept racist ideas (Gordon 125).

When Linder was saying those racial| prejudiced comments, he didn't know how it would affect the other characters and their actions. When he received an angry reaction from them, Linder said, Well i don't understand why you people are reacting this way. What do you think you are going to gain by moving into a neighborhood where you just aren't wanted and where people can get worked up when they feel that their whole way of life and everything they've ever worked for is threatened (Hansberry 119). Based on this, Gordon stated there could be a possibility of fear in integrating diverse people in the same communities (129). According to one of the Supreme Court decisions made in 1954, negroes and white inter-marrying will be a common thing and the white race will go downhill (Gordon 129). It seems to me like he was contradicting himself in the whole situation . Also it seems or feels like it is unfair that a white man tried to threaten the Younger family if they moved into the neighborhood they wanted to be in. Furthermore, it seems like he's making an assumption or stereotype about Black people - being around Black people is risky and a danger to the society. In addition, if the roles were reversed or be a double standard, the white people would probably have the same reaction like the Younger's family had.

Another character that demonstrated racial discrimination or segregation throughout some of his lines was Walter, the son of Lena Younger. There was a scene when Walter was talking to Mama about his life. He said: Mama - sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet- looking

restaurants where the white boys are sitting back and talking about things... Sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars?? sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me (Hansberry 76). It seems like Walter wishes he could live this type of lifestyle with his family. He is envious when he sees people his age living better than him and having more fortune than him- emphasized more on their skin color. This is interesting to see that Walter has a dream or vision on how he wants to live his life someday. He categorizes himself as a poor or middle class but he's trying to elevate himself to be successful like the white people. In another act of the play, Walter was talking to his wife, Ruth about his dream -on having a business negotiation with Willy is still not done. Walter mentioned: Why? You want to know why cause we all tied up in a race of people that don't know how to do nothing but moan, pray, and have babies(Hansberry 89). It seems like Walter can't get his dream accomplished because he was making a general stereotype that what all African Americans only do and why they are not successful. Not all Black or African Americans are about that lifestyle. It feels like Walter has a sense of internalized racism. In other words, Walter absorbed all the prejudiced or racist comments in his mind that comes from the dominant group that has been talking down towards his racial group. Eventually, this information bombarded him and made him have self - hatred towards his own race. This led to Walter into becoming racist towards his own idea. Therefore, I don't agree what Walter was stating about his own race to be true. There are some African Americans that are struggling and hustling to live a better life for themselves or their family. For instance, Lena Younger, the mother of Walter, wasn't satisfied on how she saw her family

living in the apartment together and weren't getting along. With the insurance money that she had inherited from her husband that passed away, she decided to live her American dream: to buy a nice house for her family in a very nice neighborhood -Clybourne Park. In the text, Lena was telling Ruth "Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much as other houses. I did the best I could" (Hansberry 95). This seems like these racist laws that they put up for colored people were given unfair treatment to grant them access to equal opportunity of housing like the European or Caucasian people. Although she got a new house, it felt like she had to go out of her way even more to find a house that's not only good for her family but was financially stable for her to buy the property. When Lena brought the house in Clybourne Park, she was trying to prove a point in the society. Mama insists on having her family permission or approval to stop the economic oppression that was happening in Chicago during that time period of segregation (Gordon 127).

To sum it up, there was a lot of racial segregation and discrimination going on throughout this time period (1950s-1960s) for African Americans. As this was a tough battle to fight and break the cycle of segregation, Black people and White people should be created equally and having the same type of access to having the same types of jobs and housing. They shouldn't be treated differently because of their skin color. We need to come together as a whole and create peace and not destroying each other.

"A Raisin in the Sun." Drama for Students, edited by Sara Constantakis, vol. 29, Gale, 2012, pp. 131-155. Gale Virtual Reference Library, <https://link>.

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