



Racial Discrimination: A Study of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

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Abstract

Aims: *This paper explores the expression of racial discrimination in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun (1959), emphasizing how systemic racism affects the aspirations and struggles of the Younger family.*

Methodology and Approaches: *The impact of social, economic, and psychological difficulties contended by African Americans in mid-20th century America is explored. Through the experiences of the Younger family, Hansberry's critique of racial discrimination includes the systems of prejudice and segregation that restrict social mobility for Blacks.*

Outcome: *The paper addresses the issue of personal aspirations set against the backdrop of racial subjugation, illustrating the impact of institutional racism on family identification and dynamics. It analyzes the responses of the central figures to the discrimination they face and how Hansberry critiques American society's*

treatment of Black Americans through nuanced and blunt representations of racism.

Conclusion and Suggestions: *The study also examines the critique of America by emphasizing the significance of these issues concerning racial disparity today.*

Keywords: *racial discrimination, systemic racism, African American, aspirations, segregation, identity.*

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Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is an American play which includes imperative themes like race, identity, and the American dream through an African American lens. The play recalls the journey of the Younger family as they deal with fierce competition, discrimination, socioeconomic struggles, and endless different forms of mental self-perception. These American classic takes place somewhere in the 1950s, a time when classic American segregation existed in its full form. *A Raisin in the Sun* encompasses the reality of life for African Americans who sought to gain some measure of equality and opportunity in society.

This paper studies the representation of racism in *A Raisin in the Sun*, exploring how Hansberry constructs the social and psychological impact of racism through character relationships. The Younger family's encounters with a bigoted society reveal both subtle and blatant discrimination, including housing

discrimination and cultural discrimination.” discrimination is cased in the form of housing discrimination as well cultural discrimination or stereotypes. Discrimination can be in housing and culture. The author captures this in his work. Hansberry’s harsh criticism of the American Dream equally highlights the social barriers and inequalities that African Americans face in attempting to attain social mobility.

This study aims to document the issues of racial discrimination within the literature; Chin called discrimination is examined through focal points or racism and race relations with an aim toward better discrimination in text focusing on racial matters discrimination. This aims to express that the storyline of *A Raisin in the Sun* progresses around an unending struggle with socio-racial discrimination in the United States and also demonstrates how this piece of literature still stands as a guiding pillar and a powerful piece of socio-political literature.

While studying racism in *A Raisin in the Sun*, scholars focus on issues like systemic oppression, capitalism, and racism, as well as an individual’s experience of race and self. The existing literature explains how Hansberry’s critique of the American dream is tightly woven into the Younger family’s experiences of racial discrimination, economic hardship, and the ‘historic’ American-capitalist framework in the 1950s.

Key studies highlight the symbolic meaning of the family’s home in connection with the American racial barriers of mobility and segregation, revealing the restrictive housing policies and sociopolitical discrimination that curtail social advancement for Black families in America. Scholars like Baldwin, Robert L (2008) argue that in Hansberry’s work, the dream held by Black Americans is an idealized reality, critiqued in the context of the so-called American values of freedom and opportunity. This is supported by other scholars, like McGinnis, Eileen Mary (2013), who argue that private policies, as well as public policies, are intertwined with institutional racism.

Moreover, the intersection of gender and race has been a critical focus of study as Bowles, Gloria, and Renate Duelli Klein explores how Ruth and Beneatha, as women of colour, cope with the oppression of both race and gender. The struggle against racial discrimination adds another dimension to their character development, showing the multifaceted struggles the Black woman endures in a segregated society. Taken together, the research interprets *A Raisin in the Sun* as a deep critique of racial inequality. It depicts personal and societal strife that persists in current conversations about race and equality.

From the societal level all the way down to the personal sphere, racial discrimination has been an enormous issue all around the world and, most importantly, in the US. *A Raisin in the Sun* stands as the very first American play, and it includes important themes like race, identity, and the American dream through an African American lens. The play recalls the journey of the Younger family as they deal with fierce competition, discrimination, socioeconomic struggles, and endless different forms of mental self-perception.

