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## THE PLAY

It's the 1950s on the South Side of Chicago, and life for black people in America is full of struggle and strife. **Walter** and his wife, **Ruth**, live in a 2-bedroom apartment with their son **Travis**; Walter's mother, whom everyone calls **Mama**; and his sister **Beneatha**. In addition to living in such close quarters, the Youngers also share a bathroom with the other families on their floor. The Youngers are desperate for a change. When Walter's father dies, the possibility of that change comes in the form of a \$10,000 life insurance check.

Mama wants the best for her family. She believes that means having a home of their own and providing an education for Beneatha.

Walter, however, wants to use the insurance money for a business deal with two less-than-savory men. His big dreams and high hopes are so infectious that even his son, Travis, is excited for the coming check.

This life-changing check has the Youngers teetering on the edge of freedom. Will the Youngers be able to live the American dream or will it "dry up, like a raisin in the sun?"

"... SEEM LIKE GOD DIDN'T SEE FIT TO GIVE THE BLACK MAN NOTHING BUT DREAMS - BUT HE DID GIVE US CHILDREN TO MAKE THEM DREAMS SEEM WORTHWHILE."

— Mama



## A RAISIN IN THE SUN

BY LORRAINE HANSBERRY | DIRECTED BY TAZEWELL THOMPSON

NOW PLAYING ON THE FICHANDLER STAGE  
MARCH 31 - MAY 7, 2017

Illustration by Charles Chaisson

A *Raisin in the Sun* is generously sponsored by  Altria. Additional support is provided by  JMA and Sheila Stampfli.

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# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



**“I CARE. I CARE ABOUT IT ALL. IT TAKES TOO MUCH ENERGY NOT TO CARE.”**

— Lorraine Hansberry

Lorraine Hansberry was born on the South Side of Chicago in 1930. Hansberry grew up immersed in the fight for civil rights through her parents' work and activism in the black community. Through her parents, Hansberry knew important African-American figures like W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson.

Hansberry found a love for theater in high school. She went on to study painting and writing at the University of Wisconsin, but she withdrew to move to New York City. Hansberry worked as a writer and editor for Paul Robeson's publication, *Freedom*, until she decided to dedicate all her time to her writing. *A Raisin in the Sun* was her first play. *A Raisin in the Sun* broke many barriers. It was the first play by an African-American woman on Broadway. Hansberry became the youngest person and the first African-American playwright to win a New York Critics' Circle award. Hansberry was 30 years old.

In 1964, Hansberry was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Her successful life was cut short on January 12, 1965 at the age of 34. Hansberry's ex-husband, Robert Nemiroff, compiled a collection of Hansberry's unpublished writings into a book and play entitled *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, which had a lengthy run on Broadway. Hansberry is also remembered for her works *The Drinking Gourd*, *Les Blancs* and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*.

# THE HANSBERRYS AND THE YOUNGERS



A front-page news article following the Hansberry family's big Supreme Court win in 1940.



Photo of Jeremiah Hasty as Travis Younger and Will Cobbs as Walter Lee Younger by Tony Powell.

Lorraine Hansberry used her family's experiences in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry also used her personal beliefs and internal struggles as a template for *Beneatha*.

In 1938, Hansberry's parents integrated a restricted neighborhood by moving their family into Washington Park, an all-white community in Chicago. A restricted neighborhood has a homeowners association that can regulate many things, like the size of houses, the number of pets and even the type of mailbox people can have. In this case, a majority of homeowners had agreed to a racially restrictive covenant, meaning no real estate could be sold or leased to someone of a "colored race." The Hansberrys were immediately met with acts of aggression and verbal threats. One evening someone threw a brick through their living room window that lodged in the opposite wall, nearly hitting Hansberry in the head.

The Illinois Supreme Court ruled that the Hansberrys should be evicted from their home due to the covenant. Hansberry's parents fought the suit and took the case to the Supreme Court of the United States, where it was reversed.

This ruling not only allowed the Hansberrys to regain ownership of their house, but also ordered that 30 blocks in the area be open to black families. Hundreds of African-American families moved to these previously white-only neighborhoods, starting to break down housing segregation.

# RACE IN AMERICA



In Chicago, "The Black Belt" became the name for the chain of African-American neighborhoods. These segregated neighborhoods were overcrowded, and landlords took advantage by turning 5-unit buildings into 20-unit buildings.

# LANGSTON HUGHES: A DREAM DEFERRED

Lorraine Hansberry got the inspiration for the title of her play from the Langston Hughes poem "Harlem." Hughes is known as one of the greatest American poets. During the Harlem Renaissance (a surge in African-American artists in Harlem after World War I) his work depicted and analyzed lives of African Americans in the 1950s.

## "Harlem"

What happens to  
a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore —  
And then run?

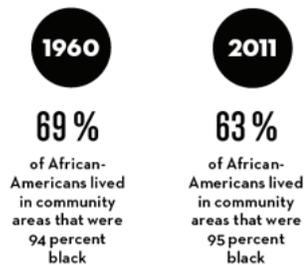
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over —  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

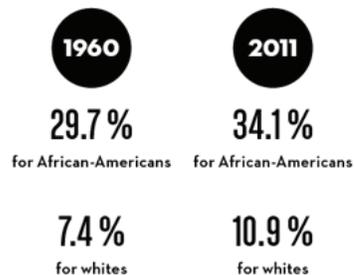
Or does it explode?