These American classic takes place somewhere in the 1950s, a time when American segregation existed in its full form. *A Raisin in the Sun* encompasses the reality of life for African Americans who sought to gain some measure of equality and opportunity in society. The study aims to express that the storyline of *A Raisin in The Sun* progresses around an unending struggle with socio-racial discrimination in the United States and also demonstrates how this piece of literature still stands as a guiding pillar and a powerful piece of socio-political literature. Maya Angelou writes about and for women of all colours and in particular, for the ignored Black women who need a voice, “So many young Black women are not spoken to by white women. Are not spoken to by Black men. Are not spoken to by white men. And if we don’t speak to here will be no voice reaching their ears or their hearts”. (Wisker, 49)

While studying racism in *A Raisin in the Sun*, scholars focus on issues like systemic oppression, capitalism, and racism, as well as an individual's experience of race and self. The existing literature explains how Hansberry's critique of the American dream is tightly woven into the Younger family's experiences of racial discrimination, economic hardship, and the 'historic' American-capitalist framework in the 1950s. Racial discrimination within the context of the younger family in *A Raisin in the Sun* serves as both an obstacle and a crucial element that hinders growth. It has been explained that socio-psychological discrimination intertwines with class, identity, family and family structure, and relations. It considers that relationship within the context of family. The play takes place in Chicago in the aftermath of World War II. It depicts the polar regions and the harsh realities of life; it also reflects a complex social life during that time. By using the experiences of the Younger family, the author tries to portray the very nature of racism that encompasses and stifles the dreams of African Americans. The author examines:

Transported by this *mise en scène*, Walter imagines an alternative to a bourgeois notion of manliness, fantasizing about who he might have become in Africa: "In my heart of hearts— (*He thumps his chest*)—I am much warrior!" (*A Raisin in the Sun* Act II, Scene I). By contrast to his fantasies of acquisitive wealth, in Walter's Pan-Africanist daydream, he envisions himself as heir to Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of the Kenyan anti-colonial movement: "That's my man, Kenyatta. (*Shouting and thumping his chest.*) FLAMING SPEAR! HOT DAMN!" (*A Raisin in the Sun* Act II, Scene I).

The purchasing of a home in a white suburb is a dream that the Younger family hopes to achieve as it will increase their social status, which lies at the very heart of the family's aspirations. Alongside the dream, the family also receives an insurance check worth \$10,000 after the father's death, serving as a beacon of hope for a promising future. Unfortunately, racial prejudice, in varying degrees,

blocks this goal. Their coupling attempts to integrate with the white community and the clearly shown discrimination working against them suffer from both forms of racism... overt and subtle.

Hansberry looks at the effects of racial discrimination on the psychological scope of the characters as well. Walter Lee Younger, the protagonist, is a man who has been branded by the relentless pursuit of wealth, believing it would afford him respect and self-worth. His internalized feeling of inadequacy stems from his race, and his desire for a better life proudly depicts the melancholic plight of Black people in America. Ruth, the family's matriarch, embodies the silenced strength and pain of African American women as she supports a divided society. Her struggle as a provider nurture within her both domestic conflict and the weight of racial violence, illustrating the complex interaction of race and gender in subjugation. Segal examines, "Europeans captured or bought African slaves, mostly from West Africa, and took them to Europe, and later on to South and North America. The number of Africans who were shipped across the Atlantic is estimated to be around 12 million." (Segal, 8)

Hansberry highlights the psychosocial consequences of racism on the life of the Younger family. The drama scrutinizes American society—how racial motives and discrimination continue to attack the dreams of Black people and, at the same time, demonize the tenacity, strength, and resilience that marks the fight against racism. Thus, *A Raisin in the Sun* still offers the piercing truth of racial discrimination that exists in America.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the American Post-War identity crisis and the racial stress interplay with the life of the Younger family. Hansberry examines the impact of racial inequality and socioeconomic discrimination on the aspirations of the members of the Younger family. The struggle of the characters against the system highlights the severe racial inequality that exists and the adverse effects of systemic discrimination on African Americans and their families. Walter says to

his wife Ruth: Walter: "First thing a man ought to learn in life is not to make love to no coloured woman first thing in the morning. You all some evil people at eight o'clock in the morning". (27)

The family portrays a multi-generational unit struggling to cope with the realities of racial discrimination and the resultant diminishing of self-esteem and social status. The central conflict in the play is the life insurance payout of \$10,000 that Mr. Younger left. With regard to this money, each family member makes a particular emotionally driven choice that demonstrates their hopes and expectations to escape the suffocating weight of oppression.

Fulfilling the younger family's expectations is the youngest son, Walter Lee Younger, a hopeful yet disillusioned attempting to 'better' his family's financial situation by purchasing a liquor store with the insurance money, attempting to further 'boost' their status and proving his masculinity as a man. Walter is yearning for financial success because he firmly believes that one needs to be economically well-off in order to hold dignity in a reality that undermines Black men to working hands or criminals. On the contrary, his wish is emboldened by lacking the American dream, which, most, is not achievable for people of colour. The struggle Walter faces internally extends beyond simply money - it centers on securing a place of worth and esteem in a society fragmented by race. As Lorraine Bethel comments:

The codification of blackness and femaleness by whites and males is seen in terms of thinking like a woman and acting like a nigger which are based on the premise that these are typically black and female ways of acting and thinking. Therefore, the most pejorative concept in the white/ male world view would be that of thinking and acting like a nigger woman. (Wisker, 37)

Unlike Walter, his sister Beneatha Younger is more rebellious and progressive toward the imposition of racial boundaries in an intellectual manner. Beneatha,

for example, wants to become a doctor instead of adhering to the feminine roles in her society, especially in the African American culture. This act of defiance, however, is not without its consequences: She has to deal with the obstacles—such as racism—of being a woman of color and a medical student.

Beneatha's struggle with assimilation represents her defiance to embrace her African roots, but this does not eliminate the previously mentioned hurdles imposed by women of color in the United States. In any case, the woman faces hostility from colleagues as well as faculty members. Beneatha's character illustrates one gap in the logic of assuming that black people are being oppressed by racism and that the existence of education would remove the shackles. Furthermore, the existence of gender adds another layer to the struggle for African American women. One of the most moving statements in the play is made by Mama when she says to Walter in response to his decisions:

Son — I come from five generations of people who was slaves and sharecroppers — hut ain't nobody in my family never let nobody pay 'em no money that was a way of telling us we weren't fit to walk the earth. We ain't never been that poor ... that dead inside. (133)

The family matriarch, Lena Younger (Mama), poignantly captures the nuances of the older generation's fight for self-worth within the dehumanizing reality of racism. A caring mother, Mama's dream is to buy a house in a posh white suburb that she believes would foster and protect a family. She seeks that the home will restore the family's dignity and bestow a sense of permanence. A home, something they have long been looking for, will also enable them to escape the slums where they currently live. Mama's sacrifice demonstrates her belief in a brighter tomorrow but also reflects the social and psychological toll of seeking dignity, respectability, and family values, all while being discriminated against. That decision to get a house, despite the blatant racial hostility from white people in the area, is perceived as one defying racial segregation.

The character of Mr. Lindner deepens the racial conflict and tensions as a representative from the white area where the Youngers plan to move. The paternal and pernicious racial discrimination in Lindner's attempt to "peace" by buying them out of the deal is startling. His cordial effort to preserve racial discrimination within the bounds of genteel segregation reveals the terrible inroad and deep violence that fuels American society's integration and equality.