## CHICAGO THEN & NOW

### SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOODS



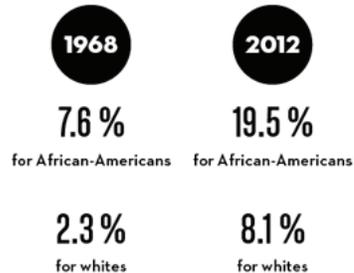
### POVERTY RATE



### MEDIAN INCOME



### UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Poverty and employment statistics by race for Chicago inhabitants in 1960 and 2011. Courtesy of *Chicago Reader*.

Many Americans in the 1950s were trying to find their place in society following the upheaval of the Great Depression and World War II. In particular, many African Americans struggled to find their place in America with marginal success. 85 years after slavery was abolished, the continued oppression of, and discrimination against, African Americans showed there was a long way to go in the fight for freedom, equality and civil rights.

During the Great Migration from 1915-1970, six-million freed slaves and their descendants moved from the South to the neighboring states in the North. Cities that got the greatest influx included Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and Chicago. Chicago's African-American population more than doubled from 1914-1918. Despite the North historically being more accepting of African Americans and supporting abolition, the new African-American residents of these cities were frequently met with disdain and resistance. This led to many African Americans being pushed into horrible living quarters and being excluded from white neighborhoods. This was true even of African Americans with social class and status equal to the white inhabitants of the neighborhood. This meant many African-American children attended worse schools and had fewer opportunities.

The legacy of racism and segregation continues today. Many African-American residents of these cities have not seen much improvement in living situation or opportunities. Statistics in Chicago show that many residential areas remain largely segregated. Communities with large minority populations are the most poverty stricken with fewer resources and higher rates of crime. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, crime rates have steadily increased from 296 homicides in 1957 to 762 in 2016.

These disadvantages inspired the work of artists like Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry and poet Gwendolyn Brooks. They saw the dire circumstances their brethren were forced into and sought to draw on this pain and truth to enlighten those who were not close to these communities. Brooks once said, "What I'm fighting for now in my work...for an expression relevant to all manner of blacks, poems I could take into a tavern, into the street, into the halls of a housing project."

# ARTISTIC IMPACT



Watch *A Raisin in the Sun Revisited*, a PBS LearningMedia series about Hansberry's play and the works it inspired. <http://tinyurl.com/hansbpbs>

*A Raisin in the Sun* is regarded as one of the best artistic explorations of the life and struggles of everyday African-American people.

Since its original Broadway run, *A Raisin in the Sun* has been reimagined on stage and on film. It inspired the musical *Raisin*, which includes 17 musical numbers. Recent productions of *Raisin* have received awards including the Tony Award for Best Musical.

In 2010, Bruce Norris wrote a play in response to *A Raisin in the Sun* entitled *Clybourne Park*. Act 1 explores the feelings of one of the families in the white-only neighborhood the Youngers hoped to move into. Act 2 takes place 50 years in the future and delves into the feelings of this now mostly black community and the threat of gentrification.

In 2013, Kwame Kwei-Armah wrote a play in response called *Beneatha's Place*, which is set in Nigeria in both 1959 and the present.



The musical *Raisin* was produced for the first time at Arena Stage in 1973 in the Fichandler. This is the same theater where *A Raisin in the Sun* is being staged.

In 1950 the value of \$1 was equivalent to \$9.87 today. The average African American's income was about \$2,000 a year. The Youngers' check for \$10,000 is a tremendous windfall.

# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What would you be willing to sacrifice for your family's well-being?

2

What happens when you are unable to follow your dreams?

3

What impact do our choices have on those we love?

# HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

# RESOURCES

Lorraine Hansberry: Pioneer African-American Playwright | *Women's History* | [tinyurl.com/rainebio](http://tinyurl.com/rainebio)

Lorraine Hansberry Biography  
Chicago Public Library | [tinyurl.com/chiberry](http://tinyurl.com/chiberry)

Chicago and the Great Migration, 1915-1950  
The Newberry | [tinyurl.com/chicollection](http://tinyurl.com/chicollection)

The Great Migration 1915-1950  
[www.blackpast.org](http://www.blackpast.org) | [tp://tinyurl.com/gremig](http://tp://tinyurl.com/gremig)

Great Migration  
*Encyclopedia of Chicago* | [tinyurl.com/chitwnhis](http://tinyurl.com/chitwnhis)

Wage Disparities and Industry Segregation: A Look at Black-White Income Inequality 1950-2000  
Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago  
[tinyurl.com/wagechi](http://tinyurl.com/wagechi)

Integration, Gentrification, Conversation  
*The New York Times* | [tinyurl.com/clyprkny](http://tinyurl.com/clyprkny)

Data: Chicago Homicide Data Since 1957  
*The Chicago Tribune* | [tinyurl.com/chistat](http://tinyurl.com/chistat)



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