By portraying the family struggles, Hansberry tries to make sense of the complications within all recall, discrimination, and hope in racial identity. *A Raisin in the Sun* features men and women with varying yet highly nuanced representations of black American life and offers fierce condemnation of injustice and violence of race, equality, and the struggle for dignity in a deeply racist society

A Raisin in the Sun captures the essence of racial discrimination in America during the 1950s and how that issue resonates in current times. It manifests in the representation of the Younger family's economic struggle to achieve some form of social equality and mobility. The systemic inequalities that exist have proven difficult for the African American community to navigate. It tells the story of the entire family working to rise out of poverty and achieve the so-called American dream, only for their goals to be persistently sabotaged by the deep-seated racism that exists in both explicit and implicit forms.

Although it did not cause it, the money's arrival into the household makes Walter's crisis of get-rich-quick syndrome worse. Instead, Walter has suffered severe psychological harm as a result of his support for hegemonic supremacy. Walter thinks the investment in the booze shop will help him become a successful businessman. When Walter talks to his son Travis about his ideal future, his aspirations of being a successful CEO and suburban father figure come to life like a lot of 1950s comedies and movies:

I'll come home and I'll be pretty tired, you know what I mean, after a day of conferences and secretaries getting things wrong the way they do... 'cause an executive's life is hell, man—(*The more he talks the farther away he gets*) And I'll pull the car up on the driveway... And I'll come up the steps to the house and the gardener will [...] say, "Good evening, Mr. Younger." [...] And I'll go inside and Ruth will come downstairs and meet me at the door and we'll kiss each other. (*A Raisin in the Sun* Act II, Scene II)

Hansberry did not limit her depiction of racism to the overt discriminatory actions of racism; rather, she focused on the impact of racism on the character's psyche. Walter Lee Younger, the main character of the play, epitomizes the struggles of a Black man who is systematically excluded from accessing ample opportunities. The American socio-political context has created an environment where financial success, for black men, is a desperate need, which underscores the imbalance sought. Beneatha, his sister, also acknowledges gender discrimination, demonstrating how racism interacts with other forms of oppression that compound her challenges as a doctor.

In addition, the play challenges the idea of integration when facing a racist calling. The association the Younger family seeks to join freely is rife with contradictions, demonstrating the essence of racial segregation. Beneatha observes, "God is Just one idea I don't accept... I get tired of Him getting credit for all the things the human race achieves through its own stubborn effort. There simply is no blasted God — there is only man and It is he who makes miracles"! (35-36).

In modern society, racial discrimination exists in varied forms, including structural black inequities in education, housing, healthcare, and employment. With the civil rights movement, there has been change; however, the same issues Hansberry dealt with in the 1950s are still alive today because of the ongoing

racial turmoil, police brutality, and the unrelenting masked racism against Black Americans. The importance of *A Raisin in the Sun* is still relevant today. It serves as a sobering reminder of the continuing impacts of racial discrimination and the ever-elusive goal of equality.

A Raisin in the Sun does a remarkable job encapsulating the systemic discrimination on the basis of race, especially the oppression that confronted Black families in America during the mid-20th century. It also examines the complicated emotional and psychological impact that this oppression brings about. The Younger family's dream to achieve a better life is plagued with more than just chaos—it is dwarfed by entrenched societal racism that is bound to crush dreams and hope. There is also an inherent system that exploits people, and the prejudice deeply rooted in the society makes it worse. One essential aspect of this play is its interpretation of class and race; it sheds light on how these phenomena are interwoven and how they intersect to impact the people of society.

Beneatha, Walter, and Ruth are Hansberry's deeply nuanced, stubbornly multifaceted characters. They confront discrimination with defiance and resignation, infused with glimmering hope, and soothed with despair. All these contradictions suggest that even the most intricate racial issues can mask hope. *A Raisin in the Sun* focuses specifically on the aggressive campaign against racial violence that is waged along the lines of dignity, self-determination, and autonomy. It is through the stories of the Youngers that Hansberry preserves the history of her people's struggle to assert marginalized identity and, more importantly, defies oppression meted out on them amid unrelenting social turmoil. Even today, this play relates to the struggle for racial equality and social justice.

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